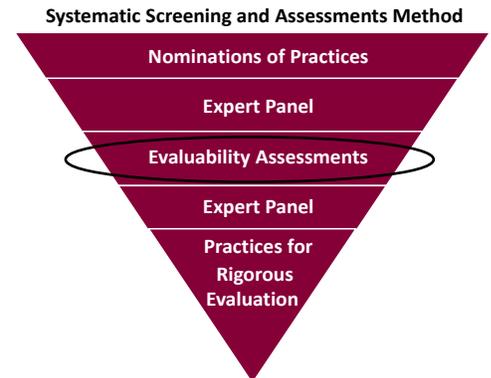


Food Policy Council Spotlight: Michigan Food Policy Council

Evaluability Assessment Overview

Evaluability Assessments (EAs) are a method to better understand innovative policies and initiatives being implemented in states and communities. A component of the Systematic Screening and Assessment Method (SSA), EAs provide preliminary evidence about which initiatives have the greatest potential for effectiveness and can inform subsequent evaluation activities. EAs are considered a “pre-evaluation” activity to determine whether a more rigorous evaluation is feasible or merited for a particular initiative, often saving costs and time. EAs also benefit the initiative by strengthening implementation and local evaluation.

The Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity (DNPAO) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) used EAs to identify the potential promise of several nutrition, physical activity, and obesity prevention initiatives and their readiness for rigorous evaluation. EAs consist of a site visit to assess implementation, data availability, intended outcomes, and staff capacity to better understand an initiative or policy. Upon completion of the site visit, feedback is provided to the initiative, which includes recommendations for future evaluation.



What kinds of Evaluability Assessments were conducted?

In 2011, DNPAO used the SSA method to learn of the potential promise of three state- and local level food policy councils. Food policy councils advise residents and governments on how to develop policies and programs to improve local food systems. The goal is to increase access to and the availability of affordable, healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables. Food policy councils include stakeholders from public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Members represent a wide array of interests, including nutrition, health, agriculture, education, policy, community design, and commerce. They can be commissioned by state, tribal, or local governments; developed at the grassroots level; or created through some combination of the other two approaches.

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One of the three initiatives selected for the DNPAO Evaluability Assessments (2011) project was the Michigan Food Policy Council (MFPC). Established in 2005, the MFPC’s overarching goal is to cultivate a safe, healthy, and available food supply for all Michigan residents, with a particular focus on school children and low-income families in both rural and urban environments.

Food Policy Councils Selected (2011)

- Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Council
- **Michigan State Food Policy Council**
- Suquamish Food Policy Council of the Indigenous Food Coalitions

Program Goals

The MFPC focuses on the following goals:

- Providing a forum for food-related government officials and stakeholders to identify policies and programs that will support or enhance Michigan’s food system;
- Strengthening partnerships and cooperation between government agencies, agriculture, public health, and economic development stakeholders in the delivery of food-related programs and policies;
- Developing policy and program recommendations that improve Michigan’s food system; and
- Working with public and private stakeholders to facilitate the implementation of food policy recommendations and programs.

Specific initiative examples include Public Act 231, which provides tax incentives to food retail establishments that operate in underserved areas and the creation of a local food policy guide.

Organizational Structure

Michigan Food Policy Council’s main body consists of 25 Governor-appointed council members, including representatives from public health, education, agriculture, rural and urban development, and food processing, as well as the directors of eight Michigan State departments.



The council members meet quarterly to guide the implementation and evaluation of the council's initiatives. Additionally, the council established four task forces to explore food system issues and programs and to develop policy recommendations. The task forces, which meet more frequently than the main council and include council members, state employees, and members of the public, address the following: 1.) Expanding food-related businesses and jobs; 2.) improving access to fresh and healthy food; 3.) promoting Michigan food; and 4.) enhancing agricultural viability.

Program Accomplishments

Over the 6 years since its formation, the MFPC has had a number of significant accomplishments. The council had facilitated increased awareness of and engagement in the food system by Government and nongovernment partners and passage and/or adoption of food systems-related policies and legislation. MFPC has also improved access to fresh foods through the EBT farmers market expansion and increased economic development opportunities through raising the noncompetitive bid level.

Considerations for those Implementing Similar Initiatives

The following considerations were developed by the stakeholders involved in the EA conducted with the MFPC.

- **Structure.** The MFPC uses both a top-down and bottom-up approach. The four taskforces provide a forum through which a variety of non-governmental stakeholders and members of the public can provide input on a range of food systems issues. In a more top-down manner, strong representation by senior state agency officials on the council has helped accelerate progress on a number of food policy issues. The result is a combination of community engagement and initiative success.
- **Synergy.** The council has helped other entities such as local food policy councils, entrepreneurs, and coalitions progress toward developing and implementing policies and initiatives that create more opportunities for all residents to access healthy foods.
- **Framing.** MFPC's scope extends beyond a single priority issue, with focus on both the promotion of Michigan agriculture and increasing access to fresh and healthy foods. This broader framing allows for ownership and support from a diverse group of stakeholders, many of whom would not have been brought together under different circumstances. Issues have also been framed in the context of "hot button" issues Michigan residents care about.
- **Funding.** Since its inception the MFPC has received a majority of its funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. When the MFPC was first established, state agencies contributed money to the council, which facilitated buy-in of key stakeholders. Future diversification of funding sources will further increase MFPC's capacity for sustainability.

Evaluation Considerations

While MFPC has not collected any formal process or outcome data to date, representation of key state agencies on the council may provide timely access to pertinent state data sources. Examples of potential data sources include the Department of Human Service's outcome data from the Double Up Food Bucks Program and farmers market food data from the Michigan Farmers Market Food Assistance Partnership. An evaluation may focus on changes in local food policy efforts around Michigan, changes in allocation and use of resources, and attitudes toward food and agriculture issues.

A rigorous evaluation of similar initiatives should be appropriately conceptualized and implemented. Evaluation activities for a similar program should consider the following evaluation questions:

- How has the work of the Council facilitated local and State food policy efforts around the state?
- How were State resources related to food? allocated before the Council began, and how are they being used now? Are more state resources being dedicated to food?
- How have attitudes toward food and agriculture issues changed among State departments?

Resources

- For more on the Michigan Food Policy Council: <http://www.michigan.gov/mfpc>
- For more on Evaluability Assessments: Leviton, L.C., Khan, L.K., & Dawkins, N. (Eds). (2010). The Systematic Screening and Assessment Method: Finding Innovations Worth Evaluating. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 125.

Contact Information

Diane Golzynski
Department of Community Health
Email golzynskid@michigan.gov