SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework: Q&A

States and organizations are implementing comprehensive nutrition education and obesity prevention programs around the country as one approach to address the rise in childhood obesity. To establish a mechanism to evaluate program effectiveness and report results to funders, NCCOR, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), the Association of SNAP Nutrition Education Administrators (ASNNA), and more than 28 states, contributed to and developed the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) Evaluation Framework: Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention Indicators.*

On August 18, NCCOR hosted part one in a two-part series on the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework. Guest speakers included: **Andrew Naja-Riese, MSPH,** Chief, Program Integrity Branch, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Food and Nutrition Service, Western Regional Office, U.S. Department of Agriculture; **Laurel Jacobs, DrPH, MPH,** Lead Evaluator, Arizona SNAP-Ed, The University of Arizona; and **Theresa Le Gros, MA,** Evaluator, Arizona SNAP-Ed, The University of Arizona. Speakers discussed the Evaluation Framework and how Arizona SNAP-Ed has used the Framework in their evaluation efforts.

On September 8, NCCOR hosted part two in a two-part series on the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework. Speakers included: **Jean Butel, MPH,** Junior Researcher, RNECE-PSE Milestone 5 Project Manager and CHL Intervention Coordinator, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa; **Lauren Whetstone, PhD,** Project Scientist, Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Unit, Nutrition Policy Institute, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources; and **Heidi LeBlanc MS, CFCS**, Food $ense Director, Utah State University. Speakers shared practical examples of measuring healthy eating behaviors, physical activity, and reduced sedentary behaviors in low-income children and families.

The presentations generated many thoughtful questions, some of which the presenters were unable to answer due to time constraints. As a follow-up to this webinar, the presenters have answered all the questions from the audience posed during the webinar. Below are those answers.

NCCOR hopes that these answers will aid Implementing Agencies and practitioners use the Evaluation Framework to both plan and evaluate nutrition education and obesity prevention programs.

- Access the Evaluation Framework
- Access the Interpretive Guide to the Evaluation Framework

August 18, 2016

1. In addition to building upon the evaluation plan's selected indicators with more data to evaluate progress year to year, is it expected that states would choose additional indicators to measure?

Andy Naja-Riese: Given the nature of Policy Systems and Environmental Change (PSE) and more comprehensive work, many of the results, particularly in the long term, "R population results" level is going to take multiple years to occur, so it's really important to think through this process in a really strategic and linear model and to think through, "In one-year what can you reasonably accomplish and what can be measured? What can you do based upon your needs assessment results, based upon your existing partners, and your existing local champions?" And then think through, "What are the type of changes that can be measured later on?" As we see more and more states in SNAP-Ed and other types of programs developing multi-year planning processes, you can use the SNAP-Ed evaluation framework to identify indicators for your current year, as well as for subsequent years so you can think about it from a horizontal approach within a level of the framework moved from short term to medium term to long term. You can also think about building out or scaling up your evaluation indicators. For example, one year you might focus on individual and family changes, then you might think about measuring comprehensive school days or farmers market changes, and then in the third year you might think about measuring broad scale changes in a state wide agricultural policy. It's intended to be both an area you can scale up vertically as well as horizontally.

2. How can you use the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework to evaluate the effectiveness of partnership activities?

Laurel Jacobs: In the evaluation framework there are two indicators that touch on partnerships: at the settings level it's ST7 and at the sectors of influence level it's ST8. I would encourage anyone who is interested in understanding how to assess partnership activities to dive into the interpretative guide for ST7 and ST8 to take a look at what we've written there and how it's maybe most appropriate for your programs. In the time we have today to answer that question, I'm just going to focus on the sectors of influence level and that's ST8. I think we can think of coalition work as a means to an end, the thought process being, "Let's get a coalition together of like-minded partners to achieve some bigger goals than what our SNAP-Ed program might be able to achieve on its own." It's important to remember that the achievement of those goals are predicated on an effective coalition, not just the presence of a coalition or a collaborative of community partnerships. So what does effective mean? It means that the coalition, for example, is in agreement about what collaborative goals they're working towards, that there's enough resources within the coalition to move the goals forward, and that the community in which the coalition is working is at a moment amenable to making community level changes. For us in Arizona, it's been about shifting our evaluative lens to the coalition itself as the unit of measurement and investigation. We think that it's through a thriving and dynamic coalition that community level changes are going to be achieved; those are the types of characteristics in a coalition that are important to measure. And that, in fact, aligns very well with ST8 to increase community capacity by better understanding multisector partnerships and planning.

3. What have you proposed to assure that data quality standards, including validity, reliability, and precision, are met?

Theresa Le Gros: In Arizona, one of the first places that we looked was at the time a west region interpretive guide, which is now the interpretive guide to the national framework, to review for recommended tools, most of which are heavily validated. From there, we went to the literature and took a deeper look at every tool we could find related to each of our focus areas and drilled down further to look at each of our strategies. We work with not just the notion of accuracy as one of our guiding principles, but also feasibility and ease of use. After we find validated tools we also ask ourselves, "Is it realistic for an implementing agency to be trained on how to use this tool and then collect data? If it's not realistic, can our evaluation team train ourselves and collect data?" And so each focus area, and sometimes even a particular strategy, will have gone through this process and had different results. In some cases, we administer or analyze ourselves, and in other cases we have the implementing agency help a site complete an assessment.

4. Have you developed indicators reference sheets? Sheets that define the indicators, the target, and the scope. If so, where can we get them?

Andy Naja-Riese: Download the Interpretive Guide to the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework, which is over 300 pages long because it includes all 51 indicators' sample tools, data collection instruments, as well as preferred survey questions and other methodologies that can be used for each indicator. If you're focused on measuring changes in government policy, we offer different types of secondary data sources that you can use for monitoring changes in government policy. If you're measuring changes for your state nutrition action counsel, we offer different types of tools like the Wilder Inventory, the coalition effectiveness inventory, and the partner mapping tool to look at "Does your coalition have the right resources in place for success?" All the tools, references, and information about each indicator are available on the SNAP-Ed Connection in the Evaluation Framework Interpretive guide.

5. In your experience, what made school health evaluations "thornier"?

Laurel Jacobs & Theresa LeGros: Any assessment related to school heath was met with initial skepticism by Implementing Agencies (IAs), who, because of their relatively long history with school-based SNAP-Ed interventions, worried about the feasibility of doing anything evaluation-related at a school or district. The concerns seem to have stemmed from:

1. The tough political climate of many districts. For example, there was a sense that School Boards would shut down anything that had "assessment" attached to it for fear of negative findings or added workload.
2. Difficulty in accessing schools or districts because of their severely limited time and competing demands. IAs were immediately concerned that a new, required SNAP-Ed assessment would mean that a school or district with whom they already worked would become frustrated with a new requirement.
3. Concern over duplication of efforts. Many schools and districts were already working to improve school health by using the CDC School Health Index, the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program, internally developed assessment tools, and other tools or systems. IAs were afraid that our evaluation requirements would add a burden that would cause schools and districts to reject their assistance, which was more likely to be accepted if it could be tied to the system that the school or district was already using.

We overcame these feasibility objections by:

- Removing the burden of LWP assessment from the schools, districts, and IAs and transferring it to our evaluation team. We then generated short, user-friendly suggestions to improve LWPs and allowed IAs to present these (or not) however they liked to the schools/districts. What they found was that districts were a lot more receptive after seeing the recommendations; some districts who had previously refused to consider LWP revisions jumped right in and made changes!
- Giving IAs time: As they moved through the LWP process, they realized how simple it was and what a low burden it was for them. They ended up becoming very excited about the recommendations they received.
- Staggering efforts: In the first year, we only do LWP *policy* assessment, and in the next year, we roll out LWP *implementation* assessment. This reduces burden to all stakeholders (including us☺).
- Choosing a tool for implementation assessment that was very short, simple, and aligned with every best practice assessment tool we could think of (the National Healthy Schools Program Award Checklist). We're still gearing up for this in the next year.

6. In terms of sectors—did you use the CDC's School Health Index/Healthy Schools or an in-house tool?

Laurel Jacobs & Theresa LeGros: We only work in the settings level for school health, as efforts in Arizona are site-based on the school and district level. We *do* use widely promoted, validated tools (not in-house tools) that are connected to the SHI and HSP. In particular, we will be using the National Healthy Schools Program Award Checklist to assess school health implementation at the school level, and we used the WellSAT 2.0 to assess LWPs at the district and school level. Many of the IAs we work with use these findings in conjunction with whatever other tools they have in place (for example, the WellSAT 2.0 can be a part of the larger SHI).

7. In the school health setting, which nutrition education materials are being used? And how are these materials evaluated for effectiveness?

Laurel Jacobs & Theresa LeGros: The Arizona Nutrition Network (http://www.eatwellbewell.org/) provides a Resource Guide with approved evidence-based Direct Education and PSE-level resources for Implementing Agencies. In terms of PSE interventions, an example is the *Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP): A guide for Schools.* In terms of direct education, a list of research- and practice-tested curricula are approved according to grade level. To evaluate effectiveness, we currently assess PSE-level interventions separate from DE-level ones using the WellSAT2.0 and the National Healthy Schools Program Award Checklist. We measure specific curricular series using our internally validated Kids' Activity and Nutrition Questionnaire in pre/post fashion. In the future, we may also expand to assessing multi-level interventions for effectiveness.

8. What needs assessment did you use and who completed the needs assessment? The evaluation comes after the assessment, correct? Can you expand on the assessment process?

Laurel Jacobs & Theresa LeGros: Generally, we require the IAs to conduct specific needs assessments that align with the strategy and focus area of the work plan. We do provide proctor training and ongoing TA to the IAs for these efforts.

For example, GO NAPSACC serves as a needs assessment for Early Childhood strategies in year 1, and the IAs are required to conduct the same assessment again in year 3, which we can compare with year 1 results to identify increased supports that have since occurred. WellSAT 2.0 is used similarly for School Health strategies related to LWPs.

In terms of large-scale, statewide needs assessments, those are conducted by the state health department by research and evaluation staff who are partially funded at the state level by SNAP-Ed.

9. How are Implementing Agencies at the state level communicating the Evaluation Framework and changes to requirements to sub-grantees (counties in our case)?

Laurel Jacobs & Theresa LeGros: In Arizona, we have ongoing and close relationships with our sub-grantees, which we call contractors. With three evaluators on our team, we each serve as an "evaluation liaison" to a set of contractors. In this role, we communicate requirements, answer questions, encourage their efforts, and provide more specialized TA depending on their localized efforts. This helps contractors know that they have a specific evaluator who understands their program and is there to assist them.

Also, we work very hard to understand how the programs work on the ground and gain buy-in from the contractors by visiting their programs around the state repeatedly with a genuine interest in getting to know the realities on the ground. With this foundation in place, when it then comes time to communicate changes and requirements, contractors are more receptive to the evaluations.
And finally, we provide many in person, webinar, and recorded trainings, as well as technical assistance opportunities so that to the extent possible, contractors understand what is expected of them and feel that they have the knowledge and confidence to collect the data in the field that we require.

10. Can you describe how the data from your multiple local partners will be aggregated on an annual basis?

Laurel Jacobs & Theresa LeGros: Since this is the first year that our team is evaluating Arizona's SNAP-Ed program, our processes for synthesizing IA-level data are still in development. We have set up our data collection systems to be able to aggregate the data in various ways.

At the end of the fiscal year, we plan to aggregate the data to provide IA-level and county-level reports, per the request of our state implementing agency. We will also aggregate data to the state level for the evaluation section of the USDA's SNAP-Ed annual report. While we already provide some "just in time" results back to our IAs throughout the year, we are also in discussions about useful ways we can share back the **cumulative data** to key stakeholders that go beyond the written report to assist them in using the information for decision making and action—with more details TBD.

September 8, 2016

11. How did using the partnership tool help you to decide specifically which PSE priorities the communities want to focus on and what outcomes that communities and residents would agree to work on together?

Jean Butel: We looked at where they were at and how they were willing to take on that activity. Did they have enough support for that activity? We found areas where they had a lot of interest and they had a lot of ability and had the broad-base support. For example, looking at the settings of a pre-school we looked at the wellness policy and wellness policy implementation and we did focus groups with the teachers, we talked to the parents, and we found out that it was wellness that they wanted. They wanted teacher wellness so that they could incorporate into the classroom. So that's the strategy we focused on—getting the nutritional physical activity worksite wellness basically to the pre-school teachers so that's how we decided on that strategy. Here is the link to publications from the CHL program.

- If you are interested in the community-engagement process see Fialkowski et al, 2013 (at bottom of the list)
- For the development of the program see Braun et al, 2014
- For assessing fidelity see Butel et al, 2015

12. Our preliminary thoughts are to include Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Systems questions in the pre and post surveys that are used during the direct education programming. This would be a self-selected sample and not necessarily a representative sample of the low-income population in the state. What are your thoughts on this approach? We have local and county level coalition data available for a few counties, but again not statewide.

Lauren Whetstone: I think that is a great question and one that we've actually been talking about. The survey that I talked about is not truly representative of the state—it was randomly selected— people were randomly selected within those counties, but the counties weren't randomly selected. While it represents the SNAP-Ed cohort that responded to the questions, but it's not truly a state representative sample. I'm not sure that all states have the resources to do a true representative sample surveillance annually or biannually. I think you could get some data, but it would be able to just speak to, represent, and apply to that particular group of people that answered it. There are opportunities to use BRFSS to get state level responses for your state that could be used to also address your population indicators in your state. So you could just look at what the BRFSS data are to understand the population level indicators for your state.

13. Can you describe for the six-month and one-year follow-up surveys? What strategies have you used to retain participants and/or track them down after such a long period of time? Have you had success with retention in that time frame?

Heidi LeBlanc: Yes, on the bottom of our first evaluation that they do we have a spot that says, "If you are willing to complete a six-month follow up please fill in your email, phone number, and contact information." Not everyone does it because it's optional. In six months we call the person and do the survey. Then, we ask them once again if they'll do a follow up. Then, we do it again six months later to get our one-year data.

14. Have the direct education surveys you use been validated? Also, do you have guidelines that you provide to your partners regarding the direct education series used with pre- and post-tests? For example, how many lessons/hours of education generally take place?

Heidi LeBlanc: They are validated; we have used the FNET behavior checklists, but we condensed them. We don't have partners—we only work with one implementing agency in Utah. When we give it to our NEAS, they are told to give them every time they teach, that way we can track how many lessons they've had and potentially see the difference in their behavior over six periods of lessons. Then for the follow up, we hope that they've taken a six-session series, and we have a punch card where they keep track of that.

Lauren Whetstone: For the impact outcome evaluation of direct education, in the past there have been guidelines that there had to be a five-course series for classes. For this upcoming year, we actually suspended that requirement based on some feedback from folks that there were some curricula that were on approved lists and were evidence-based that did not require five classes, and that it was harder for some populations to get five classes. For 2017 that won't be a requirement. But again, people will complete reports that tell us how many lessons were implemented and the duration of those lessons, so we will have that information.

15. In looking at the flow chart we have in the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework, we have changes at environmental settings at the sites and organization, and we also have changes at the sectors level, which include large scale systems at the community, village, state tribal, or territorial level. Can you use that flow chart for both changes in settings as well as changes in communities and states?

Jean Butel: Yes, it can be scaled down or up. As I said before, we used a setting level at the pre-school for wellness policy implementation. But it's also been used with the non-communicable disease coalition; we used that same type of framework looking at a jurisdiction in that case, at the jurisdiction level. So it can be scaled up or down. In other words, look at it as a group. That's kind of the reason why we're coming up with the Readiness to Collaborate tool because we figured it would be more beneficial to look at it from the collective or collaborative ability and readiness than just one group within that collaborative.

16. At what level—settings or sectors—would you say this work took place?

Jean Butel: The examples presented in the webinar took place in nonprofit sectors, although other activities were in public sectors (i.e., non-communicable disease coalitions, village mayors) and in the faith sector. This work also took place in preschools and store settings.

17. Did you move through the flowchart process with all your different programming?

Jean Butel: At the time our programming was being implemented, the flow chart did not exist. However, we followed the principle of looking at what was already being done in the community (in regard to the intervention activity) and support for those efforts, which was similar to the flow chart. When there weren't efforts directed at an activity, we searched for role models to help implement the activity. For example, in getting the Children's Healthy Living message out to the community, we worked with the community to develop the materials.

18. Are your focus group questions available for others to use?

Heidi LeBlanc: Yes, we can share them. We were able to get some of the questions from Montana and also some from North or South Dakota.

19. Can you explain why you created a theory of change model? Can you talk more about the development?

Lauren Whetstone: The group was working together. Our state workgroup of all of the implementing agencies, was looking at trying to develop a shared evaluation plan, looking at the evaluation framework, looking at the kinds of work that everyone was doing, and it seemed to us that it made sense to develop a model for what we anticipated this work would look like. What kinds of things would happen, what would we be doing, what approaches we would we be taking, and what kinds of changes would we anticipate happening. So we are really using the theory of change model to help us develop the evaluation questions. That's sort of where we are now: we developed a model, we developed a series of state goals and objectives which are tied to this model, and we are in the process right now of developing shared evaluation questions, which will be derived from this theory of change model to guide the kind of evaluation question that we will seek, to develop a methodology to evaluate across the state and across all of the implementing agencies.

20. You provided examples of tools for adults. Can you talk about any survey or data collection tools that you've used for children and youth?

Lauren Whetstone: In California, we have both a youth survey and a high school survey that are used in the impact outcome evaluations of direct education. I would have to check with our project coordinators on this, but I believe that there are just two tools available, the youth survey and high school survey, that are used for the pre-post questionnaires.

Heidi LeBlanc: In Utah, we do a parent survey: the youth take home a survey to their parents from the schools and bring it back for us.

21. When will the PSE module be launched as part of PEARS?

Andy-Naja-Riese: PEARS PSE evaluation tool is now available to all PEARS users. They have been working with the Nutrition Policy Institute at California and other stakeholders in the Mountain Plains region to develop the data collection tool, and the PEARS PSE tool will gather information related to needs and readiness, effectiveness of PSE work in both the environmental and individual level, program recognition, and media coverage and sustainability. The PEARS PSE tool aligns perfectly with all of the environmental setting indicators within the framework, so it's great to have all that info from the Kansas State team. Learn more about PEARS: https://pears.oeie.org/

22. How are you getting the pre- and post-test impacts from PEARS? Are you exporting it into excel or other statistical software?
PEARS team: Currently, survey response data can be exported into Excel and analyzed. We're looking into adding support for SPSS files and also plan to add more robust reports and data visualizations within PEARS in the coming months.

23. It seems that PEARS is being used pretty widely as a good way to collect EARS + PSE data—do you know roughly how many states are using it?

PEARS team: We have nine states on board in our region with an additional two in the western region we're in the process of onboarding. Several other states have also expressed interest. The PSE data collection tool is in the final stages of development and should be made available in PEARS in the next couple of weeks. As Lauren mentioned in the webinar, California will be pilot testing this tool using fiscal year 2016 data, which may result in some additional tweaks. The Mountain Plains Region states will start using the tool to enter data for the 2016–17 fiscal year. Once the new EARS template is approved, we'll also update PEARS to ensure we are collecting all the data needed to continue automating this report.