Objective

Overall Goal: To develop an online training for professional community nutrition practitioners, particularly those with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) or Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), who are working to bring about policy, systems and environmental (PSE) changes to prevent obesity.

Phase 1 Objective: To assess professional SNAP-Ed and EFNEP nutrition educators’ training needs related to using PSE approaches to promote healthful food and physical activity behaviors.

Background

- Guidance and policies for both SNAP-Ed and EFNEP have shifted to encourage adoption of public health approaches to support more healthful food and activity choices.
- While direct nutrition education remains a primary focus of both EFNEP and SNAP-Ed, practitioners are encouraged to implement PSE change efforts that complement education.
- Many public health and extension practitioners, the most common deliverers of EFNEP and SNAP-Ed, indicate they have limited skills in how to incorporate PSE approaches into their work.
- Use of these more comprehensive, community-based approaches requires new ways of thinking and working.
- The social-ecological model provides a framework to combine direct nutrition education with PSE approaches at organizational and community levels.
- Online training is an efficient and effective way to introduce this approach, teach related skills and train in best practices.

Description

To address Phase 1 Objective, we:

1. Developed and piloted online training needs survey with Northeast SNAP-Ed and EFNEP practitioners.
2. Formed Nationwide Training Workgroup* with representatives from each of USDA’s Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Centers of Excellence.
3. Developed national training needs survey based on NE survey and with input from Training Workgroup.
   - 24 items were used to assess needs within four categories**
   - *Items rated on 5-point scale from “not at all important” to “absolutely essential”
   - **Demographics collected were position held (coordinator, manager, community practitioner), program funding (EFNEP or SNAP-Ed or both), years employed (0-5, 6-15, more than 15) and state located.
4. Conducted online survey in February and March 2016
   - Sent to SNAP-Ed Implementing Agency Directors and EFNEP Coordinators.
   - Instructed the Workgroup to:
     - Complete survey themselves and then forward to nutrition program managers/ professional community practitioners in their programs to complete.
     - Each respondent rated training needs for both themselves (as well as those in the other position

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Results

**Full list of training topics rated by respondents:

1. Making sense of the terminology: what we mean when we talk about PSE
2. Introduction to the scope and possibilities of PSE activities
3. Understanding how PSEs complement nutrition education
4. Focusing on policy change – ex. at multiple levels in multiple settings
5. Focusing on systems change – ex. at multiple levels in multiple settings
6. Focusing on environmental change – ex. at multiple levels in multiple settings

Planning PSE Approaches

1. Assessing current efforts
2. How to conduct environmental scans, determine community readiness
3. How to strengthen partnerships and move to collaborations
4. How to address potential challenges to PSE efforts in the planning process
5. Using planning and evaluation frameworks for integrated interventions
6. How to help staff adapt PSE related skills and strategies
7. Exploring the possibilities and constraints of PSEs within EFNEP/SNAP-Ed

Implementing PSE Approaches

1. Exploring best practices for a policy, a systems and an environment change
2. Tracking PSE efforts – how to document time and activities related to PSEs
3. Best practices across diverse populations including cultural competency
4. How to support partner agencies and local communities in their PSE efforts
5. Using social marketing/media with partners and to increase engagement of participants
6. How to promote awareness of PSE changes and increase long term support
7. Balancing direct education and PSE – how to allocate time and resources
8. Sustaining change – how to ensure long-term maintenance of PSEs efforts

Evaluating PSE Approaches

1. Developing an evaluation plan
2. Using resources, tools and methods for process and outcome evaluation
3. How evaluation can inform improvements in PSE efforts

Conclusions

There is a clear need for training of SNAP-Ed and EFNEP professionals in PSEs. Developing a training based on a national needs assessment using an established online delivery platform will help build skills needed to successfully identify, plan, implement and evaluate activities that make healthy food and activity choices easier for low-income populations.

Next Steps

- Results from the needs assessment are guiding development of a training to be delivered through the established Cornell NutritionWorks online platform.
- Training will be offered to professional community nutrition educators working in SNAP-Ed and EFNEP.
- Training will provide a certificate of completion as well as continuing education units.