

Using NCCOR's Implementation Scorecard to Strengthen a Community-based Nutrition Program: The Feeding Forward Case Study

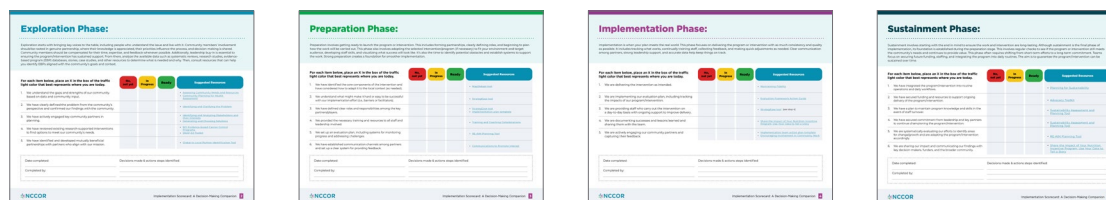
This case study demonstrates how public health practitioners can use NCCOR's Implementation Scorecard to spot strengths and blind spots as they move through the phases of implementing a new intervention or program. The scorecard is based on the Exploration, Preparation, Implementation, and Sustainment (EPIS) framework, a well-established model for identifying factors that influence implementation at each phase, making the scorecard useful guide for tailoring real-world decisions and increasing the likelihood of long-term success. To download NCCOR's Implementation Scorecard, visit www.nccor.org/nccor-tools/implementationscorecard.

Background

In 2023, Feeding Forward—a nonprofit focused on community nutrition—reviewed local public health data and held listening sessions with caregivers. They revealed a troubling rise in childhood food insecurity and access to produce, particularly on weekends and during school breaks. As a potential solution, Feeding Forward identified an existing evidence-based program using the [National Cancer Institute's Evidence-Based Cancer Control Program's database](#): the Brighter Bites in-school fresh food delivery program. While the program's core components (i.e., food deliveries over a 16-week timeframe, educational handbooks) showed strong evidence for improving children's fruit and vegetable intake, Feeding Forward found that the program's standard food lists and materials were not aligned with cultural preferences or the logistical realities of distributing food in the community. To ensure a good fit, a staff member at Feeding Forward suggested they use the NCCOR Implementation Scorecard to guide decision making, highlight readiness gaps, and access targeted resources before they initiated the program.

Community Engagement with the Implementation Scorecard

Feeding Forward convened a planning team that included caregivers, youth representatives, school staff, and local farmers and growers. This group began preparing to adapt and implement the Brighter Bites program at two pilot school sites in a mid-sized urban area. Both schools had a high proportion of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and had strong ties to local food producers.



Preview of the Implementation Scorecards

Using the EPIS Framework as their foundation and the NCCOR Implementation Scorecard as a guide, the team rated their readiness across each phase of implementation: Exploration, Preparation, Implementation, and Sustainment. Items they scored “green” on indicated strengths to build on, while items they scored “yellow” or “red” on needed targeted action.

Exploration

During the Exploration phase, the team used the Implementation Scorecard to assess their understanding of the community's needs, the clarity of the problem statement, and the strength of their engagement with community partners. Thanks to the early listening sessions they held, the team scored "green" for **item 1, understanding gaps and strengths in the community**. However, they rated themselves as "yellow" for **item 4, reviewing research-supported interventions that matched the community's cultural context and engaging key community partners**.

To address these gaps, the team used the [Community Toolbox – Assessing Community Needs and Resources](#) to help them refine the problem definition from the community's perspective. They also used the [Identifying and Analyzing Stakeholders](#) tool to broaden their circle of partners. As a result, they decided to hold two in-person weekend morning workshops (one at each school cafeteria) for the purpose of convening partners and potential program end-users. Attendees included local parents/guardians, teachers, staff, farmers, and other community members. After enjoying light refreshments, participants received an overview of the program, learned more about the local food insecurity data, and brainstormed key program components, including what an ideal food package could look like.

Participants discussed everything from the need for canned or frozen produce with a longer shelf life to including vegetables that could supplement most meals (e.g., leafy greens). This community input was critical to ensuring the new program accurately reflected the lived experiences and cultural preferences of those the program was designed to serve. After conducting the workshops and assessing all the feedback, the team was better suited to move forward with the next implementation phase, Preparation.

Exploration Phase:

Exploration starts with bringing key voices to the table, including people who understand the issue and live with it. Community members' involvement should be rooted in genuine partnership, where their knowledge is appreciated, their priorities influence the process, and decision-making is shared. Community members should be compensated for their time, expertise, and feedback whenever possible. Additionally, leadership buy-in is essential to ensuring the program/intervention has sustained support. From there, analyze the available data such as systematic reviews, research studies, evidence-based program (EBP) databases, stories, case studies, and other resources to determine what is needed and why. Then, consult resources that can help you identify EBPs aligned with the community's goals and context.

For each item below, place an X in the box of the traffic light color that best represents where you are today.

	No, not yet	In Progress	Ready	Suggested Resources
1. We understand the gaps and strengths of our community based on data and community input.			X	Assessing Community Needs and Resources Community Planning for Health Assessment
2. We have clearly defined the problem from the community's perspective and confirmed our findings with the community.			X	Identifying and Clarifying the Problem
3. We have actively engaged key community partners in planning.			X	Identifying and Analyzing Stakeholders and their Interests Generating and Choosing Solutions
4. We have reviewed existing research-supported interventions to find options to meet our community's needs.		X		NCI Evidence-based Cancer Control Programs SNAP-Ed Toolkit
5. We have identified and developed mutually beneficial partnerships with partners who align with our mission.			X	Global to Local Partner Identification Tool

Preparation

During the Preparation phase, the team used the NCCOR Implementation Scorecard to support their adaptation of the Brighter Bites program for the local community while protecting its evidence-based core. The teams scored “yellow” for **item 1, adapting to community context as needed**, and “red” for **item 5, establishing systems for monitoring progress**. To address these two gaps, they used the [Map2Adapt tool](#) to plan and document program adaptations. This tool helped them ensure any changes—such as swapping in locally sourced foods and culturally familiar recipes—were deliberate and would not impact the fidelity of the intervention. The team also used the [Re-AIM planning tool](#) to outline a process for accurately assessing and documenting the value of the program.

The team started out by testing the adapted program with a small group of families from each school who received food packages over two weeks and provided feedback about their specific experiences. A caregiver from one family said her children were excited to open the bag because they enjoyed the brightly colored foods and the recipe cards. Another family reported that heavier produce items were difficult to transport home. This test trial also uncovered logistical issues, like the need for sturdier bags that are better suited for specific produce items. The team was able to resolve these issues before the official program launch. The team acquired some good information from the actions carried out during this phase and moved on to the Implementation phase.

Preparation Phase:

Preparation involves getting ready to launch the program or intervention. This includes forming partnerships, clearly defining roles, and beginning to plan how the work will be carried out. This phase also involves adapting the selected intervention/program (if necessary) to fit your environment and target audience, developing staff skills, and visualizing what success will look like. It's also the time to identify potential obstacles and establish systems to support the work. Strong preparation creates a foundation for smoother implementation.

For each item below, place an X in the box of the traffic light color that best represents where you are today.

	No, not yet	In Progress	Ready	Suggested Resources
1. We have identified the core components of the intervention and have considered how to adapt it to the local context (as needed).		X		• Map2Adapt tool
2. We understand what might make it hard or easy to be successful with our implementation effort (i.e., barriers or facilitators).			X	• StrategEase tool
3. We have defined clear roles and responsibilities among the key partners/players.			X	• StrategEase tool • Implementation plan template
4. We provided the necessary training and resources to all staff and leadership involved.			X	• Training and Coaching Considerations
5. We set up an evaluation plan, including systems for monitoring progress and addressing challenges.	X			• RE-AIM Planning Tool
6. We have established communication channels among partners and set up a clear system for providing feedback.			X	• Communications to Promote Interest

Implementation

During the Implementation phase, the team conducted a soft launch of the adapted program at the two pilot school sites. From lessons learned in the earlier phases, team members focused on consistent delivery, staff training, product quality, and rapid feedback loops. Things were going well! However, midway through the pilot, they revisited the Implementation Scorecard and scored “yellow” for **item 4, documenting successes and lessons learned**. The evaluation they had planned wasn’t capturing the specific data they would need to attract additional partners who could provide more investment to sustain and expand the program across the community.

The [Use Your Data to Tell a Story resource](#) helped them create short, easy-to-complete surveys for families and volunteers and turn the program metrics, success stories, and numbers into compelling materials. Within weeks, they were able to create and present a one-page flyer describing some of the program’s initial impact. The flyer included pictures of smiling family members along with data describing the number of children/families served and some popular recipes. This flyer also included participant feedback about how the program decreased stress around having nutritious food at home and helped to stretch monthly grocery budgets. The team disseminated the flyer broadly, sharing this impactful information regularly at school board meetings and with local media. In turn, new donors expressed interest in supporting the program, including a well-known community foundation that committed to covering the food costs for an additional semester. The team’s newly created food program was here to stay!

Implementation Phase:

Implementation is when your plan meets the real world. This phase focuses on delivering the program or intervention with as much consistency and quality as possible. It includes tracking what works, continually training staff, collecting feedback, and making quick adjustments as needed. Clear communication among partners, strong leadership support, and accurate data help keep things on track.

For each item below, place an X in the box of the traffic light color that best represents where you are today.

	No, not yet	In Progress	Ready	Suggested Resources
1. We are delivering the intervention as intended.			X	• Maintaining Fidelity
2. We are implementing our evaluation plan, including tracking the impacts of our program/intervention.			X	• Evaluation Framework Action Guide
3. We are providing staff who carry out the intervention on a day-to-day basis with ongoing support to improve delivery.			X	• StrategEase tool (see step 4)
4. We are documenting successes and lessons learned and sharing them with the team.		X		• Share the Impact of Your Nutrition Incentive Program: Use Your Data to Tell a Story
5. We are actively engaging our community partners and capturing their feedback.			X	• Implementation team action plan template • Encouraging Involvement in Community Work

Sustainment

The momentum from the Implementation phase carried into the Sustainment phase. The new donor interest and positive media coverage created by the flyer and personal stories gave the team a stronger starting point for long-term planning. Even with these wins, they scored “yellow” for **item 2, securing stable funding**. To address this area, the team turned to the Grounded Solutions Network’s [Advocacy Toolkit](#). Using its step-by-step guidance, they identified key decision makers, crafted tailored messages, and developed talking points using the data and quotes from their various impact materials. The Feeding Forward team had taken the necessary time to develop an advocacy plan.

This advocacy plan helped school leaders, parent/guardian representatives, and other interested volunteers present at school board meetings, speak to civic groups, and meet with local business owners. As a result of these collective advocacy efforts, two local grocery chains agreed to donate produce for the program year-round. The school district also voted to formally integrate the program into its wellness policy. By year two, a school-led task force had taken ownership of the program, using the advocacy materials to sustain funding and community visibility. Feeding Forward remained engaged as a strategic advisor and technical assistance partner, stepping in to provide refresher trainings or promote new advocacy opportunities as they arose.

Sustainment Phase:

Sustainment involves starting with the end in mind to ensure the work and intervention are long-lasting. Although sustainment is the final phase of implementation, its foundation is established during the preparation stage. This involves regular checks to see if the program or intervention still meets the community's needs and continues to provide value. This phase often requires shifting from short-term efforts to a long-term commitment. Teams focus on securing future funding, staffing, and integrating the program into daily routines. The aim is to guarantee the program/intervention can be sustained over time.

For each item below, place an X in the box of the traffic light color that best represents where you are today.

	No, not yet	In Progress	Ready	Suggested Resources
1. We have integrated the program/intervention into routine operations and daily workflows.			X	• Planning for Sustainability
2. We have secured funding and resources to support ongoing delivery of the program/intervention.		X		• Advocacy Toolkit
3. We have a plan to maintain program knowledge and skills in the event of staff turnover.			X	• Sustainability Assessment and Planning Tool
4. We have secured commitment from leadership and key partners to continue championing the program/intervention.			X	• Sustainability Assessment and Planning Tool
5. We are systematically evaluating our efforts to identify areas for change/growth and are adapting the program/intervention accordingly.			X	• RE-AIM Planning Tool
6. We are sharing our impact and communicating our findings with key decision-makers, funders, and the broader community.		X		• Share the Impact of Your Nutrition Incentive Program: Use Your Data to Tell a Story

Applying Recommended Resources

The Feeding Forward Team used the Implementation Scorecard to guide the development and growth of their nutrition-related community program by intentionally working through each phase of implementation.



In Exploration, the [Community Toolbox resources](#) helped deepen their community engagement efforts and ensure that the program design reflected the voices within their community, as well as local food preferences and other realities.



In Preparation, the [Map2Adapt tool](#) helped the team make their specific program adaptations intentional and measurable, while the [RE-AIM Planning tool](#) guided early testing with local families to build excitement and trust.



In Implementation, the [Use Your Data to Tell a Story](#) resource helped transform their evaluation approach, turning data into a compelling one-pager that ultimately unlocked new donor commitments and enhanced community-level support.



In Sustainment, the [Advocacy Toolkit](#) gave school district leaders, staff, and parents/guardians a structured way to translate their impact stories into year-round food donations and long-term integration of the program into school operations.

Sustaining Impact with the Implementation Scorecard

The NCCOR Implementation Scorecard proved to be more than a checklist. It became a shared decision-making guide that helped the Feeding Forward team ensure the program was strategic, community-centered, and action-oriented. By linking readiness ratings to practical, phase-specific resources, the scorecard helped the team advance efficiently through the four phases, and build the capacity for strong partnerships, impactful data, and continuous advocacy – all of which are needed for sustained impact.

Use NCCOR's Implementation Scorecard to support your childhood obesity prevention, nutrition, or physical activity program.

To download the scorecard, visit www.nccor.org/nccor-tools/implementationscorecard.