

# Best Practices Guide

Increasing Access to  
Healthy Foods through  
Innovative Strategies



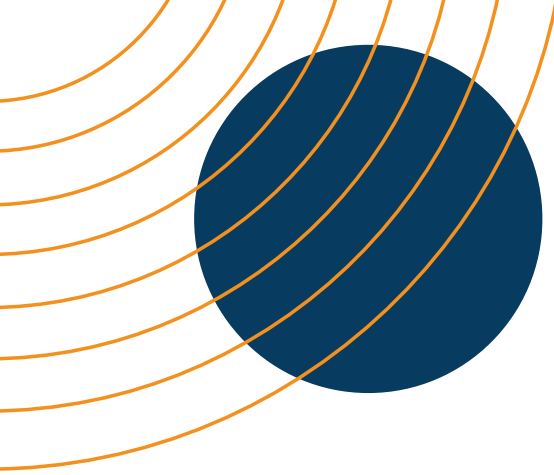




Photo: In Elba, Alabama, youth are shown how to incorporate healthy foods in recipes during a Elba Parks and Recreation Department event.

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# About This Guide

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This guide is based on research on out-of-school time (OST) programming, food insecurity, farmers markets, intergenerational programs, and transportation solutions, and includes input from urban, suburban, and rural park and recreation agencies across the United States. In collaboration with federally funded OST meal programs, park and recreation agencies can play a key role in increasing access to healthy food and nutrition education. The purpose of this guide is to highlight key strategies that park and recreation agencies can use in the implementation of three innovative program models to increase access to healthy foods — starting or expanding farmers markets or community supported agriculture, starting or expanding intergenerational programming and addressing transportation barriers.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) investigated the three innovative models through a grant program in 2019 and the evaluation results formed the basis of recommendations in this guide. In May 2019, with funding from the Walmart Foundation, NRPA awarded grant funds to 26 park and recreation agencies to support children’s health through OST programming, and overall community health through increased food access strategies. The NRPA Increasing Access to Healthy Foods Through Parks program was implemented between May 2019 and December 2019 with 17 awards given to organizations to implement one of three innovation strategies and 9 awards given to rural agencies in Alabama, Louisiana and New Mexico to support their OST meal programs. The three strategies were: 1) establishing and expanding farmers markets; 2) starting or expanding intergenerational meal programs; and 3) addressing transportation barriers. Grant funds were designated to help park and recreation agencies achieve the stated goals of the program: increase access to healthy foods in low-income and rural areas through the USDA child nutrition programs — Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program and/or National School Lunch Program — during out-of-school times; provide evidence-based nutrition literacy to children and families that creates behavior change including increased consumption of fruits and vegetables and increased confidence in healthy decision making; and implement, analyze and share best practices of innovative food access strategies in rural, suburban and urban communities. NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC), on behalf of NRPA, conducted an evaluation of the 17 innovation cohort grantees.



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## Participating Organizations

- Central Arkansas Library System, Arkansas
- City of Kerman, California
- City of San Jose, Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services, California
- City of Colorado Springs, Colorado
- New London Recreation Department, Connecticut
- Indianapolis Parks Foundation, Indiana
- City of Davenport Parks and Recreation, Iowa
- Grow Appalachia, Kentucky
- New Orleans Recreation Development Commission/Market Umbrella, Louisiana
- City of Port Huron Recreation Department, Michigan
- East Orange Recreation & Cultural Affairs, New Jersey
- City of Farmington Parks and Recreation, New Mexico
- Friends of Mount Vernon Arts, Recreation and Youth Programs, Inc., New York
- Mount Airy Parks and Recreation, North Carolina
- Lancaster Recreation Commission, Pennsylvania
- Burlington Parks, Recreation & Waterfront, Vermont
- Shenandoah County Parks and Recreation, Virginia

# Introduction

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Out-of-school time (OST) nutrition programs, including the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), provide federal funding to serve meals and snacks to children age 18 and under in low-income areas.<sup>1</sup> Through these programs, children can access free meals after school, on weekends, during school holidays and throughout the summer, when they may otherwise miss meals that they rely on while in school. Food insecurity is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.<sup>2</sup> Low-income communities lack access to healthy foods, due to factors such as fewer supermarkets and lower quality produce when compared to wealthier communities.<sup>3</sup> Communities of color are at greater risk of food insecurity. In fact, children in households headed by non-Hispanic black and Hispanic parents were almost twice as likely to experience food insecurity as children in white households.<sup>4</sup> Children living in food insecure households may experience both hunger and obesity.<sup>5</sup> OST meal programs can help reduce hunger and improve nutrition. SFSP and other OST meal offerings are important for providing low-income children with nutritious meals and snacks as well as the opportunity for physical activity during the summer months to combat the risk of weight gain during the summer months.<sup>6</sup> Beyond meal service, park and recreation agencies also can play an important role in increasing access to healthy foods at farmers markets and other food-based activities, through increasing nutrition literacy, and by decreasing common barriers to attendance, such as lack of transportation. Park and recreation agencies and their facilities, which includes their park sites and community centers, are settings that foster community connection. With strategic planning, these spaces can be utilized for intentional interaction, for example intergenerational programming.<sup>7,8</sup>

## USDA Child Nutrition Programs

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OST Meal Programs funded by USDA include:

- ▶ Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) ([fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-food-service-program](https://fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-food-service-program)): SFSPs are run as open sites, enrolled sites or camps. Open sites serve free meals and snacks to all children in a low-income area, and enrolled sites serve free meals to all children enrolled in a program with at least 50 percent of children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. Participating camps provide reimbursable free meals and snacks to children based on their individual eligibility. In general, SFSPs can serve up to two meals, or one meal and one snack, per child. Camps can serve up to three meals per day.
- ▶ Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) ([fns.usda.gov/cacfp/child-and-adult-care-food-program](https://fns.usda.gov/cacfp/child-and-adult-care-food-program)): The CACFP's At-Risk Afterschool component provides up to one free snack and one free meal per child in attendance areas where at least 50 percent of children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. The program is available to out-of-school time programs during the school year, including on weekends and holidays.
- ▶ National School Lunch Program (NSLP) ([fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program-nslp](https://fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program-nslp)): The NSLP's Afterschool Care Snack Service is available for programs sponsored or operated by a school district and allows for one snack to be served on regular school days.

Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service Programs for Out-of-School-Time Providers, Retrieved from [fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/Afterschool\\_Options.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/Afterschool_Options.pdf)

The NRPA Increasing Access to Healthy Foods program was implemented between May 2019 and February 2020 and included summer and afterschool meal service programs. The three main objectives of the grant were:

- Increasing access to healthy foods in low-income areas, including rural communities, through the USDA child nutrition programs (SFSP, CACFP and/or NSLP) during OST;
- Providing evidence-based nutrition literacy to children and families that creates behavior change, including increased consumption of fruits and vegetables and increased confidence in healthy decision making; and
- Implementing, analyzing and sharing best practices of innovative food access strategies in rural, suburban and urban communities, including establishing and expanding farmers markets, starting or expanding intergenerational meal programs, and addressing transportation barriers.

Park and recreation agencies can serve a vital role in increasing access to healthy food through OST meal programs, since many have existing youth and senior programming that can be leveraged, including camps, both half-day and full-day; specific sports activities; and park space that is well located and easily accessible. In the following section, we provide an overview of each innovation strategy and how it was implemented by the NRPA grantees.

### ***Starting or Expanding Farmers Markets***

Six grantees were funded to start or expand farmers markets or community supported agriculture (CSA) programs. The grantees were the City of Kerman (California), City of Davenport Parks and Recreation (Iowa), Grow Appalachia (Kentucky), New Orleans Recreation Development Commission/Market Umbrella (Louisiana), East Orange Recreation & Cultural Affairs (New Jersey), and City of Farmington Parks and Recreation (New Mexico). The common components of these programs included expanding services offered at existing farmers markets, extending hours or locations that the farmers markets were available, offering mobile markets, offering summer or afterschool snacks or meals, and providing financial assistance to purchase produce at the market. A main component of parks and recreation's involvement in the farmers market was the expansion of nutrition education and physical activity opportunities for children at the market. The programming included cooking demonstrations, taste-test samples, recipe sharing, and games incorporating food and physical activity. The enrichment programming created an opportunity for children to be engaged at the farmers market and learn about fresh fruits and vegetables while providing an opportunity for parents and families to attend the market.

### ***Starting or Expanding Intergenerational Programs***

Six grantees were funded to start or expand intergenerational programs. The grantees were City of Colorado Springs (Colorado), City of Port Huron Recreation Department (Michigan), Friends of Mount Vernon Arts, Recreation, and Youth Programs, Inc. (New York), Lancaster Recreation Commission (Pennsylvania), Burlington Parks, Recreation & Waterfront (Vermont), and Shenandoah County Parks and Recreation (Virginia). These programs utilized existing child and senior programming that occurred at park and recreation facilities or partner organizations to schedule intergenerational activities that centered on nutrition education. Educational activities included hands-on cooking classes, cooking demonstrations and taste tests, and gardening. These nutrition education activities provided an opportunity for the children and seniors to interact, learn together and learn from each other. Some of the grantees operated the child and senior programs themselves and others operated the programs through a partnership with another local public entity, such as school districts or offices on aging. To align with existing resources, grantees also considered transportation when scheduling and identifying a location for their program activities.

### ***Addressing Transportation Barriers***

Five grantees were funded to start or expand programs to address transportation barriers. The grantees were Central Arkansas Library System (Arkansas), City of San Jose, Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (California), New London Recreation Department (Connecticut), Indianapolis Parks Foundation (Indiana), and Mount Airy Parks and Recreation (North Carolina). These grantees addressed transportation barriers in two ways — transporting children to the program sites and mobilizing the programming to meet children where they were. Grantees provided transportation services and benefits for children to attend programming, to return home after programming and to attend non-programming at locations such as libraries, grocery stores and other planned field trips. Other grantees implemented mobile units to bring nutrition education and physical activity programming to existing meal service locations. These grantees targeted sites lacking sufficient staff or resources to host these types of activities. One mobile unit, which carried staff, nutrition education materials and sports equipment, visited multiple sites a day, depending on the total number of service locations.



# Innovative Strategies to Increasing Access to Healthy Foods

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## Starting or Expanding Farmers Markets and CSA Programs

Farmers markets and CSA programs provide an opportunity for community members to purchase fresh, and often local, produce on a weekly or monthly basis. Farmers markets and CSA programs benefit not only the community but also the vendors who have a venue to sell their produce and goods. Farmers markets can host a variety of vendors offering fresh produce; dairy, meat, and eggs; prepared food and baked goods; and non-edible products. CSA programs typically include fresh produce, but products can vary depending on the CSA structure and capacity. For example, offering both local and non-local foods and products allows the organization to incorporate more vendors and a larger variety for consumers. As hubs for community activity, farmers markets are an ideal location for promoting healthy food choices and physical activity. In this section we describe strategies to consider when starting or expanding farmers markets or CSA programs in your community including assessing community needs to optimize schedule and location; serving OST meals; and conducting nutrition education and physical activity programming. In addition, we describe three potential challenges that you can prepare to address by recruiting vendors to participate; expanding or establishing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits; and preparing for adverse weather events.

## Strategies for Consideration

### ***Assessing Community Needs to Optimize Schedule and Location***

Identifying specific needs in the community early on, and designing aspects of the program to address those needs, contributes to success of the program.<sup>9</sup> For example, one of the NRPA grantees conducted a survey prior to implementation of the grant to obtain community buy-in about the time, days of the week, and place that would be most accessible for people to attend the farmers market. This enabled them to adjust their farmers market hours and location based on the results of that survey. Another approach is to conduct a [community needs assessment](#) to identify implementation sites and desired services. This information can be used to determine which park site to use if your community has multiple options or to decide if you should use a non-park location. If using a non-park site, you will need to identify key partners to help obtain access to that space.<sup>10</sup> Community input can be collected through paper surveys, online surveys, interactive sampling like dot surveys or public parks meetings.

### ***Serving Out-of-School Time Meals***

Many OST meal programs have been established and funded throughout the United States because they provide opportunities to deliver healthy foods and to promote physical activity. These programs allow children to access free meals during times when they may otherwise miss meals they rely on while in school. Farmers markets can serve as meal service sites in the summer for programs such as SFSP because they serve as a community gathering place, they operate when children are out of school and they provide a safe and educational space for children to eat.<sup>11,12</sup> The markets also benefit from serving meals because they can increase foot traffic and visibility. In order to increase awareness of the OST meals at the market, organizations can pair the meal service with taste tests or food demonstrations. These activities can include food from the market and can incorporate educational elements.



## Conducting Nutrition Education and Physical Activity

Either in conjunction with meal service or as a separate activity, you can conduct nutrition education and physical activity programming for youth during the farmers market. Nutrition education can follow USDA supported resources (e.g., Fuel Up to Play 60),<sup>13</sup> the NRPA Commit to Health Foods of the Month Curriculum,<sup>14</sup> or something tailored to your community. To make the curriculum more interactive, you can include cooking demonstrations or taste tests to provide a hands-on learning experience and incorporate produce from the farmers market into the educational lesson. Whether youth are participating by themselves or with family members, encourage healthy eating to continue beyond the market by printing out the recipe of the taste test offered, for people to take home. Other printed resources and materials also can be used to promote healthy eating, for example, fliers that promote packing a healthy lunch and guides to finding local restaurants and grocery stores.

Physical activity also can be incorporated by taking advantage of the market location. Utilize park facilities, proximity to walking trails and city resources like rental bikes to encourage customers to participate in outdoor activities that are unique to the park location. You also can leverage your presence at the farmers market to provide additional enrichment activities that engage children and families. These activities may serve as an entry point to the farmers market for some families who may not have attended otherwise, but who want to learn more about the market and resources available through the family programming. Enrichment activities may include arts and crafts, such as tie dye and photo contests; educational demonstrations, such as composting and sustainability; and lessons about the market using a scavenger hunt or market bingo game.

## Case Study

### *Berea Kids Eat (Berea, Kentucky)*

## Innovative Strategy: Expanding the Farmers Market

Community Adaptations: market at park facility; junior market; school wellness program

Berea Kids Eat, partnered with Berea Parks and Recreation, Berea Farmers Market, and Berea Community School District, supported the Berea Farmers Market's mission to increase local food access for families in Berea, Kentucky. Berea Kids Eat implemented a multi-pronged approach to increase access to healthy foods in their community, including moving the farmers market to a park site, launching a junior market, and incorporating nutrition programming and outdoor education at both summer and after-school meal sites. The relocation of the market to the park site on Saturdays led to an increase in visibility, foot traffic and sales. On site trash, water, electricity and Wi-Fi served both the market and the customers, and provided amenities needed to operate taste tests and cooking demonstrations. Additionally, the market manager reported a nearly 60 percent increase of foot traffic at the first market day at the new location, and the city added the market as a stop with the tourism bus the following week. Berea Kids Eat operated four events for the new junior market, which supported 28 independent youth vendors, who collectively sold items amounting to more than \$4,800. The Junior Farmers Market attracted dozens of new families, increased sales among the regular vendors and further connected the farmers market to the community. Berea Kids Eat also incorporated nutritious snacks at the events with smoothie bikes, or pedal-powered blenders; local food taste tests with farmers from the area; school garden tours; and a chicken petting zoo. Reaching an estimated 986 families, event participation increased teacher and staff interest in connecting youth with gardening and culinary experiences. As a result, Berea Community School District is reestablishing a Wellness Committee consisting of school and community partners committed to increasing healthy access at both the school and in households.

*Photo: Grow Appalachia in Berea, Kentucky hosts a Junior Farmers Market for local youth to sell food and crafts.*



## Anticipated Challenges

### **Recruiting Vendors**

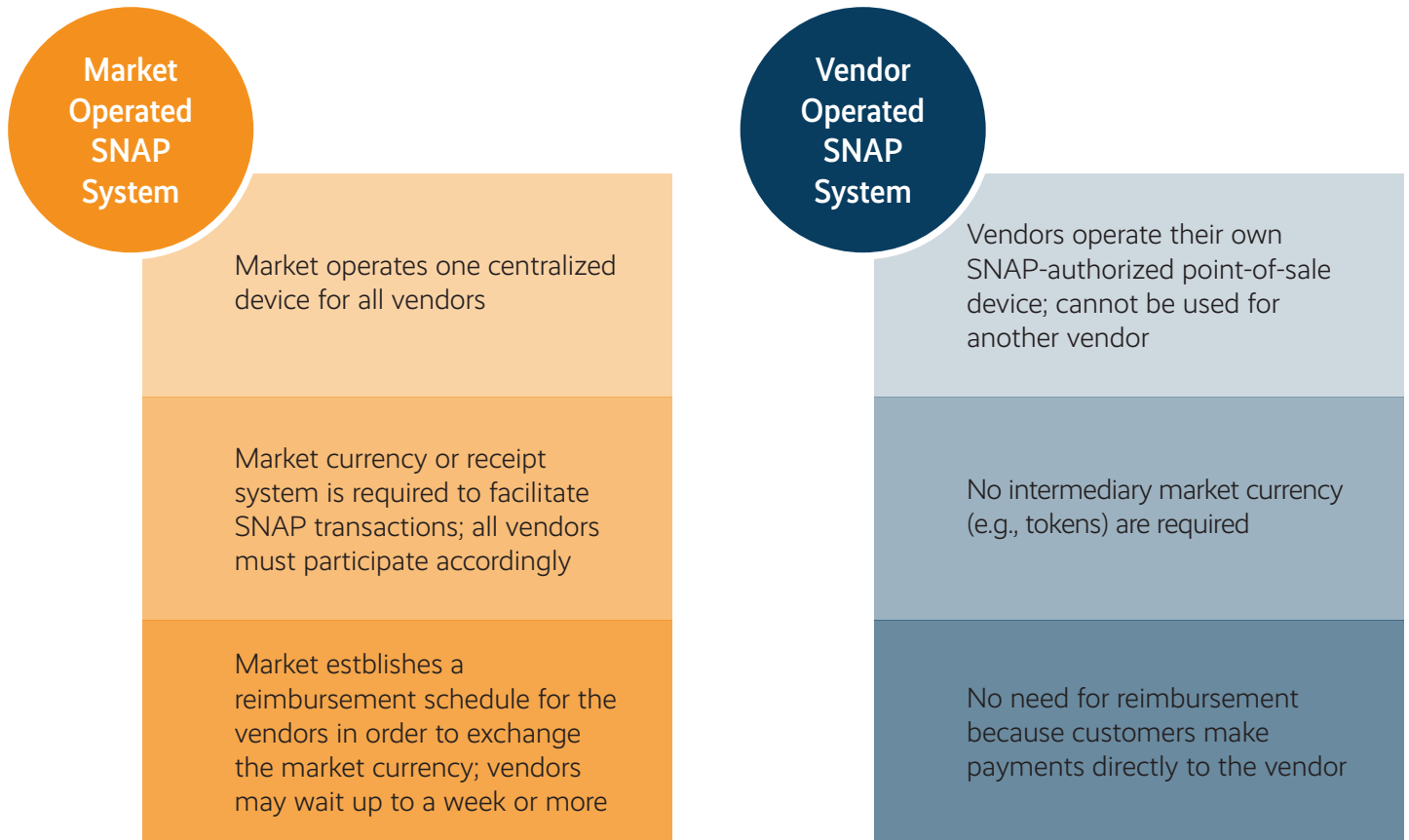
Recruiting vendors is the first step to attracting customers and residents to a farmers market. Try to identify and invite vendors that sell a diverse range of food items and products to minimize competition among vendors and to attract people of different groups from the community.<sup>15</sup> Minimizing competition among vendors may make new vendors feel more inclined to participate. Vendors may prefer the convenience of participating in farmers markets that are within closer proximity to them, or ones that they have previously participated in. Recruiting vendors to participate in farmers markets located in rural areas may be especially difficult due to costs related to travel and time. If you are starting a new farmers market, you may face barriers in recruiting vendors to participate in a new market with unknown earning potential. Engage with the vendors who do participate in order to collect feedback for quality improvement. Building trust and awareness in the community is a multi-year process. When communicating with new vendors, try to expand upon how the potential benefits or outcomes of participating in your farmers market outweighs the time and financial resources required. There are a variety of avenues farmers market management can employ to recruit vendors, including websites, recruitment fliers and online directories.<sup>16</sup> Farmers market managers also can identify specific products through customer surveys that they may currently sell and that are in demand and try to invite vendors who supply the product to participate.

### **Establishing or Expanding Use of SNAP Benefits**

Farmers markets and vendors can receive authorization to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for eligible food products.<sup>17</sup> In addition to traditional grocery stores and other food retailers, farmers markets are ideal food retail spaces to accept SNAP because they sell SNAP eligible foods including: fruits and vegetables; meat, poultry, and fish; dairy products; breads and cereals; and seeds and plants.<sup>18</sup> All states now use electronic benefit transfer (EBT) systems to distribute SNAP benefits on a government-issued debit card that can be used at farmers markets and traditional food retail stores. Establishing an EBT system to accept SNAP at your market for the first time or expanding EBT coverage to more vendors at your market may be challenging. Markets and vendors must be licensed by the Food and Nutrition Service to accept EBT. Depending on the capacity of your staff or market coalition, and the vendors' experience with EBT, there are considerations and challenges with each approach.<sup>19</sup>



*Children in Burlington, Vermont, eat healthy foods at an event hosted by Burlington Parks, Recreation & Waterfront.*



Source: *Center for Agriculture and Food Systems. (2020) Who Administers SNAP: Markets, Vendors, or Both?*  
 Retrieved from: [farmersmarketlegaltoolkit.org/snap/legal-topics/who-administers](https://farmersmarketlegaltoolkit.org/snap/legal-topics/who-administers)

The market-operated approach is the more common approach for accepting SNAP benefits. The market applies to become an authorized SNAP retailer and manages the point of service (POS) device from a central location on behalf of all vendors. The market is responsible for converting SNAP EBT into market currency, such as tokens, for the customers to use at participating vendors. The vendors then receive reimbursement from the market, which may take up to a week or more. If a market does not want to rent or buy a POS device, your state may have free POS equipment available. The vendor-operated approach requires that each vendor applies individually to become authorized SNAP retailers. This means that each vendor must also have their own POS device. While this may be a barrier for some inexperienced vendors, it may be more efficient for other vendors, because they do not have to use market currency and instead receive payments directly from customers.

**Preparing for Adverse Weather Events**

Adverse or unexpected weather events may occur that can impact your market service for one day or multiple weeks. Extreme weather events, such as flooding, may require you to relocate your market to a new location for an extended period of time. Other extreme weather such as heat waves may impact your market for a shorter period of time, but the disruption in the community may have a ripple effect on your market for the rest of the season. It is important to consider the possibility of adverse weather events, and other emergency events, and to create an emergency preparedness plan or protocol prior to the launch of your market. Potential impacts that extreme weather may have on your market include:

- Inability to access the farmers market location
- Decrease in attendance
- Inability for farmers/vendors to attend the market
- Decrease in farmers’ crop yields to sell at the market

# Additional Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). *Healthier Food Retail: Beginning the Assessment Process in Your State or Community*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from [cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/HFRassessment.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/HFRassessment.pdf)

**Relevance:** This guide gives examples of assessment questions, guidance on defining important areas and populations of interest, and components to consider when designing an assessment. It also discusses different types of datasets (it provides links) and the value of geographic information system mapping.
- Public Health Institute. (2016). *Making Food Systems Part of Your Community Health Needs Assessment: Practical Guidance from the Tackling Hunger Project*. Retrieved from [phi.org/uploads/application/files/15gi3yetjrz6genaw13ppu92u9flcbspm1wgzqc6u9llvsb888.pdf](https://www.phi.org/uploads/application/files/15gi3yetjrz6genaw13ppu92u9flcbspm1wgzqc6u9llvsb888.pdf)

**Relevance:** This source includes a table detailing metrics, data sources, and their potential uses in CNAs. It also discusses what types of entities in communities focus on food security and local food system capacity.
- The Wallace Center at Winrock International. (2013). *Recruiting Vendors for a Farmers Market*. Retrieved from [farmersmarketcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/RecruitingMembersforaFarmersMarket\\_WallaceCenter.pdf](https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/RecruitingMembersforaFarmersMarket_WallaceCenter.pdf)

**Relevance:** This source has great examples of case studies and good insight on farmers markets experiences from the perspective of vendors.
- Market Umbrella. *Market preparation: Recruiting vendors*. Retrieved from [farmersmarketcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Marketshare\\_Recruiting\\_Vendors.pdf](https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Marketshare_Recruiting_Vendors.pdf)

**Relevance:** This informational worksheet helps market coordinators think through vendor recruitment strategy.
- Farmers Market Coalition. “Recruiting Producers: Farmers Market Management Tip Sheet.” Retrieved from [wafarmersmarkettoolkit-org.wafarmersmarkets.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/FMC\\_Tipsheet\\_Recruiting\\_Producers.pdf](https://wafarmersmarkettoolkit-org.wafarmersmarkets.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/FMC_Tipsheet_Recruiting_Producers.pdf)

**Relevance:** A fact sheet that covers recruiting procedures.
- Farmers Market Coalition. SNAP Guide for Farmers Markets. Retrieved from [farmersmarketcoalition.org/education/snap](https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/education/snap)

**Relevance:** This online guide contains step-by-step instructions to assessing your market’s needs, implementing SNAP and attracting customers.
- Farmers Market Coalition. SNAP EBT Equipment Program. Retrieved from [farmersmarketcoalition.org/programs/freesnapebt](https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/programs/freesnapebt)

**Relevance:** Information for 12 states that offer free, wireless EBT equipment to eligible markets and farmers, as well as links to other resources for determining eligibility in your state.
- Michigan Farmers Market Association. Emergency Procedures for Farmers Markets. Retrieved from [mifma.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Final-Flipchart.pdf](https://mifma.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Final-Flipchart.pdf)

**Relevance:** Informational guide and template outlines steps for creating emergency procedures for your market.





## Starting or Expanding Intergenerational Meal Programs

Intergenerational programming intentionally connects people of different ages, across generations, and allows them to share, learn and engage with each other. Intergenerational programs contribute to community building and have been shown to be mutually beneficial for youth and older adults, including improved aspects of health and wellbeing. Food insecurity and poor nutrition remain top concerns for children and older adults. About 16.6 percent of U.S. households with children experienced food insecurity in 2015.<sup>20</sup> In 2016, the food insecurity rate for all senior households was 7.8 percent, an increase from previous years.<sup>21</sup> Community leaders, stakeholders and organizations can leverage intergenerational programming to target these populations that are at risk for food insecurity, poor nutrition and physical inactivity. In this section, we describe strategies to consider when starting or expanding intergenerational meal programs in your community including partnering with existing senior programs, conducting interactive nutrition education activities, and fostering an inclusive approach. In addition, we describe two potential challenges that you can prepare to address by recruiting seniors to participate and tailoring the program to older-adult learning styles.

### Strategies for Consideration

#### ***Partnering with Existing Senior Programs***

Park and recreation agencies that are interested in starting or expanding intergenerational programming can partner with existing senior programming at the community or senior centers they own and operate. Engaging with senior program staff to develop intergenerational activities can result in new or strengthened relationships within the department. Senior programs and youth programs that are co-located at the same community center benefit from shared facilities, on-site staff familiar with the programming and cross promotion of programs. Park and recreation agencies also can look to their local area agency on aging as well as other senior and childcare resource organizations in the community. Some cities and towns may also have a senior resource group, which can serve as a valuable group of stakeholders to assist with ensuring the development, promotion and participation in the program.

#### ***Conducting Interactive Nutrition Education Activities***

Consider planning nutrition education activities that are age- and skill-appropriate. Developing activities that reflect common interests, backgrounds and social histories of the participants is an effective strategy for maintaining engagement.<sup>22</sup> Nutrition education activities are successful for intergenerational programs because they utilize complimentary skill sets between children and adults, including coordination, attention and literacy.<sup>22</sup> Some examples of intergenerational activities focused on healthy foods and nutrition include:

- Learning new cooking skills (e.g., chopping, measuring, cleaning)
- Learning new recipes
- Sharing regional or cultural recipes
- Gardening activities

Either before or after the activity, consider coordinating a shared meal to create a sense of family discussion among the participants. To encourage conversation, you can provide discussion prompts about favorite foods or memories in the kitchen. Depending on the size of your groups, you may be able to pair seniors and children together one-to-one, or you can assign groups of two or more children per senior. If possible, use complementary pairing to align skill levels, interpersonal styles and language abilities of children and seniors.

### **Fostering an Inclusive Approach**

Fostering an inclusive approach empowers all groups of people within a community. In intergenerational programs, vulnerable groups, such as older adults, will be able to participate and benefit from programming. Selecting, planning and implementing joint and interactive activities that appeal to both children and older adults is a critical aspect of intergenerational programming. Inclusive activities consider the interests and needs of both age groups and, consequently, ensure that both age groups feel invited and encouraged to participate. Ensuring that both age groups are interested enough to participate in program activities will facilitate and nurture relationship building. For both children and older adults, you may need to provide adaptive equipment to remove barriers to participation.<sup>22</sup> This may include supplying magnifying glasses or digital projections for better viewing, modified kitchen equipment, and wheelchair-accessible countertops and garden beds. Another inclusive approach is considering multiple different races, ethnicities/cultures and languages among the participants. Supply materials, such as recipes or gardening information, in languages spoken by your participants. If possible, have staff or volunteers present that are proficient in other languages as well. You also can tailor the nutrition education activities to include regional or cultural dishes and ingredients.

## **Best Practices for Intergenerational Programming**

1. Staff members of the adult and child programs collaborate to plan activities.
2. Participants are involved in decision-making about the activity and during activities.
3. Participation is voluntary.
4. Participants are prepared ahead of time and reflect on the activity afterward.
5. Activities reflect interests, backgrounds and social histories of program participants.
6. Activities are age- and role-appropriate.
7. Activities support interaction among intergenerational participants.
8. Facilitators skillfully stage the environment to promote interaction.
9. Facilitators consider the social environment and the role of staff members.
10. Adaptive equipment is used as appropriate.
11. Facilitators document and communicate experiences to build on in future activities

Source: Jarrott, S. E. (2011) *Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going? Content Analysis of Evaluation Research of Intergenerational Programs*. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* 9:37-52.

Retrieved from [pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/FCS/FCS-34/FCS\\_34P.pdf](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/FCS/FCS-34/FCS_34P.pdf)

## Case Study

*Lancaster Recreation Commission (Lancaster, Pennsylvania)*

# Innovative Strategy: Starting an Intergenerational Nutrition Program

Community Adaptations: [nutrition education curriculum](#); [intergenerational cooking class](#); [bilingual learning](#)

Lancaster Recreation Commission partnered with a local youth organization, Power Packs Projects, to implement a new intergenerational program at the recreation center. The program brought together seniors and preschool-age children to learn about nutrition, healthy food options and cooking skills to develop long-term healthy habits. Program staff, led by the nutrition educator, developed a tailored curriculum that consisted of classroom instruction followed by hands-on cooking skills and taste testing. The curriculum also included a baseline and follow-up fruit and vegetable knowledge survey for both children and seniors. The NPRA Foods of the Month curriculum complemented the program specific curriculum, even though it was not specifically designed for the target age groups. The highly interactive nutrition education fostered communication between the children and seniors. The park and recreation department serves a large Latinx population and while many children in the programs spoke both English and Spanish, there were some children for whom English was a second language. Some of the seniors in the program spoke Spanish and were able to communicate with the children in the language that was most comfortable for them. They were not only learning healthy eating habits, but also connecting as community members.



*Children in Little Rock, Arkansas create fruit kabobs during a Little Rock Parks and Recreation Department summer camp. The summer meal was made accessible by the Be Mighty Little Rock program, which is hosted through a partnership between the parks department, Central Arkansas Library System and Rock Region METRO.*

## Anticipated Challenges

### **Senior Participant Recruitment**

Senior participant recruitment may be a challenge depending on the location of the program, access to transportation and familiarity of the programming. If the intergenerational programming is located in the same building as the senior program, you can consider scheduling activities to optimize senior attendance. If the senior center is located offsite, you can ensure that participants have access to transportation by coordinating with the senior center, providing transportation services or partnering with local public transit services to schedule a shuttle for the program time. One challenge is new participant buy-in. Due to unfamiliarity with the program, some older adults may be reluctant to participate in the beginning. Regular and consistent programming will provide frequent opportunities for participants to build trust with the staff and youth participants over time. Some effective engagement strategies with older adults include:

- Personal Outreach
  - Personally invite seniors to attend the first event, or to return for another event
  - Identify staff or volunteers who can remind seniors when programming is scheduled and can help ensure they have a way to attend
- Special Programming
  - Specify certain activities as “bring-a-friend” recruitment events
  - Establish a pilot group of seniors who want to participate in the new programming, provide feedback and recruit others to attend
- Promotion
  - Work with senior programming coordinators to develop meaningful opportunities for involvement
  - Use benefits-focused language in promotional material

### **Tailoring the Program to Learning Styles and Cognitive Abilities**

Depending on the age ranges of your youth and older adult participants, you may need to tailor the nutrition education curriculum, or other programming protocol, to adapt to different learning styles. For example, in a cooking class with young children (ages 3 to 5) and older adults (over 60), you may find challenges with information retention, depending on the physical or cognitive abilities of the participants. Plan your lessons to allow for varying skill speeds and incorporate a review of material at the beginning of each lesson. In addition, you can prepare youth participants and staff for different learning styles and cognitive abilities by practicing the following communication strategies<sup>23</sup>:

- Make eye contact
- Speak slowly and loudly
- Position your body closer or so that you are facing the person
- Repeat yourself if necessary
- Ask for clarification



# Additional Resources

- Age Friendly Edmonton. *Intergenerational Programming Toolkit*. City of Edmonton (Alberta). Retrieved from [edmonton.ca/city\\_government/documents/PDF/afe-intergenerational-toolkit.pdf](https://edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PDF/afe-intergenerational-toolkit.pdf)  
**Relevance:** This toolkit discusses the importance of intergenerational programming, addressing ageism and the steps to program planning and program implementation.
- The Intergenerational Center of Temple University. (2012). *Intergenerational Community Building: Resource Guide*. Retrieved from [education.temple.edu/sites/education/files/u261/IGCdocs/cfaa\\_resourceguide.pdf](https://education.temple.edu/sites/education/files/u261/IGCdocs/cfaa_resourceguide.pdf)  
**Relevance:** Discusses assessing community need using an intergenerational lens, cross-sector collaboration and actionable plans.
- Generations United and LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston. *Connecting Generations in Senior Housing: A Program Implementation Toolkit*. Retrieved from [ltsscenter.org/Connecting\\_Generations\\_in\\_Senior\\_Housing\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://ltsscenter.org/Connecting_Generations_in_Senior_Housing_Toolkit.pdf)  
**Relevance:** A step-by-step resource for implementing intergenerational programs in senior housing centers covering preparation, planning, implementation, evaluation and sustainability.
- Generations United. *Youth-Led Intergenerational Projects*. Retrieved from [gu.org/app/uploads/2018/07/Intergenerational-Report-Youth-Led-Toolkit.pdf](https://gu.org/app/uploads/2018/07/Intergenerational-Report-Youth-Led-Toolkit.pdf)  
**Relevance:** This toolkit was created from the experiences of young people leading intergenerational projects in their communities to serve as a resource for others who are interested in leading projects.
- Generations United and the Neighbors Growing Together program at Virginia Tech. *Tried and True: A Guide to Successful Intergenerational Activities at Shared Site Programs*. Retrieved from [gu.org/app/uploads/2018/05/SharedSites-Report-TriedandTrueActivitiesGuide.pdf](https://gu.org/app/uploads/2018/05/SharedSites-Report-TriedandTrueActivitiesGuide.pdf)  
**Relevance:** This online handbook of activities was designed to be used at shared sites or in other intergenerational programs. These activities are targeted to young children and frail elders but could be adapted or modified for use with other populations.
- Generations United and A Second Chance Inc. *Fact Sheet: African American Grandfamilies*. Retrieved from [gu.org/app/uploads/2018/07/AA-Grandfamilies-Fact-Sheet.pdf](https://gu.org/app/uploads/2018/07/AA-Grandfamilies-Fact-Sheet.pdf)  
**Relevance:** This fact sheet provides a brief overview of the importance of prioritizing and supporting relatives for children who cannot remain with their parents, because these children do best when they are raised by relatives. When placed in foster care, African-American children often lose connections to their cultural identity and experience poor outcomes.
- Generations United. *Fact Sheet: American Indian and Alaska Native Grandfamilies*. Retrieved from [gu.org/app/uploads/2018/07/AI-AN-Grandfamilies-Fact-Sheet.pdf](https://gu.org/app/uploads/2018/07/AI-AN-Grandfamilies-Fact-Sheet.pdf)  
**Relevance:** This fact sheet offers a brief overview of the importance of providing culturally relevant services and prioritizing relatives and tribal placements for children who cannot remain with their parents. When placed in state foster care with non-relatives, American Indian and Alaska Native children often lose connections to their cultural identity and experience poor outcomes.
- Virginia Cooperative Extension. (2011). *Best Practices in Intergenerational Programming, Fact Sheet Series*. Retrieved from [pubs.ext.vt.edu/tags.resource.html/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu:department/family-and-human-dev](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/tags.resource.html/pubs_ext_vt_edu:department/family-and-human-dev)  
**Relevance:** This series of 11 fact sheets covers the emerging best practices associated with intergenerational programs. Fact sheets 5, 7 and 10 were referenced in this guide.



## Addressing Transportation Barriers

Challenges related to transportation often make it hard for residents to access healthy foods and nutrition education. To make their communities healthier and more accessible, community leaders, stakeholders and organizations should work to minimize transportation barriers. Transportation barriers include lack of access to a vehicle, an inadequate or non-existent public transit system, or unsafe pick-up locations. In this section, we describe strategies to consider when addressing transportation barriers in your community including partnering with public transportation services; providing transportation services; and leveraging transportation services to explore the community. In addition, we describe two potential challenges that you can prepare to address including: establishing parental consent protocols and transportation voucher tracking processes.

### Strategies for Consideration

#### ***Partnering with Public Transportation***

Park and recreation agencies can partner with public transportation or other organizations with existing transportation services. Working with community stakeholders and organizations that have similar goals or values can establish and sustain partnerships that provide transportation services.<sup>24</sup> A common partnership agreement that the NRPA 2019 grantees used was the distribution of pre-paid bus passes or vouchers. Depending on program resources and the partnership agreement, the bus passes can be purchased for children as well as their parents. Providing bus passes to families that may not otherwise have had access to them serves as an opportunity to increase transportation literacy. Public transportation services benefit from a more informed ridership that continues beyond the time period of the program.

#### ***Providing Transportation Services***

Organizations that already have their own vehicles, such as school districts and retirement communities, can leverage partnerships to provide transportation services through donation or rental agreements. Organizations also can form partnerships to use vehicles through donation or rental agreement. Bus routes should be thoughtfully planned in order to reach a maximum number of children. For example, certain neighborhoods or apartment complexes in the community may have a high concentration of families that would be interested in participating, and those areas can be designated as bus pick-up spots. Partnering with the local housing authority is one way to identify neighborhoods and/or apartment complexes with a need for transportation services and youth programming.

#### ***Leveraging Transportation Services to Explore the Community***

Whether your program is partnering with public transit services to offer bus passes, or your program is providing transportation services with a vehicle of your own or through a partnership, you can leverage those resources to expose program participants to more locations and experiences throughout the city. For example, a summer bus pass with unlimited rides, as one of the NRPA 2019 grantees provided, allowed children and parents to take the bus to work, to the grocery store, to medical appointments, or to parks, splash pads and community events. If the bus pass or transportation service is limited to use during the program time, you can organize field trips to museums, libraries, farmers markets and grocery stores. Partner with the sites you plan to visit so that you can arrange special programming for the children. For example, a scavenger hunt in a grocery store can familiarize children with how to navigate the aisles and to find healthy options.

## Case Study

*City of San Jose, Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (San Jose, California)*

# Innovative Strategy: Addressing Transportation Barriers

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Community Adaptations: [public transit partnership](#); [summer bus pass program](#); [bus tokens](#); [transportation literacy](#)

The City of San Jose's Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) has operated the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) for the past several years. PRNS recently assumed operations of the Alma Youth Center, and quickly identified a need to establish SFSP as a part of standard youth programming. The Alma neighborhood is predominantly low-income and a known food desert where fast food chains and liquor stores are much more frequent than grocery stores. Through the NRPA grant in 2019, PRNS established healthy youth programming at the Alma Youth Center, including transportation services. Funds have helped market the new camps and the SFSP to ensure community awareness of services. The biggest success has overwhelmingly been connecting youth to daily meals and snacks over the summer, which previously were not available in this neighborhood. The program had a total of 54 participants enrolled in the Alma Summer Program and distributed 37 Youth Summer Bus Passes. The pre-paid bus passes allowed participants to ride the bus from their nearest bus stop to the youth center without having to walk through unsafe areas of town. Participants who lived within walking distance of the center, or who did not need a bus pass, received bus tokens to increase their access to locations in their community where they could purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, such as local farmers markets and grocery stores not within walking distance. Staff have taken the youth on field trips using various bus routes to teach them how to travel on public transit safely, how to navigate connecting bus routes, and where in their neighborhood they can access fresh, healthy foods.

## Case Study

*Mount Airy Parks and Recreation (Mount Airy, North Carolina)*

# Innovative Strategy: Addressing Transportation Barriers

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Community Adaptations: [park transportation services](#); [mobile recreation vehicle](#); [housing authority sites](#); [swim lessons](#)

Mount Airy Parks and Recreation provided a mobile recreation vehicle during the summer months that provided recreation activities to the children of the Mount Airy Housing Authority in conjunction with the summer feeding program. Activities consisted of athletics, arts, crafts, cards, board games, innovative games and nutrition education at each of the four housing authority sites. All children in the Mount Airy Housing Authority had the opportunity to take American Red Cross Swim Lessons at a local community center. Transportation was provided daily by Mount Airy Parks and Recreation staff and vehicles. In order to successfully implement the transportation service, staff coordinated a detailed schedule of pick-ups and drop-offs at the various housing authority sites for swim lessons, to the summer meals, and for supervised recreation activities. During the meal and recreational programming stops, staff also incorporated NRPA's nutrition-education curriculum. One of the biggest successes of the program was providing recreation activities and swim lessons to the children of the Mount Airy Housing Authority. By addressing the transportation barrier, children were provided with opportunities that would not have been possible otherwise. There were multiple children who could not swim but became good swimmers by the end of the summer.

## Anticipated Challenges

### ***Establishing Protocols of Parental Consent***

In most cases, a parent or designated guardian must give consent on behalf of a minor for them to engage with or participate in a transportation service. It is important to establish protocols of parent or guardian consent. A parental consent protocol is especially important when transportation is provided from the program site directly to the child's house. This process requires up-to-date contact information for the parent or guardian who would be present at home when the child was dropped off. If the program coordinator is unable to contact the parent or guardian at the time of drop-off, this poses a challenge. It is important to establish back-up protocol for this scenario, for example keeping the child on the bus or van during subsequent drop-offs and attempting to re-contact the parent or guardian at a later time. Another good practice is to have more than one parent/guardian contact on record for each child in case the primary contact is unavailable. Parental consent also should be obtained for a bus pass or voucher system. This is important because children may be using the bus system for the first time or may be unaccompanied when traveling to and from the program. With this program model, parents should be informed about the conditions of the bus pass and the ways their children can use the bus pass. The bus passes should only be distributed after obtaining parental consent.

### ***Transportation Voucher/Bus Pass Tracking Processes***

One potential challenge to consider when providing transportation services through a public transit service is creating a system for tracking the distributed vouchers (e.g., bus passes). You should take into consideration:

- Location of bus pass pick-up (e.g., at one location or multiple)
- Identification system for tracking each pass (e.g., recording bus pass number)
- Staff training required to implement distribution and tracking system
- Accountability check-ins with participants to monitor usage outside of program time

Implementing a distribution tracking system is important for large programs as well as programs with multiple sites. Summer program staff need to be trained on how to distribute the passes and track them in the inventory system. When planning your transportation services, allocate sufficient time for this step. Creating the system, training staff and implementing protocols before the start of the summer program can be a challenge. Another approach for tracking is accountability check-ins with participants who have unlimited bus passes for the summer. As a condition of the program, you can encourage participants to use the bus passes for healthy food access on non-program days, such as going to the grocery store or farmers markets. The check-ins also serve as an internal tracking system for the staff to better understand how often and for what the bus passes are being used. It also provides another touch point for staff to interact with and to build trust with participants.



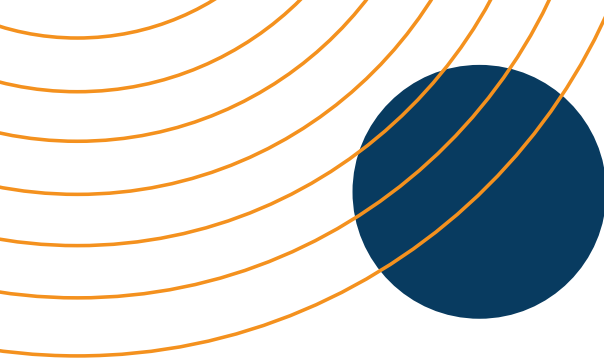
# Additional Resources

- No Kid Hungry's Center for Best Practices. Mobile Meals Toolkit. Retrieved from [bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/summer-meals/launch-a-mobile-meals-program](https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/summer-meals/launch-a-mobile-meals-program)  
**Relevance:** This resource and toolkit provides best practices for launching a mobile meals program.
- National Center for Mobility Management. *Transportation Strategies To Connect Youth With Summer Food Programs*. Retrieved from [nationalcenterformobilitymanagement.org/wp-content/uploads/Pdfs/FNS-Transport-Final.pdf](https://nationalcenterformobilitymanagement.org/wp-content/uploads/Pdfs/FNS-Transport-Final.pdf)  
**Relevance:** This practical guide offers strategies to address common transportation barriers for youth attending summer food programs.
- Rural Health Information Hub. Rural Transportation Toolkit: Promising Transportation Program Models. Retrieved from [ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/transportation/2/program-models](https://ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/transportation/2/program-models)  
**Relevance:** The toolkit is focused on rural transportation strategies with guidance on program models, implementation, evaluation, sustainability and dissemination. The program models module describes ways to improve access to transportation, overcome transportation barriers and improve transportation safety or infrastructure.

## Conclusion

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Park and recreation agencies serve an important role in increasing access to healthy food, since many have existing youth and senior programming that can be leveraged and park space that is well located and easily accessible. Beyond meal service, they can serve as coordinating agencies for farmers markets and other food-based activities, can help increase nutrition literacy, and can decrease common barriers to attendance, such as lack of transportation. Farmers markets and CSA programs provide an opportunity for community members to purchase fresh, local food; participate in nutrition education activities; and engage in community building events. Intergenerational programs connect people across generations to share and learn together in a way that can improve health and wellbeing. Lastly, transportation barriers, including the lack of access to a vehicle and an inadequate or non-existent public transit system, can restrict access to healthy foods and nutrition education. The strategies in this guide, and the additional resources offered, provide a road map for developing similar approaches to increasing access to healthy foods in your communities. Each community is different, with a unique set of strengths and challenges; successful programs are the ones that maximize strengths and assets in the community with a collective approach because healthier options will benefit everyone.



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*Back cover photo: During an afternoon tea event hosted by Berea Kids Eat, a Grow Appalachia program, youth eat and learn about the source of healthy foods.*

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