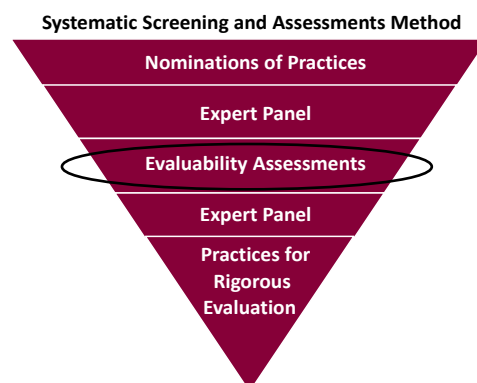


Food Policy Council Spotlight: Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition

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 Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition. Established in 2007, the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition's (CCCFC) two primary goals are:

- Creating access to healthier foods for all residents, particularly those with low incomes
- Strengthening the local food economy by creating a just food system for all residents

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

While CCCFC's initiatives have the capacity to positively impact all Cleveland City/Cuyahoga County residents, the council's focus is on helping those most in need, including low income residents who receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or the Women, Infants, and Children Program; the elderly; youth; and those with developmental disabilities.

Program Functions

CCCFC engages in both programmatic and policy-related initiatives. Its main functions include providing community forums for discussing regional food issues; creating regional food sources and supplying the community with these sources; facilitating coordination between sectors in the food system and engaging the community in facilitation efforts; assessing barriers in the food system and explore innovative strategies, including policies, to address them; influencing and evaluating policies that impact food production, access, processing, distribution, and waste recycling; and creating new economic development opportunities within the food system. Since its inception, the council has engaged in over 20 initiatives, ranging from establishing a grant program for food cart vendors who supply healthy foods to developing a water policy for urban agriculture projects.

Organizational Structure

The CCCFPC comprises over 100 representatives who work in a broad range of fields and organizations, such as city and county government, public health and nutrition, hunger advocacy, academia and research, foundations, business, agriculture, land use, food retail outlets, and faith-based organizations. The council is led by highly skilled staff from Ohio State University Extension, Case Western Reserve University, and Case Western's Prevention Research Center. The CCCFPC has an advisory board of about 10 members, many of whom work for local government.

The CCCFPC has 5 working groups that represent different aspects of the local food system, including: (1) health and nutrition; (2) land use; (3) food waste and recovery; (4) food assessment; and (5) local purchasing. Working groups are typically led by local volunteer professionals who work in the corresponding topic area. Groups are tasked with identifying food system needs related to their topic areas and developing a plan of action for addressing the issue. Plans can include programmatic, policy, and/or environmental change interventions. CCCFC seeks community involvement across the scope of its activities.

Program Accomplishments

CCFC has already had substantial success implementing programs and policy and environmental change initiatives across the greater Cleveland area. A snapshot of these successes includes:

- The coalition completed retail food assessments of the relationship between healthy food access and public transit in five greater Cleveland communities, which led to the development of recommendations for the Regional Transportation Authority.
- The CCCFPC created and distributed a Cuyahoga County Local Food Guide to give area residents more information about where to purchase local food, how to identify what is in season, and how to get involved in urban agriculture.
- The coalition promoted electronic benefit transfer (EBT) for SNAP recipients at farmers markets in Cuyahoga County, leading to a significant increase in the number of markets that accept them.
- The CCCFPC has worked with city and county government to develop several landmark policies to support local food systems, including a new zoning designation for urban agriculture that allows parcels to be used exclusively for food production.
- The CCCFPC worked with the Cleveland City Council and Cleveland Mayor Frank G. Jackson to pass and sign into law in 2009 a revised ordinance allowing bees, chickens, and other small livestock to be kept in residential neighborhoods of Cleveland.
- By partnering with ParkWorks, Neighborhood Progress Inc., and Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative, CCCFPC helped lead the Northeast Ohio Local Food Assessment and Plan to identify business strategies and investments to strengthen the regional economy through local food production, processing, and consumption.

Considerations for those Implementing Similar Initiatives

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

- **Strategic Planning.** Strategic planning, such as the development of a logic model, can help to determine the appropriateness of goals relative to their intended outcomes.
- **Leadership.** Active leadership provided by advisory board members, including city councilmen and funders, has been critical to CCCFPC's success and can serve as a model to other food policy councils.
- **Structure.** Structural elements such as leadership, workgroup composition, community engagement, and government and university affiliation, can affect a food policy council's effectiveness. CCCFPC's structure provides numerous benefits, including autonomy, credibility, efficacy, efficiency, flexibility, transparency and enhanced community involvement.
- **Funding and Affiliations.** Funding diversification can be critical to a FPC's sustainability. The Gund Foundation, CCCFPC's primary funding source, is helping the council to recruit additional funding sources. Additionally, CCCFPC receives in-kind assistance and support through its university affiliations, which have enhanced the council's monitoring activities and ability to apply for funding.

Framing. Framing contextual issues can increase buy-in for food policy council initiatives. The CCCFPC has used the frames of economic recovery and sustainability, as well as job creation, as a way to promote food and agriculture policies that otherwise may not have resonated with policymakers or community leaders.

Evaluation Considerations

A rigorous evaluation of similar initiatives should be appropriately conceptualized and implemented. Some of the following evaluation experiences and activities of CCCFPC could be considered.

- **Evaluation prioritization.** CCCFPC staff members recognize evaluation as an important means through which to provide the council with enhanced focus over the coming years.
- **Assessment of resources.** Resources available for evaluation activities play a critical role in evaluation effectiveness. A significant strength of CCCFPC is its support from Case Western Reserve University and Ohio State University, both of which provide the council with representatives who possess research expertise. CCCFPC's university affiliations have assisted it with its monitoring and ability to apply for funding. Additionally, ample staff is in place to identify and collect data elements.
- **Data sources.** Finally, Cleveland and Cuyahoga County are engaged in a substantial amount of data collection, and these existing data can be leveraged to document outcomes of CCCFPC's initiatives. Major healthcare institutions in the area may provide additional data and resources for evaluation. Potential sources for evaluation data include: farmers market data, including EBT redemption data; Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance Survey data; Youth Risk Behavior Survey data from middle and high schools; and agricultural census data at the county level through USDA (2007 was the last year), with information on farms, acres, etc.

Resources

- For more on the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition: <http://cccfoodpolicy.org/>
- 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.

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