

Jersey City Healthy Corner Store Toolkit



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Executive Summary

Corner stores can be crucial partners in improving food access in underserved communities throughout Jersey City. In September 2017, I began working the New Jersey Healthy Corner Store Initiative in Jersey City that was started by the Jersey City Department of Health and Human Services (JCDHHS). The initiative seeks to build relationships with store owners and encourages owners to make gradual changes to increase healthy food access in the community with support and training provided by the JCDHHS. In addition, the JCDHHS seeks programming that features health screenings, cooking demonstrations, and nutrition education. The initiative was supported by a mini-grant and trainings from the Food Trust.

The effort began with two stores, Privilege Food and Denisse Supermarket, located in Wards A and F, respectively. Privilege Food has hosted a ribbon cutting event with Mayor Fulop and has progressed through various trainings and marketing changes. Denisse Supermarket is in the earlier stages of initiative and will have a ribbon cutting in early Spring of 2018. JCDHHS hopes to increase this pilot program throughout Jersey City in the coming years to increase food access. This Jersey City-specific toolkit draws from various other toolkits while drawing out the best practices gathered from the first five and a half months working on the initiative.

Key Findings

The healthy corner store initiative is about relationship building.

Building relationships with both store owners and staff. If store owners trust and know you, they will be more likely to make changes in the store. They will be your champions of the initiative in the store—encouraging customers to come to programming and to check out the newly stocked healthy food items. Spend time getting to know the store owners.

Corner Stores can effectively improve food access in Jersey City.

Store owners in Jersey City consistently express interest increasing healthy food access and are concerned about the health of their communities. However, store owners need to

see that the initiative is financial prudent and an opportunity to increase public profile of the store to join in the initiative.

Store owners need varying degrees of support with simple steps to follow.

Each store owner and store are different. They carry varying amounts of produce and some owners own multiple locations. It is important to meet the store owner and the store where they are to provide sustainable and efficacious change. It is important to be gradual and realistic when setting up the time frame for changes.

The Healthy Corner Store Initiative is a successful model for increasing the availability to healthy food throughout communities. It works to build relationships between owners and encourages gradual changes to provide healthy food access. With help from JCDHHS, these changes can increase food access and the health of communities throughout Jersey City.

Introduction

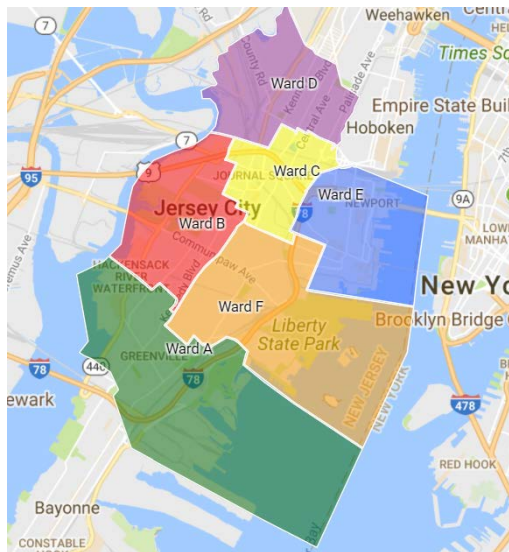
About this Toolkit

This toolkit has been compiled over the course of five months working in Jersey City on the New Jersey Healthy Corner Store Initiative and is the product of the Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship field placement. The Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship is a social justice program that seeks to give fellows field experience at fighting hunger and poverty through field placements, like JCDHHS, combined with a policy placement in Washington, DC. A \$5,000 mini-grant provided by the Food Trust kickstarted the effort led by the JCDHHS. The framework was drawn from various toolkits from efforts across the country. This is a Jersey City specific toolkit designed to consider the contextualized experience of those who hope to work with corner stores in Jersey City at the JCDHHS.

Overview of Jersey City

Jersey City is one of the nation's most diverse cities with over 265,000 residents.¹ The city is located in Hudson County between the Hackensack and Hudson River and covers almost 15 square miles of land within the New York City metropolitan region² Jersey City has a food insecurity rate of 10.6%.³ Ninety-four percent of residents are below 185% of poverty level, meaning that those residents are likely income eligible for federal nutrition assistance.⁴ In 2015, Jersey City was home to 79,718 Hispanic, 63,974 Asian, 57,533 White and 53,962 Black residents.⁵ The city is growing at a rate that will make it the largest city in New Jersey by 2020.⁶

Figure One: Ward Map of Jersey City (Source: Google Maps)



The city is comprised of six wards. The Wards are A (Greenville), B (West Side), C (Journal Square), D (the Heights), E (Downtown), and F (Bergen-Lafayette), which are alternatively identified as Wards A through F respectively. While the city is very walkable, there are many options for public transportation. The city has PATH, Hudson Bergen Light Rail, NJ Transit Buses, NY Waterway Ferries, and Citi Bikes. In 2015, 46.8% of Jersey City citizens use public transportation followed by 32% driving alone.⁷ The median household income as of 2015 was \$59,485 with the wealthiest census tract

¹ City of Jersey City. "#JCMMAKEITYOURS"

² Gundersen, C., Dewey, A., Crumbaugh, A., Kato, M. & Engelhard, E. "Map the Meal Gap 2017: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level."

³ Ibid

⁴ Gundersen, C., Dewey, A., Crumbaugh, A., Kato, M. & Engelhard, E. "Map the Meal Gap 2017: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level."

⁵ Census Bureau

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

located Downtown earning \$156,750 and the lowest located in Bergen-Lafayette earning \$18,077.⁸ The rate of Jersey City citizenship is roughly 77%, which is lower than the national average of 93%, which has consequences for local efforts in providing health and food assistance.⁹

Food Deserts in Jersey City

The lack of access to healthy, affordable food is a problem throughout most of Jersey City. Grabbing a bag of chips is more convenient than grabbing fresh fruit. The limited availability of healthy, affordable food can lead to serious health problems and is a growing concern throughout Jersey City.¹⁰ Much of Jersey City would be described as a food desert. The USDA defines a food desert as “a low-income census tract where either a substantial number or share of residents has low access to a supermarket or large grocery store.”¹¹ A low income tract is defined as “those where at least 20 percent of the people have income at or below the federal poverty levels for family size, or where median family income for the tract is at or below 80 percent of the surrounding area's median family income.”¹² Tracts qualify as “low access” tracts “if at least 500 persons or 33 percent of their population live more than a mile from a supermarket or large grocery store.”¹³ However, this definition does not fully encapsulate the experience that much of Jersey City, particularly the low-income communities of color. Perhaps, a more appropriate term would be food apartheid, which reflects the human created system that has consigned food wealth to some and the rest food scarcity.^{14,15} The food apartheid in Jersey City has led to an increased rate of diabetes, heart disease, obesity and other diet-related illnesses in the more marginalized communities of Jersey City.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Gundersen, C., Dewey, A., Crumbaugh, A., Kato, M. & Engelhard, E. “Map the Meal Gap 2017: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level.”

¹¹ USDA. “Food Desert Locator.”

¹² Ibid

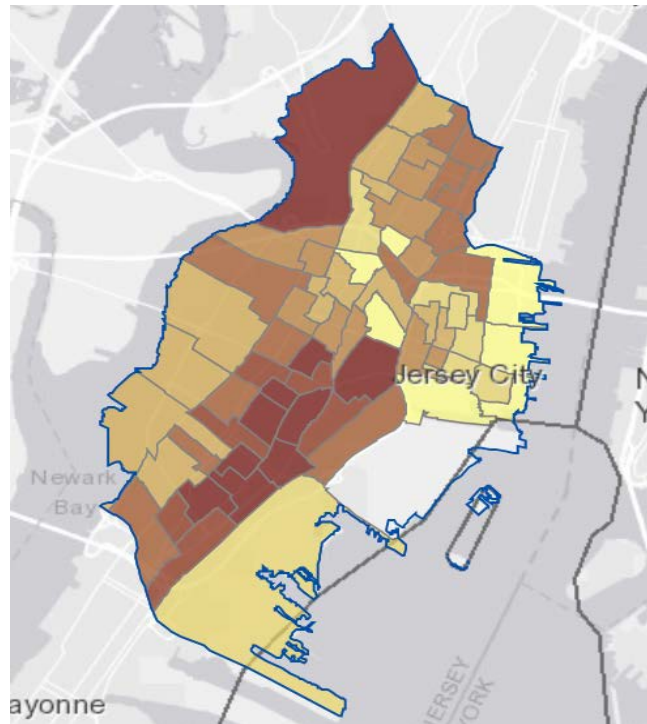
¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Fernandez, Meadows-Fernandez. “How Do We End ‘Food Apartheid’ in America? With Farms Like This One.”

¹⁵ Saletan, William. “Food Apartheid.”

The food apartheid is realized in Jersey City by the concentration of fast food restaurants and low food access in Wards A and F particularly, which are both predominately African American and residential.¹⁶ While the city has made great strides to increase farmers' markets, their reach is limited to specific portions of the city. The markets are disproportionately located in the more developed downtown region with only one farmers' market in the traditionally African American neighborhoods of the city. These neighborhoods have higher rates of diabetes, obesity and high levels of cholesterol, particularly when comparing Wards A and F with Ward E.¹⁷

Figure Two: Map of Obesity Rates Among 18+ Adults in JC (Source: CDC 500 Cities)



(Darker brown indicates greater obesity rates)

While much of the city has a lack of access to affordable, healthy food options, some have begun to rely on the FreshDirect, Amazon Fresh, Blue Apron, Jet, etc.^{18,19} Through my own experiences in Downtown Jersey City and talking to people in my neighborhood, I have heard that many rely on food delivery rather than shopping in a brick and mortar store. While these options can increase food access, these food delivery is often unaffordable or require a minimum upfront purchase. Increasingly, supermarkets have shifted their efforts from building new storefronts to joining in the growing food delivery scheme.²⁰ Jersey City, like many cities throughout the country, has an extensive

¹⁶ Census Bureau

¹⁷ CDC. "500 Cities: Local data for better health."

¹⁸ Iati, Marisa. "Want bulk groceries delivered to your door? There's a new option for that."

¹⁹ Liu, Gia. "What is AmazonFresh? Here's everything you need to know."

²⁰ Low, Elaine. "Wal-Mart Trademarks 'Wam! By Walmart Amid Grocery Delivery Push."

network of small corner stores and bodegas. Although these stores most often primarily stock unhealthy food and sugary beverages, cities have often focused on these establishments to increase the food access in often underserved communities.^{21,22,23} Government agencies, like the JCDHHS, non-profits and civic groups can begin to undo the system of food apartheid—in part—through the healthy corner store initiative.

The healthy corner store initiative is based in the concept of community food security.²⁴ Community food security (CFS)²⁵ addresses the needs and problems that may be facing a community through engaging the complete range of food chain activities. CFS promotes a systems approach to food problems through engaging farmers, distribution, nutrition, health advocacy and public policy.²⁶ This method aims to meet the needs of each resident, in a manner that empowers people to be self-reliant and bringing about the change they wish to see in their communities. While the JCDHHS is leading the corner store initiative, the community and store owners must be active and engaged partners to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the program.

Health Risks Associated with Lack of Food Access and Poor Nutrition in Jersey City

Low food access and poor nutrition are linked to higher rates of obesity. The increase in high calorie diets and decrease in physical activity are the two greatest determinants of the obesity epidemic.²⁷ Obesity increases an individual's likelihood of developing other serious health problems like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, some cancers and hypertension.²⁸ The rates of obesity for adults in New Jersey are 27.4% in 2016 and have been rising in recent years.²⁹ And children in New Jersey have a higher

²¹ Food Trust. "Healthy Corner Store Overview."

²² Rellergert, Linda & Wissmann, Mary. "St. Louis Healthy Corner Store Resource Guide."

²³ Hinchy, M., Gordon, L., Arenberg, L., Goodwin, E., Becker, A.B. & Gonzalez, E. "Healthy Corner Store Toolkit."

²⁴ Winne, Mark. "Community Food Security: Promoting Food Security and Building Healthy Food Systems."

²⁵ Community Food Security is "an extension of food security, which occurs when all households have available to them nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire food in socially acceptable ways"

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ WHO. "Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health."

²⁸ Custer, Sarah. "Healthy Corner Stores for Healthy New Orleans Neighborhoods."

²⁹ <https://stateofobesity.org/adult-obesity/>

obesity rate than adults at 31.7% in 2016.³⁰ If these trends continue, this generation of children will have shorter life expectancies than their parents for the first time in this country's history.³¹

When examining the issue of obesity, there is a stark contrast between Greenville and the Downtown Jersey City. In parts of Greenville, rates of obesity among adults above the age of 18 are over 40%, while in downtown the rates are around 15%.³² The citywide prevalence of obesity is approximately 20%.³³ Furthering the comparison between various regions of Jersey City, there is a startling trend across various health outcomes related to obesity and food access.³⁴ Across various health outcomes, the same regions have the highest prevalence of the diet-related conditions. High blood pressure is found to be as high as 45% in Greenville, while parts of Downtown are as low as 15% and the city prevalence is around 28%.³⁵ Prevalence of diabetes in Jersey City is around 10%, but in parts of Greenville the rates are almost twice the average of the city and five times the rate of parts of downtown.³⁶ Similar trends can be observed in high cholesterol, teeth loss, coronary heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and cancer.³⁷

Recent research has shown that food swamps, which are areas with high-density of establishments selling high-calorie fast food and junk food, relative to higher food options, are stronger predictors of obesity rates than food deserts alone.³⁸ Corner stores often contribute to food swamps as they are more likely to carry unhealthy food and sugary drinks than fresh produce. Combating issues of food swamps and deserts, corner stores can provide a great opportunity to remove some of the unhealthy and high-calorie food

³⁰ Robert Wood Foundation. "Study of Children Ages 10 to 17 (2016)."

³¹ Ibid

³² CDC. "500 Cities: Local Data for Better Health."

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Cooksey-Stowers, K. C., Schwartz, M. B., & Brownell, K. D. "Food Swamps Predict Obesity Rates Better Than Food Deserts in the United States."

options while increasing healthy food items in the most underserved community in Jersey City.

What are Corner Stores?

According to the National Association of Convenience Stores—the international trade association representing over 2,000 small retailers—the United States convenience store industry is comprised of 152,794 stores and 63% are run by independent owners.³⁹ The Food Trust defines corner stores as having less than 2,000 square feet, four aisles or less, and one cash register.⁴⁰ On any given block in Greenville or Bergen-Lafayette you will find a few bodegas. Many people that I spoke to during my time in Jersey City spoke of going to a specific bodega on their block.

In 2018, Privilege Food was the first store to sign up for the Healthy Corner Store Initiative. Privilege Food, located at the intersection of Ocean and Dwight, is owned by Santiago Rodriguez. The corner store has become the go to place for community members to buy their groceries. When Santiago agreed to join the initiative, he previously worked to sell more fresh fruits and vegetables, despite being known for his meat selection. Santiago Rodriguez has increased business at the store by becoming more responsive to the needs of the customers and the community.

During one visit to the store, a customer asked Santiago if he had a particular type of ice cream. Santiago walked over to grab the ice cream for the customer saying, “this is the one you asked about, my friend?” When customers were surveyed at Privilege Food, they spoke of Santiago’s responsiveness to their requests and their reliance on the corner store for groceries, which made it a perfect pilot store for the Jersey City Healthy Corner Store Initiative.

The Healthy Corner Store Initiative

In 2004, the Food Trust—a nationally recognized nonprofit with a comprehensive approach to improving food access—developed the Healthy Corner Store Initiative to

³⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. “Healthy Corner Stores: Making Corner Stores Healthier Places to Shop.”

⁴⁰ Food Trust. “Healthy Corner Store Initiative Overview.”

support corner store owners committed to making healthy changes for their customers and business.⁴¹ In communities that lack supermarkets or healthy food access, these stores can be valuable opportunities for healthy food access and economic development. The goal of the initiative was to increase the capacity of corner stores to sell healthy options while encouraging customers to make healthier choices.

Due to their prevalence in Jersey City, the stores have unique potential to improve health disparities associated with low food access. Efforts to encourage these small business owners to offer a healthier mix of foods and beverages has been shown to be a viable option to improve nutritious food access, the diet of residents, and community health.⁴² The Food Trust has found that partnering with corner stores is an effective strategy to improve healthy food access in underserved communities. In their experience, corner store owners are willing to introduce healthy inventory with support and small investments in equipment, which can significantly increase corner stores' capacity to sell healthy products.

Image 1: Store Conversion (Source: Dave Tavani)



The initiative broadly has five components: inventory changes, marketing changes, business training, equipment changes, and healthy corner store certification. Stores are expected to change inventory to stock healthier food items with the support of a partner organization. The JCDHHS will provide

marketing materials to the corner stores and offer additional store-specific marketing ideas. The JCDHHS will offer trainings sell healthy products, develop better business management practices and reduce in food waste. The final phase of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative involves the nutritional education and programming at the store provided by

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Hinchy, M., Gordon, L., Arenberg, L., Goodwin, E., Becker, A.B. & Gonzalez, E. "Healthy Corner Store Toolkit."

JCDHHS and partners to encourage healthy eating and create a healthy access for the community.

The Wider Jersey City Food Landscape

Farmers' Markets

The municipal government of Jersey City has worked hard to increase food access through farmers' markets. In 2015 the City Council of Jersey City passed an ordinance to encourage the growth and development of farmers' markets throughout the city. The ordinance established regulated hours and standards for all farmers' markets licensed through the JCDHHS. At least 55 percent of the total volume of all products available for sale must be sourced from farmers within 300 miles of Jersey City and at least 25% of the vendors must accept SNAP/EBT, WIC Cash Value Vouchers and/or Farmers' Market Nutrition Program vouchers.⁴³

The nine Jersey City farmers' markets are Exchange Place Farmers Market, Farmers Market at Lincoln Park, Arlington Park Farmers' Market, Hamilton Park Farmers Market, Historic Downtown SID Farmers' Market, Journal Square Greenmarket, Paulus Hook Farm Stand, Riverview Farmers' Market, and Van Vorst Park Farmers Market.⁴⁴ While the markets are spread throughout the city, there is a concentration of markets in Downtown, one market in Bergen Lafayette that has low attendance, and none in Greenville.

Image 2: Historic Downtown SID Farmers' Market (Source: InsideJersey)

Community leaders pointed out there needs to be greater variety and marketing at the Arlington Park Farmers' Market to increase participation. While Arlington Park



⁴³ Jersey City Council. "2015.02.25 Amend Farmers Market Ordinance."

⁴⁴ Jersey City Eats. "Jersey City Farmers' Market 2017."

Farmers' Market is outside of Greenville, it is the closest farmers' market to Greenville and is frequented by some Greenville residents that I spoke to. I interviewed a variety of community leaders to understand some of the issues facing Arlington Park Farmers' Market and the food scene in Wards A and F broadly. I spoke to Florence Holmes, who works at the Mary McLeod Bethune Life Center⁴⁵ and is on the board of the Friends of Arlington Park. She told me that "we need to get at least two farmers. We had two, but one went up to the Heights. There was more money and business was good in the Heights...you aren't going to go to the farmer's market with one farmer."⁴⁶ The farmers were drawn to areas where they could make more money, while the community was not drawn to the market with few options creating a self-perpetuating cycle that led to decreased attendance.

Floyd Jester, of Continuous Flow Christian Center⁴⁷, says that he "think[s] it would be awesome [to have a farmer's market in Greenville]. But you have to make folks feel comfortable shopping at the farmers' market."⁴⁸ The marketing of farmers' markets, Floyd Jester posited, must be changed to encourage members of Greenville to attend.

Assemblywoman Angela McKnight believes that there is an issue with the location of the Arlington Park Farmer's Market.⁴⁹ The location was not in an established congregating site for the community. All three spoke about lack of nutritional and food preparation education as another reason why certain communities do not frequently use farmers' markets. If there was an increased marketing campaign with education, the community could be encouraged to utilize the Friends of Arlington Farmers' Market more.⁵⁰

Community Driven Food Access Projects

Over the course of interviews with fifteen community leaders, I came to understand that the community has the knowledge, know-how and desire to drive change to create a healthier food environment. Throughout Jersey City, community members recognized

⁴⁵ The Bethune Center is in the heart of Greenville and has become a gathering space for community groups throughout Jersey City

⁴⁶ Holmes, Florence. 2017, November 11. Personal Interview with Bardia Vaseghi.

⁴⁷ Continuous Flow Christian Center is a church located in Bergen-Lafayette.

⁴⁸ Jester, Floyd. 2017, December 4. Phone Interview with Bardia Vaseghi.

⁴⁹ McKnight, Angela. 2017, December 15. Personal Interview with Bardia Vaseghi.

⁵⁰ Based on interviews

deficiencies in the food access and have sought to change the food scene for their communities. In 2011, Greenville residents came together to establish a community revitalization plan led by Garden State Episcopal Community Development Corporation. The organization is funding efforts within Greenville to create affordable housing, increase scholarships for nurses from the neighborhood, and increase intergenerational engagement in 2018. One of the groups that is receiving funding from Garden State Episcopal Community Development Corporation is AngelaCares. Started by Assemblywoman Angela McKnight in 2011, AngelaCares seeks to advocate and support senior citizens and caregivers and mentor youth by educating and empowering them to volunteer.⁵¹ The organization provides Thanksgiving meals and community feedings throughout the year.

The JCDHHS facilitated the convening of food pantries across Jersey City. The group, called HungerFree JC, is a coalition of churches, food pantries and community leaders are working to work more effectively together to leverage volunteers, storage space and kitchens to provide food to those in need of additional food. In addition to the food pantries throughout the city, the Campus Kitchen at Saint Peter's University, established in 2014, is a community service program that seeks to save food that would be wasted from dining halls, cafeterias and grocery stores, and creates nutritious meals for people throughout Jersey City struggling with hunger.⁵² In its first year, the organization served 10,113 meals.⁵³ The Jersey City Gardening Coalition has promoted community gardens as a way to increase food access in the city. Bethe Schwartz, one of the founders of the coalition, says that the community gardens are a way to "empower and support communities" that have been "disenfranchised."⁵⁴ In Jersey City, the community has stepped up to provide food access; however, some use the community efforts to supplement their typical grocery shopping from supermarkets and corner stores.

⁵¹ AngelaCares. "Our Story."

⁵² Saint Peter's University. "Campus Kitchen."

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Schwartz, Bethe. 2018, January 10. Phone interview with Bardia Vaseghi.

The Role of Grocery and Corner Stores in Jersey City

When walking around Jersey City, it is not hard to understand why most of the city is in a food desert. The two main supermarkets, Extra Supermarket and ShopRite, are often crowded with people from all over Jersey City. When people forgo the supermarkets, they seek out their local corner stores. Corner stores are a ubiquitous part of the urban landscape in Jersey City. There might be five or six corner stores within a block of each other each all throughout Wards A and F. The stores sometimes have one aisle with mostly canned goods, while others might have four aisles and bulk meat and produce packages. Of the Privilege Food customers interviewed, over 80% lived within a five-minute walk and over half go to the corner store more than once a week.

This convenience was often echoed in the conversations that I had with community leaders. The leaders often asked if I had considered their local bodega for the initiative. Everyone has a bodega that they frequent to buy items they forgot at the grocery store, to grab lunch, or just grab a quick snack. However, when surveying Privilege Food customers, I found that many came to rely on that corner stores for their groceries. Approximately 60% of surveyed customers of Privilege Food told me that they frequently bought meat, produce, and most of their other groceries at the store. Although, one senior spoke of the challenges associated buying most of her groceries from corner stores as she told me that “I will often spend over \$100 buying a week’s worth of groceries.” She continues to go back because it is easy for her to get to, but the prices are too high. Prices were often the crux of the issue for customers. During surveys with customers, a majority (60%) said that prices were the main reason that they did not buy most of their groceries at corner stores. However, some of the seniors at Ocean Towers⁵⁵ told me that they would continue to pay the high prices since they found it more convenient to buy their groceries from the nearest store rather than the most cost effective.

To begin to understand why customers spend more money at corner store instead of traveling to a supermarket, community leaders often spoke of transportation issues. Transportation is often unreliable for many Jersey City residents. Buses often drive past

⁵⁵ Ocean Towers is a few blocks from Privilege Food. It is also a congregate eating site for seniors.

waving people or show up late. In Greenville, located in the southern area of Jersey City, about 28% of families have no vehicle access and public transit access is severely limited.⁵⁶ There are only two Light Rail stops in Greenville, both of which are located along the ward's eastern border and far from residential areas. Therefore, some people within Greenville will stick a nearby at a fast food restaurant, corner store, or walk the long trip to a supermarket. Healthy food options are sparse in Greenville. There is also a knowledge gap when it comes to preparing healthy food options. Community leaders and food pantry organizers often told me that patrons did not know how to prepare healthy foods. However, once they understood how to prepare the food, many would begin to eat healthy options.^{57,58,59,60}

Every community leader spoke to the lack of nutrition and cooking education and lack of access as the two main reasons people within Greenville did not eat healthy food. Outside of the education and access, some community leaders stressed that many community members that they worked with just did not even think about healthy food as they had other issues to worry about—particularly safety issues and rising housing costs. Organizations like the Jersey City Housing Coalition, the JCDHHS' Police Chaplain Program, and other organizations are all working to engage with the safety and housing issues throughout the city. The Jersey City Housing Coalition is working on a plan to develop the superfund site, Bayfront, into affordable housing.⁶¹ The Jersey City JCDHHS' Police Chaplain Program seeks to provide support to citizens and police officers in times of emergency and engage youth at risk of crime to try to steer them away from violence.⁶² Organizations must also engage with the issues of hunger and lack of healthy food access to improve community health.⁶³

⁵⁶ Census Bureau

⁵⁷ Holmes, Florence. 2017, November 11. Personal Interview with Bardia Vaseghi.

⁵⁸ McKnight, Angela. 2017, December 15. Personal Interview with Bardia Vaseghi.

⁵⁹ Jester, Floyd. 2017, December 4. Phone Interview with Bardia Vaseghi.

⁶⁰ Webster, Elnardo. 2017, December 15. Personal Interview with Bardia Vaseghi.

⁶¹ McDonald, Terrence T. "Jersey City council candidates rally for affordable housing."

⁶² City of Jersey City. "JC Police Chaplain Program."

⁶³ Stokols, Daniel. "Translating Social Ecological Theory into Guidelines for Community Health Promotion."

Recent research has suggested that food deserts are not alone to blame for eating habits, rather a difference in income inequality and in education and nutritional knowledge.⁶⁴ High-income people benefit more from higher levels of education and better information about the benefits of healthy eating. The income inequality and difference in nutritional knowledge inherently shape eating habits and our health. To effectively engage with these issues, there needs to be a larger effort across the city to decrease economic inequality. However, to engage with the issues of food access and nutrition education, the Food and Nutrition Division of the JCDHHS can pursue the Healthy Corner Store Initiative to increase healthy food access while also providing education in addition to broader efforts to engage with economic inequality.

Working with Corner Stores: What are the Role and Responsibilities?

The JCDHHS and corner stores have a mutually agreed upon responsibilities for the initiative. For the initiative to be sustainable and successful, the JCDHHS and the corner store need to be equal partners and readily understand their roles. Some stores will be able to have greater ability to do things independently, while other stores will need more assistance from the Department. Each store will have differing timelines based on their capacity and comfortability of store owner to make changes.

Role of the JCDHHS

- Seek out partners in the community who can assist in the healthy corner store initiative
- Lead the initiative and communicate with partners
- Explain the healthy corner store initiative to partners and corner stores

⁶⁴ Allcott, H., Diamond, R. & Dube, Jean-Pierre. "The Geography of Poverty and Nutrition: Food Deserts and Food Choices Across the United States."

- Explain the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with corner store owners step by step
- Provide healthy food marketing materials to the store
- Potentially provide equipment to the corner stores
- Provide technical assistance through trainings
- Take inventory of store to acquire basic information about the store size, inventory, and equipment⁶⁵
- Reach out to partners for health screenings, nutrition educations, and cooking demonstrations
- Coordinate programming at each corner store with corner store and partners
- Survey the customers, store owners, and community
- Connect the store owner to small business resources in Jersey City

Role of the Corner Store

- Purchase healthy food options for store
- Decide on which value-added options work for the store to increase food options
- Choose equipment
- Be the daily champion of the initiative in the corner store
- Maintain neat and fresh displays for the healthy food products in a prominent location in the store
- Participate in technical assistance trainings and educational opportunities
- Allow nutrition education and events at the store to promote healthy eating of the community

⁶⁵ Refer to Appendix 1 for Store Evaluation form

Shared Roles

- Establish timeline for when four healthy food options are added
- Establish timeline for when new equipment is delivered
- Establish programming times for cooking demonstrations, nutrition education and Heart Smarts
- Work together to place healthy items near eye-level and closer to the front while moving unhealthy items to the back of the store and away from the register
- Place healthy food marketing materials together

Planning for the Healthy Corner Store Initiative

A successful corner store initiative can occur with or without a community food assessment. The purpose of a community food assessment is to assess various indicators of community food security.⁶⁶ A well done food assessment will assess how well an organization is doing at making it possible for residents to eat healthfully. It will obtain brief feedback about which programs are doing well and which programs need to be improved and increase awareness of the types of steps and organizations can take to promote healthy eating in the community. And finally, a well-done community food assessment will result in action steps for improvement and tracking progress.⁶⁷

There are advantages and disadvantages to doing a community food assessment before beginning the healthy corner store work in Jersey City. The benefits of a community food assessment are that the assessment allows you to determine the gaps of service in the community, the wants of the community, who is working on the issues of the community, and a map of the community to see where the greatest need is. Additionally, this data can be utilized to recruit store owners. The main disadvantage of doing a

⁶⁶ Cohen, Barbara & IQ Solutions, Inc. "Community Food Security Assessment"

⁶⁷ Michigan Department of Community Health. "Healthy Communities Toolkit: How You Can Work Toward Creating Healthy Communities."

community food assessment is the time it takes to complete effectively and delays helping people as soon as possible.

I did not conduct a community food assessment because of the short duration of my fellowship in Jersey City. I partnered with the other fellow placed in Jersey City understand the community food scene. I recommend that future efforts in the Jersey City Healthy Corner Store Initiative utilize community food assessments before starting store recruitment. This assessment can guide the Healthy Corner Store Initiative to be more efficacious. While, a quasi-assessment can occur concurrently once a store is on board, it will not provide thorough feedback to utilize for recruitment.

When planning for the Healthy Corner Store Initiative it is important to consider sustainability, recruitment, and partnership development. After one decides on whether or not to do a community food assessment or do a concurrent evaluation, one can then begin asking the guiding questions of the program. It is important to understand the scope and timeline of the project. Who is taking the lead within the Department? Who is going to be available to assist on the project? Who are the stakeholders? Who is partnering on the project? What is a realistic timeline? How will one target the stores? How many stores are being targeted? How many stores should be worked with at once? How will one engage the community? Will the community be engaged before or after one has established partners? Has the Memorandum of Understanding been written? The answers to these questions might look different for differing experience in working on the healthy corner store initiative. However, if one has an answer to all these questions, the path to success will be a clearer.

Targeting Healthy Corner Stores

Consider how one will target corner stores. Some things to consider are location, relationship and partners. It is important to make sure that the store is near to popular community locations such as schools, senior buildings, parks, etc. Make sure to visit the store before approaching the owner to see the inside of the store and surrounding community. These brief assessments will enable you to target each store with contextualized changes in mind before one even speaks to the owner. Look for stores with nearby accessible public transportation. In terms of relationships, existing relationships with

store owners and reputation in the community are good things to look for in a store. Finally, it is important to consider if any partners have relationships with the store or are in the area to provide extra outreach to stores or feedback about the reputation of a corner store. Once one has these stores identified, present the list to the Health Inspectors at the JCDHHS to see the status of the stores. It is important to approach stores that have received satisfactory health inspections to make sure that they are up to code. Once stores are marked as satisfactory, one can now approach the store.

In the pilot Jersey City Healthy Corner Store Initiative, WIC or SNAP stores that were within a quarter mile of schools were targeted in Greenville. We established that this would allow us to attain buy in from stores that were already providing some healthy foods. In terms of community impact, children frequent corner stores for their afterschool snacks; therefore, the corner stores could provide healthier options for after school snacks. Nutrition education outreach could also be conducted at schools to encourage the students to eat healthy. However, the real breakthrough in the project came when the JCDHHS began working and partnering with the Hispanic American Commerce Association (HACA). HACA has a network of over 300 Hispanic businesses throughout Jersey City. This vast network provided an access point for the JCDHHS for recruitment. Once the stores were approached with the President of HACA, Hipolito Ovalles, the stores that had been previously approach jumped at the opportunity to sign up for the initiative.

Canvassing the Corner Stores

Before I began my own efforts canvassing corner stores, I read the Food Trust Healthy Corner Store Initiative toolkit and various other toolkits to better understand how other agencies have approached the work.⁶⁸ During my first month at the JCDHHS, I received training from the Food Trust. The Food Trust provided an overview of the initiative as well as best practices and tips that they had learned from their years of work. Next, I shadowed the Food Trust staff member, Osvaldo Hernandez, to see the recruitment in action. During the shadowing, Osvaldo Hernandez showed me their process of approaching store owners and best practices. When the Food Trust got a store on board in

⁶⁸ These can be found under Resources and Various Toolkits

Jersey City, I observed a store evaluation to see how to properly gather store information and how to determine appropriate changes from the data. The following canvassing course of action is based on my experiences in the field and best practices from the Food Trust.

*First Visit*⁶⁹:

- If the store owner is available, follow steps below. If store owner is not available, ask when the owner will be in and come back then
- Introduce yourself and the initiative
- Provide the store owner with the program description, the Food Trust healthy product menu, and success stories (useful to have in Spanish & English)⁷⁰
- Leave your phone number with the store owner and encourage them to call if they have any questions
- Ask when a good time is to drop by for the second visit
- The first visit is brief and should not interrupt the flow of business
- Wait about a week to a week and a half before the second visit

Second Visit:

- Bring along the MOU, Food Trust Sell Healthy Guide, and potential equipment options⁷¹
- See if the store owner has any questions and be prepared to answer specifically about the initiative
- Stress that it's an opportunity to increase sales and provide recognition and PR
- Exchange cell phone numbers with store owners

⁶⁹ Guide to inventory questions and recruitment scenarios found in Appendix

⁷⁰ English model script can be found in the Appendix

⁷¹ Model MOU and Sell Healthy Guide in Appendix and Resources and Various Toolkits respectively

- Establish a time that you can come back for the third visit
- Wait about a week to a week and a half before the third visit

Third Visit

- Go over the MOU line by line with the store owner spelling out the responsibilities of the Department and the corner store
- Answer any lingering questions
- Leave the MOU and potential equipment document with the store owner
- Wait about a week and a half for the next visit or call

Remaining visits

- Repeat the goals of the program
- Call the owner every week or so following the first three visits

For some store owners, they want to see how committed you repeated visits before they give you an answer. Others will need more convincing each time you go down to see that the program will be beneficial for their store. Each store owner has different motivations for saying yes or no. Some might be primarily interested in dollars and cents requiring a recruitment focusing on value added items and marketing changes that will increase the sales. Others will care about health due to a family member experiencing a diet-related illness and will require more convincing from a nutrition and health focused recruitment. There is no one size fits all for the stores and you will have to read the store owner and ask questions that help you understand their values. Regardless of whether the store owner agrees to join the initiative, make sure to thank them for their time and leave your number with them if they change their mind.

Implementation of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative

Once one has reached an agreement with a corner store to join the New Jersey Healthy Corner Store Initiative, you will need to conduct an evaluation of the store.⁷² This evaluation will be the baseline that you and the store owner will work to improve from. Gather as much data as possible—photos, interviews and surveys with store owners and customers, inventory of the store, and identifying healthy food items.⁷³ Make sure to gather qualitative data through the interviews and surveys making sure to not disrupt the normal day of business and quantitative data about the size of the store, layout, and stock of both unhealthy and healthy food. When surveying and interviewing folks, it is important to have an incentive or thank you gift for their time. This could be a chip clip, jar opener, or cup from the city. After one gathers this data, one can begin to better understand how to go about transitioning the store from a corner store to a healthy corner store.

The Healthy Corner Store Initiative has five main phases which are inventory changes, marketing materials, business training, healthy corner store network conversion and healthy corner store certification and programming. Every corner store will have varying levels of capacity and will require different amounts of technical and equipment support. The first three phases can happen concurrently and at differing orders; however, the last two phases require the first three to be completed. The first three phases will be a more involved process, while the latter two phases are higher level goals that involve a more hands-off approach.

Phase One: Inventory Changes

Step One

Take survey of healthy food offerings in the store as defined by the Food Trust product

⁷² This store evaluation can be found in the Appendix.

⁷³ Customer, store owner and community leader questions can be found in the Appendix.

guide⁷⁴

Step Two

Interview and/or survey community stakeholders, store customers, and the store owner⁷⁵

Step Three

Gather data to ascertain what would be good healthy food additions to the store based on customer feedback⁷⁶

Step Four

Go through the Food Trust product menu with the store owner to identify which options are viable options for the store

Step Five

Establish timeline and sourcing for healthy food products

Phase Two: Marketing Changes⁷⁷

Step One

After one identifies healthy food options, establish a process and timeline for moving healthy food items near the register and eye-level and unhealthy items near the rear of the store and away from the register

Step Two

Discuss the culture and language of the community is with the store owner to



⁷⁴ It is important to establish what is a healthy food item for the initiative. This will allow the corner store owners to have a list of items to choose from. After reviewing a variety of product menus, we chose the Food Trust menu because it was informed by the American Heart Association and provided many reasonable options for the store owners..

⁷⁵ Interview questions are attached in the Appendix.

⁷⁶ For example, if the store already sells a large amount of canned beans, suggest low-sodium canned beans. If the customers want more grapes or cherries, work with the store owner to see if that is a feasible healthy option for them from the two separate healthy categories.

⁷⁷ Ramos, A., Weiss, S., Manon, M., Harries, C. "Supporting Healthy Corner Store Development in New Jersey."

ensure that marketing efforts are culturally appropriate and efficacious

Step Three

Place shelf talkers and shelf banners near healthy food items and window stickers for beverages provided by the Food Trust⁷⁸

Step Four

Place the door decal

Step Five

Consider other ways to highlight healthy food items⁷⁹

Phase Three: Business and Technical Trainings ⁸⁰

Step One

Establish timeline for trainings with the store owner⁸¹

Step Two

Begin business trainings

- Training ideas that will vary for each store based on capacity. There is no specific order and are not limited to:
 - How to source healthy food options.

⁷⁸ The marketing materials provided by the Food Trust are to guide and empower customers to make healthier decisions, increase visibility of healthy foods in the store already and identify the store as a member of the healthy corner store network. The shelf talkers designate green, yellow and red for healthy, somewhat healthy and not so healthy foods respectively with brief explanations. The door decals mark that the store is part of the healthy corner store network.

⁷⁹ You can also get creative with marketing materials and apply green stickers or markers to signify all the individual healthy items present in the store. The Passaic Healthy Corner Store Initiative has taken the work out of determining healthy food items by cutting out green construction paper and placing in on the shelf next to healthy food items. This would enable the customer to rely more on the sticker than reading the ingredients to check if it falls within the healthy designation.

⁸⁰ Hinchy, M., Gordon, L. Arenberg, L. Goodwin, E. Becker, A.B. & Gonzalez, E. "Healthy Corner Store Toolkit."

⁸¹ These trainings are typically informal as the store owner might not have the time to come away from the register to focus entirely on the training. It is important, therefore, to train at a time when there will likely be fewer customers and to have the concise lesson planned with visuals for the store owner.

- Many stores purchase from Jetro⁸². However, this could be an opportunity to compare prices between Jetro and farmers' markets. Perhaps collectively sourcing produce for stores could allow smaller stores to not have so much risk. Collect these local sources and ideas and take them to discuss with the store owner.
- How to price healthy food items and ideas for coupons and/or deals for healthy food items.
 - Consult the [Sell Healthy Guide](#) (pg. 10-12) for tips about how to price healthy food items and the value that produce can have over chips. Many customers that I surveyed expressed interest in coupons, like supermarkets do, to help valued customers to save money.
- How to display healthy food items and increasing the shelf life of produce
 - Consult the [Sell Healthy Guide](#) (pg. 4-6).
- ServSafe training and food safety, spoilage and temperature
 - ServSafe trainings are hosted by the JCDHHS. Ask supervisor when the next one will be hosted so the owner can attend. Consult the [Sell Healthy Guide](#) (pg. 3-7) for information about food safety, spoilage and temperature.
- Healthy food promotion
 - Consult page 10 of the [Sell Healthy Guide](#)
- Value-added products
 - Consult the [Sell Healthy Guide](#) (pg. 8-12)
- Maximizing store space and additional equipment ideas
 - Consult [Sell Healthy Guide](#) (pg. 15-16)
- How to become green in Jersey City

⁸² Jetro is a food supplier that is used by many corner store owners throughout Jersey City.

- Encourage the store owner to check out this [link](#) to see how they can attain green certification. Additionally, consult [Sell Healthy Guide](#) (pg. 17-18) for more information.

Phase Four: Buying Equipment ⁸³

Step One

Secure a vendor for equipment that is able to accept delayed payments until products are delivered per Jersey City government guidelines. The vendor must be willing to be a vendor of the City and take a purchase order. By taking a purchase order, the vendor agrees that they will not get paid until after a product or service is delivered.

Step Two

Walk through the store to identify places that equipment⁸⁴ could be utilized to display healthy food items.⁸⁵

Step Three

Explain ideas have about equipment to corner store owner and together decide on which make sense for the space of the store

Step Four

Set up a timeline for delivery of equipment and displays in accordance with the first launch and programming with the corner store

⁸³ The city has limitations on what equipment that can be purchased for the initiative. The city owns whatever equipment that is purchased; therefore, it is important to make the corner store a vendor of Jersey City. This will allow the city to open a line of credit with the store so that the store can purchase the corner store on the city's credit.

⁸⁴ Equipment could include refrigeration, shelving, paint, baskets, blenders, etc.

⁸⁵ When walking though consider if there is there space near the register for a fruit basket? Is there space near the entrance for shelving for healthy food options? Could baskets be added on shelves to make the fruit and vegetables more appealing?

Phase Five: Healthy Store Certification and Programming

Step One

Discuss with the store owner the date and layout of the launch event (1-1.5 months out)

Step Two

Let supervisor and Department director know the date of the launch in order to see if Mayor can come to ribbon cutting event (1-1.5 months out)

Step Three

Contact partners to notify them of the event date and discuss viable options for programming (1-1.5 months out)

Step Four

Work with partners to establish cooking demonstrations, nutrition education, smoothie bike and health screenings that would be available for the launch (1 month out)

Step Five

Secure parking space for screening van (3 weeks out)

Step Six

Work with the store owner to ensure that the store will be stocked for the event to make sure that the healthy foods are highlighted in the store (2 weeks out, but touch base 1 week out as well)

Step Seven

Create a run of show⁸⁶ for the event (2 weeks out)

Step Eight

Set up banner, balloons, etc. for the event and make sure to have giveaways ready (3

Image 3: Ribbon Cutting for JC's First Healthy Corner Store (Source: City of Jersey City)



⁸⁶ A run of show is the outline of what is going to occur during the program from set up, to schedule, and clean up.

hours before event)

Step Nine

Host the ribbon cutting event

Step Ten

Establish dates for the continuance of nutrition education and cooking demonstrations with the store owner and partners (during or shortly after the ribbon cutting)

Healthy Corner Store Challenges & Solutions

Challenge: Store owners are often wary of partnering with the JCDHHS and Human Services as they associate the Department with getting shut down.

Solution: When building the relationship with the store owner, stress the fact that this is a partnership and that their success as a store is a success for you. Therefore, you will help them stay up to code.

Challenge: Health inspections can take some time to get completed

Solutions: It is necessary to work with corner stores that have received a satisfactory health inspection from the Health Inspectors. The Health Inspectors often have a long list of stores to inspect. You can ask for a list of satisfactory stores from the Health Inspectors. Or you can get a store on board and shortly after have a Health Inspector go down for a visit.

Challenge: Difficulty identifying a store and getting a store owner on board

Solution: WIC stores are often easier to get on board as they have taken some steps toward providing certain levels of healthy food for their customers and are familiar working with the government. In Jersey City, the Hispanic American Commerce Association (HACA) can provide an access point for approach stores. Finally, if you tap into a community organization and encourage people to ask their local corner store owner if they have considered the program.

Challenge: Store owners control the pace of changes

Solution: Relationships are the key to success when it comes to the initiative; therefore, it is important that the store owner sees you frequently and you do most of the footwork initially. Once store owners see your commitment, they will also become more involved.

Challenge: Language and cultural barriers

Solution: Many of the store owners in Jersey City speak Spanish as their first language. It is important, therefore, to be able to either speak Spanish or have someone on staff available to translate and assist in the recruitment and maintenance of relationship with store owners. Additionally, it is important to have the recruitment materials translated into Spanish for the store owners.

Challenge: Wariness of store owners to sell produce

Solution: Store owners are worried about their bottom line and what it takes for them to maintain or increase sales. You can make sure to offer the store owners various options when it comes to selling produce. If they already sell cans, you can encourage canned fruits and vegetables in 100% fruit juice and low sodium respectively. Frozen fruits and vegetables are also another great option. You can also provide recipes for value-added options like smoothies so that store owners can use produce that is too ripe. Another way you can increase sales is by selling certain produce in bulk or pre-made recipe portions.

Challenge: Owner availability

Solution: Some store owners have multiple business or are short staffed leading to a limited time you can interact with them. It is important to schedule appointments that work best for the store owner. Calling before heading down to the corner store to make sure that they have the time for a training or to talk is important. It is also important to be flexible and give the store owner time to get back to you and have multiple available times that work for you to visit.

Challenge: Working for a governmental agency

Solution: Often, there will be things out of your control in terms of moving the process along with a corner store in terms of MOU, health inspections, general bureaucracy, etc. While

you are waiting for MOU or health inspections, you can continue to identify potential stores, think about the space in stores for equipment purchases, or conduct interviews with community leaders.

Keys to Success

Build Relationships

This is the fundamental aspect of the corner store project. Building a relationship with the store owner will allow you to understand the wants and needs of the owner. This understanding will enable you to provide an owner-specific approach to encourage the sales of produce. The corner store is a business and needs to succeed; therefore, it is important to frame healthy foods to increase profits. By working with store owners, you will learn about the store operations and customer base quicker. At the end of the day, the store owners and staff will be in the store every day and if you can build a relationship with the owner, they will be more likely to become the champion of the initiative.

Scale Up

Small steps. Gradual changes. These actions will enable the store owner to adjust to the changes of selling healthy—often more perishable—food. Scaling the changes will allow for the store owner to increase commitment over time and will ensure that these changes do not happen too quickly. Touch base with the owner frequently about making changes in the inventory and purchasing equipment. Additionally, phasing the activities allows for time to build trust in the relationship.

Make the plan simple

Make it easy for store owners to join the initiative with a simple step-by-step plan for every phase of the program. This will make it easier for store owners to introduce new products and understand how the process will take place. You can help with the marketing changes by placing all the markers for the store owners. Make a list of all the healthy items for the

store owner and offer to assist in the shifting of products. If the store owner sees that you are not only making it easier for the transitions to occur in the store, but also willing to do the work with them, they will trust you more.

Keep the Store Visits Brief

Some store owners own multiple stores, are short staffed, or are making runs to grab more stock. It is important, therefore, to keep trainings and interactions brief. The trainings should be able to be condensed into brief five to ten-minute interactions with lots of visuals and information to leave with store owner. Find times when the store owner will be the least busy by calling ahead to see if they will be in the store.

Partner with community organizations

Partnering with community organizations will allow for better opportunities to market stores, while also providing more assistance with programming and healthy corner store conversions. These partnerships will ultimately raise awareness and afford an opportunity to combine resources to create larger and more lasting changes.

Focus on the Owner's Experience

Beginning the conversation in this fashion will let the store owner know that you are interested in the store owner and the store's success. Highlight the benefits to joining the program and how you could work together to overcome the previous challenges that the store owner might have had.

Conclusion

Throughout Jersey City, there is a lack to food access and a concentration of fast food restaurants that have led to adverse health outcomes for many residents. These challenges require a variety of solutions. The Healthy Corner Store Initiative is one effective strategy that should be pursued by the JCDHHS in conjunction with various other healthy eating initiatives and policies city-wide. The work increases the health of the community begins with the introduction of healthy foods. For the initiative to be successful, the

community and store owners must enthusiastically buy-in. This will require continuous engagement from the Department through marketing and programming within the communities of need.

Remember that this work takes time and changes will likely come slowly. Stores will not become a beacon of health overnight. These changes are incremental, and it might be awhile before the community takes up the cause. However, it is important to remember that this initiative is a part of a larger effort to improve health outcomes for residents across Jersey City one store at time. Good luck with the Healthy Corner Store Initiative!

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Resources and Various Toolkits

- [The Food Trust--Healthy Corner Store Overview](#)
- [The Food Trust--Supporting Healthy Corner Store Development in New Jersey](#)
- [Minneapolis Healthy Corner Store Project](#)
- [St. Louis Healthy Corner Store Resource Guide](#)
- [Cook County Department of Health--Healthy Corner Store Toolkit](#)
- [Heart Smarts](#)
- [Sell Healthy Guide](#)
- [Philadelphia's Healthy Corner Store Initiative](#)
- [Shop Healthy NYC Implementation Guide](#)
- [Healthy Food Access Portal](#)
- [Healthy Corner Stores for a Healthy New Orleans](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Corner Store Evaluation

Store Evaluation

Store Name: _____

Store Address: _____

Store Owner: _____

Store Number: _____

Store Owner Number: _____

Hours of Operation: _____

Draw Store Layout Below

Accept EBT: Y___ N___ Accept WIC: Y___ N___ Has deli: Y___ N___

Sells heated food: Y___ N___ Existing produce promotion: Y___ N___
Scale for weighing produce: Y___ N___

Fresh Produce	Quality 1= Mostly overripe, brown/black spots, wrinkly, low stock 2=Mix of low & high-quality, relatively stocked 3=Mostly high- quality, well- stocked	Price	Location in Store

Canned Fruits and Vegetables	Level of Stocking	Store Location	Low sodium or 100% fruit juice

Beverages	Level of Stock	Placement	General Comments

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Food item	Quantity Stocked	Number of Types	Cost and general comments
Whole grain or whole wheat bread			
Whole grain cereal			
Brown rice and/or whole grain pasta			
Nuts			
Frozen fruits			
Frozen vegetables			
Canned meat			
Dried beans			

Store Lighting: Excellent___ Good___ Poor___ Comments:

Clean Sidewalk: Y ___ N _____

Public transit nearby: Y____ N____ If yes, how close? _____ min walk

Cleanliness inside: Excellent___ Good___ Poor____ Comments:

Number of coolers: _____

Number of freezers: _____

Close to schools: Y___ N___ If yes, how close: _____ min walk

Close to churches or other gathering places: Y___ N___ If yes, how close: _____ min walk

Close to park: Y___ N___ If yes, how close: _____ min walk

HACA Store: Y___ N___

Appendix 2: Customer Survey

1. About how often do you shop for food at corner stores like the one we are at today?
 - a. Never
 - b. A few times a year
 - c. Once a month
 - d. Once every two weeks
 - e. One to two times a week
 - f. More than 5 times a week
2. About how far do you live from this store (in minutes)? _____
3. How do you usually get to the store?
 - a. Walk
 - b. Bike
 - c. Your own car or car owned by a household member
 - d. Car of a friend/relative not in your household
 - e. Bus
 - f. Taxi
 - g. Other (please specify): _____
4. What items do you usually buy from this store?
5. What items would you like the store to sell that it doesn't sell now?
6. What would it take for you to buy your groceries at this store? (Circle all that apply)
 - a. Finding a more convenient way to get to the store
 - b. Better prices
 - c. Better quality
 - d. It needs to be cleaner
 - e. Healthier food options
 - f. Other: _____
7. What influences your eating habits of fruits and vegetables? (Circle all that apply)
 - a. I like eating fruits and vegetables

- b. I like to eat other foods
 - c. Fruits and vegetables are too expensive
 - d. I don't know where to get them
 - e. I don't know how to prepare them
 - f. I don't have time to prepare them
 - g. They are of poor quality at the stores where I do most of my shopping
8. The type of fruits or vegetables that you usually buy? (Circle all that apply):
- a. Fresh
 - b. Frozen
 - c. Canned
 - d. Dried
 - e. I don't usually buy these
9. Are there any specific fruits or vegetables you would like to see at this store?
-
10. The type of beverages you usually buy here are (circle all that apply):
- a. Soda
 - i. Regular
 - ii. Diet
 - b. Milk
 - i. Whole
 - ii. 2%
 - iii. 1%
 - iv. Skim
 - c. Juice
 - d. Other (please specify): _____
11. Are there any specific types of beverage that you would like to buy from this store if they were sold here? _____

Appendix 3: Owner Interview Questions

Store Owner Interview

Basic Information:

Store Name and Address:

Store Owner:

Store Hours:

Interview Date:

Interviewer(s):

Best times to contact store/store owner:

1. Do you have any ideas to increase the availability, visibility and affordability of fresh produce and healthy food and beverages in your store?

2. What are some challenges that your store faces? How can we better assist in those challenges?

3. How many customers are regular customers? Do you know many of them by name?

4. What kind of things do you customers buy most?

5. How do you decide what items to stock? When do you restock?

6. What items do you sell the most/least of?

7. How many different vendors/distributors do you work with to stock your food and beverages?

Appendix 4: Community leader interview questions

1. Can you please describe the current services or programs that your organization provides to improve healthy food access in the Bergen-Lafayette or Greenville neighborhoods?

a. Which of these programs have been most successful?

b. What factors led to the success of these programs? What could be improved?

2. Do you think improving healthy food access is a high priority for residents in these neighborhoods? For organizations in these neighborhoods? If not, what issues do you think are higher priorities and why?

a. Ask as a follow-up question if necessary: If you believe improving food access is a low priority, why do you think that is? What issues do you think are higher priorities and why?

3. Who is served by the programs that you run? Are there eligibility requirements?

a. Approximately how many individuals would you say are served by your programs?

b. Are there any groups that you have trouble reaching? What are the biggest barriers to serving these groups?

c. In the last few years, have you seen an increase or decrease in the number of people you've served?

4. How would you describe availability and access to healthy foods in Bergen-Lafayette and Greenville? Have there been any changes in the last 3-4 years?

a. What would you say are the top three barriers to healthy food access in this community?

b. What do you think are the most effective ways to reduce these barriers, if given unlimited resources?

5. What are the general problems your organization faces in improving healthy food access?

6. Do you coordinate your programs with other organizations and/or government agencies? How do you avoid redundancy or overlap with other organizations?

a. Can you please describe any previous work you have done with the JCDHHS?

b. Can you think of any ways that the JCDHHS could be of greater help to your organization?

7. Can you think of particularly effective programs that could be initiated by the Department / municipal government? What could we be doing better?

a. JCDHHS has launched a healthy corner store initiative to increase healthy food options in corner stores. What are your thoughts about the initiative?

8. For the past 3 years, the JCDHHS has partnered with the Friends at Arlington Park in Bergen-Lafayette to run Arlington Park.

a. Were you aware of the market? Did you shop at the market?

i. If you were not aware of the market, would you shop at the market now that you are aware of it?

ii. If you have shopped at the market, what could we improve about the market? What did the Farmer's Market do well?

b. Do you think a Farmer's Market is a vital component of improving healthy food access in these neighborhoods?

Appendix 5: Script for approaching store

Introduction:

Hi, my name is _____. I am here today to discuss a **business opportunity** with you: the New Jersey Healthy Corner Store Initiative which works with corner store owners by helping promote the healthy items they sell and educate customers about healthy eating. This type of program has seen success in not only improving people's access to healthy foods, but also **increasing the sales revenue** for neighborhood corner stores like your own. We are here to help your customers eat healthier and provide support for you while you make the changes. **Benefits for our program include a gift card, marketing materials, training, publicity, and potentially equipment for your store** if you add 4 new healthy products of your choice and join the statewide initiative. Are you interested in learning more?

Participation Criteria and Main Incentive

- To become a partner, you must do the following:
 - Agree to sell healthy products by expanding or introducing four (4) new categories of healthy fruits and vegetables. However, we can additionally make other inventory changes from our sell healthy product menu if this is not within your capacity.
 - Allow us to post our "Healthy Foods Identification Campaign" in the stores. The marketing campaign includes a sign for the store and shelf talkers to put

messages on the shelves.

Additional Incentives

- We have already started working with corner stores in New Jersey who have started selling fresh produce and other healthy products. Customers have been buying the new healthy products and store owners have been making money.
- We know you are very busy and do not have much time to spend on learning how to sell new products. We will help you by providing you with in-store training to properly display and price healthy items. We will also provide you with simple toolkits that will help make selling healthy products easy and profitable.
- We will provide you with free marketing materials to promote your new healthy products. We will also work with the community to promote your business and raise awareness of your new healthy offerings.

Summary Remarks

We are excited to share a potential business opportunity with you! As you know, many residents depend on your store for their meals. Even if they go to the local grocery store, many come to your store everyday to buy food for themselves and their family. We want to partner with you to make sure they have healthy options. **This will help improve your community while increasing your profits.**

Do you have any questions? Would you like to join our Network? Feel free to contact me, _____, at email or xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Appendix 6: Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) example

I, _____, owner of corner store _____ agree to participate as a member of the Jersey City Healthy Corner Store Network. The Jersey City Healthy Corner Store Network is part of The Department of Health and Human Service's Healthy Corner Store Initiative; the Network connects corner store owners, community partners and local farmers to increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods in corner stores throughout Jersey City. =

As a member of the Network I agree to:

- Allow Department of Health and Human Services staff to post the Healthy Foods Identification Campaign throughout the store and remain in the store for at least 1 year
- Introduce or expand 2 categories of HEALTHY food and within each category introduce **at least 2 NEW** healthy products (for a total of 4 new products) and continue carrying

these new items for at least 1 year (see provided product menu for what is healthy and the categories)

- Provide contact information for records and my participation payment including: store name, name of owner, store address, store phone number
 - If someone other than the store owner will be receiving the incentive payment, describe who they are and how are they associated with the store.
- Allow Department of Health and Human Services staff to do a quick walkthrough of the store, noting basic information about the store size, inventory and equipment.
- Work with Department of Health and Human Services staff to place healthy food options at eye-level and move non-healthy items to lower shelves
- Work with Department of Health and Human Services staff to place healthy items on or near check-out and move non-healthy items to the rear of the store

The Department of Health and Human Services will

- Provide a \$100 gift card for joining the Healthy Corner Store Initiative, provided the store owner meets the agreement outlined above
- Provide training and support to help introduce healthy products and the marketing campaign described above, free of cost.
- Potentially provide equipment to support marketing and inventory changes throughout the store

The Department of Health and Human Services and the corner store owner each have the right to end this agreement. If the agreement is ended, The Department of Health and Human Services will discontinue payments to the corner store owner and/or repossess any materials provided.