

# Strategies to Improve Access to Healthy Foods & Places to Be Active



# Introduction

There are many evidence-based policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change approaches to improving access to healthy foods and safe places to be physically active. The strategies listed in this guide are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather are intended to help community coalitions generate ideas and identify strategies that may fit within their community's needs, interests, and budget. Each strategy includes suggestions on how coalitions might support the work—with or without funding.

For more information, tools, or assistance in implementing these strategies, contact Kelsey Allen at [kelsey@eatsmartmovemore.org](mailto:kelsey@eatsmartmovemore.org) or 734-255-2910.



## Community-Based Strategies

### Open Community Use

Work with school districts to adopt Open Community Use policies and ensure implementation in each school.

#### Without Funding

With permission from the district/schools, promote the policy and open facilities through LetsGoSC.org, social media, and traditional media outlets. Provide sample language for schools to include in parent newsletters. Host a volunteer clean-up day at a local school to beautify the outdoor facilities. Ask a local business to donate refreshments for the volunteers.

#### With Funding

Promote the Open Community Use policy by providing signage for local schools listing the facilities hours of use, rules, etc. Work with the district and/or local schools to determine if additional equipment or resources are needed (e.g., trash cans, benches, landscaping, upgraded playground equipment, etc.).



*Open Community Use at Laurens Middle School in Laurens, SC.*

### Complete Streets

Work with city or county officials to adopt and implement a comprehensive Complete Streets policy through a city ordinance, resolution, agency policy, plan, or design guide.

#### Without Funding

Maintain communication with decision makers throughout the process of policy adoption and implementation. Share success stories of the economic, health, and social benefits of investing in complete streets. Become aware of existing local and SCDOT plans for road improvements, and advocate for complete streets elements (e.g., bike lanes, cross walks, etc.) to be incorporated into those projects. Often this can be done with little added cost to SCDOT.

#### With Funding

If you are having trouble generating support for the policy, consider investing in a small “demonstration” project (downtown connectivity project, short trail extension, etc.) that raises awareness and generates excitement about complete streets. Funding may also be used to support a bike or pedestrian plan in a key location in your city or county. In addition, funding may be needed for signage (wayfinding, bike boulevards, share the road, etc.), curb cuts, truncated domes, cross walks, bike lanes, etc.

## Comprehensive Planning

Work with city or county planners to ensure healthy eating and active living policies, goals, and action steps are included in city or county comprehensive plans.

### Without Funding

Meet with local planners and planning commission members to share healthy eating, active living priorities that may be included in the plan. Use the Health + Planning toolkit as a guide.

### With Funding

Upon inclusion of healthy eating, active living priorities in the county comprehensive plan, offer to support implementation by providing funding for one or more of the objectives.

## Active Community Environments

Work with city and county officials (elected officials, parks and rec staff, planners, etc.) to develop new—or improve existing—bike, pedestrian, and recreation projects, including bike lanes, sidewalks, trails/greenways, parks, and playgrounds.

### Without Funding

Use walkability and/or bikeability assessments, park audits, and other tools to assess the conditions of current infrastructure and to make recommendations for improvements. Host a volunteer clean-up day at a local school, park, or trail to beautify the outdoor facilities. Ask a local business to donate refreshments for the volunteers.

### With Funding

Provide funding for beautification efforts at existing facilities or to support new projects. Funds could support landscaping, trash cans, signage, lighting, benches, paint, new playground equipment, bike lanes, bike racks, curb cuts, etc.



*Bike rack in downtown Spartanburg, SC.*

## Bike & Pedestrian Planning

Work with city and county officials to establish and implement bike and pedestrian plans, including bike routes, sidewalks, trails/greenways, parks, etc.

### Without Funding

If applicable, advocate for implementation of existing bike/ped plans. If a plan doesn't already exist, consider conducting walkability and/or bikeability assessments in key areas to assess the conditions of current infrastructure and to make recommendations for improvements. Become aware of existing local and SCDOT plans for road improvements, and advocate for bike and pedestrian elements (e.g., bike lanes, cross walks, sidewalks, etc.) to be incorporated into those projects.

### With Funding

Provide funds to contract with a planning, design, and/or engineering firm to establish a bike and/or pedestrian plan. If a plan already exists, provide funding for implementation of one or more recommendations in the plan. Needs may include signage (wayfinding, bike boulevards, share the road, etc.), curb cuts, truncated domes, cross walks, bike lanes, lighting, etc.



*SNAP vendor at Soda City Market in Columbia, SC.*

## Farmers' Markets

Work with farmers, farmers' markets, and farm stands to accept SNAP/EBT, WIC vouchers, Senior vouchers, and Healthy Bucks [the SC Healthy Bucks program allows SNAP recipients to double the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables (up to \$10) purchased with their EBT cards].

### Without Funding

If the market or farmers are unable to cover the equipment costs, there are several opportunities for SNAP/EBT equipment to be provided at little or no cost. Once the market/farmers are equipped, promote the market through social media, partner websites/newsletters, school communications, and through other organizations that serve SNAP/WIC/Senior Voucher recipients (e.g., Housing Authority, Council on Aging, WIC clinics, etc.). Consider conducting a walkability/bikeability assessment near the farmers market to provide recommendations to the city/county on how to make the market more accessible by bike or foot.

### With Funding

Cover the cost of SNAP/EBT equipment if needed. Provide marketing materials like tote bags, hand fans, flyers, or water bottles that promote the market hours and SNAP/EBT/Healthy Bucks. Consider covering the cost of one or more of the recommendations issued by the walkability/bikeability assessment mentioned above.

## Community Gardens

Support the development and sustainability of community or school gardens.

### Without Funding

Support existing gardens by partnering with local Master Gardeners, Clemson Extension agents, or local volunteers who may be willing to provide technical assistance to community gardens. Consider approaching local hardware or gardening stores about donating seeds or gardening equipment. Host a donation drive to encourage community members to donate seeds, seedlings, or gently used gardening equipment to local community gardens.

### With Funding

Provide funds to build new or renovate existing community gardens. Consider locations that have garden champions as well as organizational policies designed to help maintain and ensure the sustainability of the garden. Also consider garden locations in areas of highest need in the community.

## Healthier Food Choices in Public Places

Work with government agencies to develop, adopt, and implement healthy food and beverage purchasing policies and standards, including for government buildings, public parks, and special events.

### Without Funding

There are many free resources available to support development of a healthy food/beverage purchasing policy. Meet with city/county staff and elected officials to generate support for the policy. Once passed, raise awareness through staff listservs, organizational newsletters and websites, and social/traditional media.

### With Funding

Partner with local vendors and/or caterers to host healthy taste test events to gain support for the policy and allow employees and the public to sample healthy items. Provide marketing materials for vending machines to help users identify the healthy options.



*Healthy food options at the SC Court of Appeals building in Columbia, SC.*

## Healthy Retail

Work with local retailers to establish healthy checkout aisles.

### Without Funding

There are many free resources available to support development of healthy checkout aisles. Meet with local store owners to generate support for healthy checkout. Once established, raise awareness through staff listservs, organizational newsletters and websites, and social/traditional media.

### With Funding

Provide marketing materials to promote the healthy checkout aisles (e.g., tote bags, flyers, signage, etc.).

## Healthy Food Financing

Partner with local business leaders and state partners on initiatives to finance the construction and renovation of retail and wholesale outlets to increase access to grocery stores, corner stores, farmers' markets, food hubs, and mobile markets selling healthy food, in underserved communities.

### Without Funding

Partner with the SC Community Loan Fund to determine eligibility for low-interest loans. Provide educational materials and model policies to local elected officials and/or developers.

### With Funding

Since coalition funds often aren't large enough or eligible to finance major construction costs, funding may be used to support supplemental costs like planning/design, landscaping, signage, bike racks, etc. Coalition funding may also be leveraged as a match in new grant applications.

## Healthy Corner Stores

Work with small food retailers in underserved areas to carry healthier, affordable food items.

### Without Funding

There are many free resources available to support development of a healthy corner store initiative. Meet with local store owners, farmers, and other potential distributors to generate support. Once established, raise awareness through organizational newsletters and websites and social/traditional media.

### With Funding

Provide marketing materials to promote the healthier items (e.g., tote bags, flyers, signage, point-of-purchase prompts, etc.). Host healthy taste test events to allow shoppers to sample healthy items.

## Healthy Faith-Based Initiatives

Work with the faith-based community to adopt and implement comprehensive healthy eating, active living policies, as well as policies that promote and support families' decisions to breastfeed their children.

### Without Funding

Provide technical assistance and education to local faith-based organizations on healthy eating, active living, and breastfeeding policies.

### With Funding

Provide signage that demonstrates support of breastfeeding mothers as well as materials that may be needed to create a breastfeeding friendly space (Boppy pillow, nursing cover, door hangers, etc.). Provide funding to train church leaders in healthy eating and active living policies and/or programs such as Walk with Ease and Better Choices Better Health.

## Worksite Wellness

Work with local businesses to adopt comprehensive worksite wellness policies or consider participating in the SC Working Well program. Policies should address 1) healthy meetings and events; 2) nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold in onsite vending machines or cafeterias; 3) a "no food dumping" policy to dissuade staff from bringing in leftover birthday cake, candy, and other unhealthy foods; 4) physical activity opportunities during the workday.

### Without Funding

There are many free resources available to support development of worksite wellness policies. Once established, raise awareness through staff listservs, organizational newsletters and websites, and social/traditional media. Consider creating a healthy competition by developing a contest to see which municipality (for example) can get the most organizations to adopt a wellness policy.

### With Funding

Cover the cost for organizations to adopt the Working Well program. Provide prizes or incentives for organizations that adopt a policy. Provide marketing materials to promote the new policy (e.g., tote bags, flyers, signage, etc.). Host healthy taste test events to allow employees to sample healthy items.



## School-Based Strategies

### **FitnessGram**

Encourage your local school districts to participate in the statewide implementation of FitnessGram (if they aren't already).

#### **Without Funding**

Educate district officials about the importance of tracking student fitness and BMI data.

#### **With Funding**

Support school PE programs with equipment or other needs. Provide healthy celebration opportunities to promote schools that are participating.

### **Alliance for a Healthier Generation**

Encourage your local school districts to join the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's (AHG) Healthy Schools Program.

#### **Without Funding**

Complete school assessment and implement no cost PSE changes as recommended by AHG. Use AHG online trainings, communication tools, and other resources to increase school community support for, and engagement in, your work.

#### **With Funding**

Support implementation of PSE action items identified from the AHG assessment results and action plan development. Provide healthy celebration opportunities to promote schools that are participating and have implemented changes.

### **Safe Routes to School**

Partner with SC Safe Routes to School, Department of Transportation officials, and other community members to assess and improve walking and biking conditions around schools.

#### **Without Funding**

Complete safety and walkability assessment and present results to leadership, parents, and community members.

#### **With Funding**

Support schools with signage and changes to the built environment as recommended by safety and walkability assessment. Promote and celebrate schools that participate in Safe Routes to School partnership.



*Safe Routes to School initiative in Barnwell County, SC.*

## Farm to Institution

Advocate for and support Farm-to-School and/or Farm-to-Preschool programs in community schools and child care centers.

### Without Funding

Provide education and input from your coalition to encourage participation of schools and preschools in Farm to Institution.

### With Funding

Through conversation with schools and preschools, identify and address needs related to Farm-to-Institution implementation. Promote and celebrate participation in Farm to Institution.

## Healthy Out of School Time

Work with out-of-school time providers (including afterschool programs, summer camps, etc.) to implement the National AfterSchool Association's healthy eating and physical activity standards.

### Without Funding

Provide educational materials, model policies, and input from your coalition to encourage adoption of best-practice guidelines.

### With Funding

Through conversation with out-of-school-time providers, identify and address needs related to physical activity and nutrition. Promote and celebrate adoption of National AfterSchool Association's standards.



## Other Strategies

### Youth Engagement

Youth can be powerful voices for community change. Engaging youth in your coalition's PSE change efforts may help further advance your goals as well as empower the next generation of healthy eating, active living advocates. With each strategy your coalition pursues, consider how you might effectively engage youth in your efforts.

### Without Funding

Partner with local youth-serving organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy/Girl Scouts, school clubs, church youth groups, etc.) to identify similar interests and opportunities for collaboration.

### With Funding

Create a local Healthy Young People Empowerment (HYPE) Team. Contact ESMMS staff to get started.



*Park assessment in Denmark conducted by the Denmark County HYPE Team.*

### Support & Awareness Campaigns

With each PSE strategy that a coalition pursues, it's important to build awareness and support in the community through marketing and communications. Using the technical assistance available through ESMMS, coalitions should promote the PSE changes they are working on as a means to build credibility and raise awareness of healthy eating and active living efforts in their communities. Some examples of this include campaigns such as Let's Go to the Farmers Market, Let's Go for a Walk, and Let's Go H2O.

### Without Funding

Share information through social media campaigns, coalition website, ESMMS, local newspapers and radio, and LetsGoSC.org blogs. Approach local businesses about sponsoring printed materials.

### With Funding

Provide marketing materials (e.g., totes, water bottles, banners, posters, brochures, flyers, etc), paid social media ads, and/or promoted posts.



*Example of social media post promoting the LetsGoSC.org directory.*