

Kansas Health Foundation

Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative 1

Final Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

In 2006, the Kansas Health Foundation launched its Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative (“NPA” or “the Initiative”). NPA seeks to improve the value Kansans have for two important determinants of health—nutrition and physical activity. The two goals of the Initiative are to:

- Strengthen the capacity of selected community foundations in Kansas to facilitate strategic, sustainable change; and,
- Improve the health of various communities in Kansas by creating environments that promote and support physical activity and healthy eating.

Four community foundations from across the state were selected to implement the Initiative: The Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas, Golden Belt Community Foundation, Western Kansas Community Foundation, and Community Foundation of Dickinson County. Innovation Network, Inc. was selected as the evaluation partner for the Initiative. Through a participatory process, Innovation Network worked with each community foundation and the Kansas Health Foundation to:

- Develop community-level and Initiative logic models,
- Articulate the Initiative evaluation plan, and
- Collect data to measure progress against the key Initiative goals and outcomes.

Over the past two years, the evaluation team has developed data collection instruments and collected both quantitative and qualitative data to address the goals of the Initiative. This year’s reporting synthesizes the findings from year one and two of the evaluation. Several key themes have emerged over the past two years within the Initiative’s goal areas.

Goal 1: To what extent has the Initiative strengthened the capacity of selected community foundations to facilitate strategic change?

Learning from the Community

Across the board, the community foundations have broadened their awareness and understanding of how to strategically address local community needs through the community convening process. In the first year of the evaluation, the community foundations had not fully embraced the role of community convener. In Year 2, the community foundations had become much more comfortable with this leadership role. This was due to community foundation staff feeling more experienced in the role and seeing positive results from the convening process.

Moving forward, the challenge will be for community foundations to sustain this leadership role, and to learn from and engage the community outside of the Initiative. Although there were fewer convenings this year than last, and this seemed to influence how strongly the foundations were viewed as a convener by grantees, there was evidence that the role will be sustained by some of the community foundations. One community foundation, for example,

convened community organizations last fall to learn about community needs given the sudden downturn in the economy. Having the staff time to dedicate to this process will be critical to community foundations being able to continue in the role of convener.

Engaging the Community

Overall, the community foundations felt that NPA increased their ability to build new relationships within the targeted communities—often reaching into some of the smaller communities they had not reached before. The foundations found that engagement of the community helped them to establish their credibility by being seen as community partners, rather than competitors.

Building Grantee Capacity

Grantees ranked the foundations' ability to *recognize* their needs very high in Year 2, though slightly lower than last year. This slight reduction is likely due to fewer convenings held in Year 2, and perhaps also in part to the downturn in the economy.

In terms of foundations *responding* to grantee needs by providing training and or technical assistance, this year 85 percent of grantees accessed some type of assistance from the community foundation, up from 65 percent last year. This increase in utilization of assistance is important, as technical assistance is a key to building capacity. The main types of assistance offered were grant writing assistance and community needs assessment. Grantees cited the need for more help with identifying grant funding—a reflection perhaps of difficult economic times.

Sustaining Strategic Funding/ Programs

Innovation Network assessed the four foundations' abilities to sustain strategic funding and programs by examining their ability to:

- Integrate strategic grant making into their own grant-giving processes,
- Leverage additional funding, and
- Sustain their program staff and funded programs.

All of the community foundations indicated that various components of the strategic grant-making process promoted by the Kansas Health Foundation have been bought into by both staff and board members. The main barriers to its integration into all grant-making processes are the lingering effects of the declining economy. Three of the four community foundations referenced the economic downturn as a hindrance to incorporating strategic grant-making practices. Despite this, some of the community foundations had integrated certain strategic grant-making practices.

The community foundations felt they had some direct and indirect success in leveraging additional funding due to NPA and 49 percent of grantees reported being able to leverage funding as a result of NPA—up 10 percent from last year.

Maintaining staffing is a critical component to institutionalizing strategic grant making within the community foundations. This year, one of the people brought on to implement the Initiative will be let go due to financial reasons. The other three community foundations plan to keep their program person in place.

Goal 2: To what extent have the community foundations improved the health in their communities by creating environments that promote and support physical activity?

Enhancing Knowledge and Awareness of NPA Best Practices

Seventy-five percent of the grantee respondents see an increase in NPA awareness among the vast majority (75 percent or more) of their program participants. Sixty-one percent of the grantee respondents indicated that they have seen a similar proportion (75 percent or more) of their program population experience increased knowledge about NPA principles.

Promoting Healthier Food Choices and Physical Activities

Last year, the majority of changes discussed in interviews were changes in *knowledge and awareness*; this year most of the discussion was about changes in *behavior*. This is a very positive finding that signals a progression of positive outcomes. Over half of grantees indicated that the majority of their participants (75 percent or more) have increased their healthy eating behaviors. Similarly, over half of grantee respondents report that the majority of their program participants have increased their weekly physical activity.

Advocating for NPA

Finding individuals who are champions of nutrition and physical activity—people who not only choose a healthy lifestyle for themselves, but also actively promote it with others—is fundamental to sustaining strong nutrition and physical activity programming in the NPA communities. Over 35 percent of grantees surveyed indicated that the majority (75 percent or more) of participating grantees have brought healthier eating behaviors and activity to their family unit. Just under 30 percent of the grantees surveyed reported that approximately half of their program participants have gone on to become champions for NPA within the community.

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