



Healthy Families Produce Rx Program Project Micro Report: Community Feedback

Introduction

HFPRx is an innovative food access program, funded by the USDA's Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Grant Program (GusNIP). The program provides eligible families with \$40 per month to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at select local farmers markets and grocery retailers with the goal of improving food security for families in rural Louisiana who are disproportionately impacted by poor nutrition and related health outcomes.

Project Goal

Gather feedback to understand the participant experience, facilitators and barriers for program participation.

Design Challenge: How do we increase voucher redemption and improve the participant experience?

Objectives:

- Gather feedback from Produce Rx program users related to support needs in redeeming vouchers, improving participant experience
- Brainstorm possible solutions and/or co-create solutions

Session Details:

- 2 sessions with unique user groups; barriers vs no barriers
 - Session 1: (90 min) gather feedback/reactions, confirm understanding and brainstorm ideas
 - Session 2: (60 min) confirm understanding, continue to brainstorm and react to ideas
 - Future engagements: feedback gathering after ideas have been implemented
- 14-16 participants
- Compensate all participants with Visa gift card at \$100 per hour
- All focus groups facilitated in English, no other languages required
- Virtual via Zoom

Methods:

- Desk research
- Primary research methods: survey, facilitated conversations with current and previous HFPRx participants via open and targeted recruitment

- Group discussion to ground in our understanding of participant experience around the program and evaluate the effectiveness of program implementation processes - enrollment, redemption, utilization.
- Brainstorming sessions to generate ideas
- Synthesis of findings from survey and eight group interviews.
- Findings compiled as insights and opportunity areas and reviewed with participants to validate findings and confirm understanding.

Insights

Participants strongly value the Healthy Families Produce Rx program and the impact it has on the health and wellness of the family

- Participants made it clear that the produce voucher was helpful, appreciated and impactful
- Some participants tried new things as a result of receiving the voucher, like juicing, using fresh vegetables over frozen
- The voucher helped participants get the essentials they needed and supported diet changes across the family, and increased family engagement in the shopping, meal selection and preparation process
- There was a strong perception that “healthy food is expensive” and participants generally expressed excitement and gratitude around the opportunity to use the program

Many participants learned about the program through community or event spaces, trusted community members or through social media

- Community spaces like their children’s school, the doctor’s office, and food banks were seen as reputable, trusted sources of information for the program
 - Participants elevated the value of integrating program promotion within trusted community spaces (school via school-based health care centers, community WIC offices, etc.) that were at times perceived as more trustworthy than medical professionals
- Participants highlighted the strength of word of mouth to increase knowledge and awareness of the program and have a strong desire to share the opportunity with others, as many did so, or learned about it through family, friends, coworkers
 - Participants spoke about increased advertisement of the program, especially in spaces where children are accessible (school, library), and recommended developing shareable materials for participants to utilize
- Some participants were hesitant to apply and highlighted the advantage of having a trusted person (community member, health care professional, program expert) available to encourage application and answer questions
 - Some needed additional information, were unfamiliar with program, perceived it may be a scam or “too good to be true” and shared personal experiences with the stigma around applying for assistance programs

Participants perceive their health plan, pediatrician and related medical staff as trustworthy and would still be likely to apply if they promoted the program

- Participants noted a difference in perception between doctors and pediatricians, and viewed pediatricians as more trustworthy
- Participants would trust and be inclined to apply for the program if promoted through their health plan, their pediatrician, and/or other medical staff in the office (medical assistants, front desk staff, etc.)
- Participants would be receptive to in-office marketing (flyer/signage) but consistently perceived in-office doctor's visits as too quick or infrequent and recommended program promotion via text, email, mail and newsletter
 - Participants recommended integrating program promotion into existing internal messaging systems (MyChart), or other eligibility screening tools (one participant shared about her experience with filling out a screening survey from her health plan and receiving a text the next day with a list of qualifying programs relevant to her needs)
- Participants felt the program would have increased credibility if pediatrician has first-hand experience with/knowledge of program ex: utilized by other patients

Participants felt the application process was simple and easy, once they decided to apply

- Most all participants believed the application process was simple, easy and straightforward, and elevated the value of the QR code application option
- Participants appreciated that the application didn't require a lot of information, particularly income
- Participants recommended adding additional info at the end of the application with next steps, send text or email after applying to acknowledge receipt

Participants stated the welcome packet received after applying had adequate information and was easy to understand, but in conversation, identified knowledge gaps or program enhancements

- Participants felt the receiving the welcome packet within two weeks of application was a quick turnaround time, however they were unsure and unaware of their application status between applying and approval
 - Participants recommended adding additional information at the end of the application and/or after acknowledging receipt and detailed next steps
- The welcome packet was perceived as comprehensive, with easy to understand next steps, however in every group, participants shared that they were initially unsure about how to use the card at the register and cashiers were not familiar with the program and how to use the card
 - Participants highlighted that the stigma against assistance programs and shared that the lack of program visibility and understanding at the food retailer was embarrassing and demoralizing
 - When asked how we might work with participants, to increase comfort with and knowledge of redemption, participants emphasized the importance of having clear and concise instructions on how to use the card, whether it be via text, email, or video.

- Participants also offered suggestions to incorporate into employee sensitivity training (as they do with SNAP), educate cashiers - supportive resources like flyers, instructional meeting, facilitate conversation between program and food retailers to increase knowledge and awareness of program
- The tips and recipes provided in the welcome packet were seen as valuable resources
 - Generally, most participants were comfortable with eating fruits and vegetables, but there was a desire for additional FSE, including:
 - recipes, especially kid friendly ones (smoothies),
 - tips around different methods for cooking vegetables
 - diet specific recipes, like diabetes
 - tips around stretching your dollar/saving money at the store
- Some participants also shared they were unaware they would be taxed on certain items and were required to pay out of pocket are shared this was a pain point of the user experience

Utilizing and redeeming the vouchers at the store was an overall positive experience, but in conversation, participants identified key barriers to program utilization

- Once beyond the initial engagement points, participants perceived the ease of use at the register as a key facilitator to program participation
 - The redemption experience at the register was seen as comfortable and private
 - Participants shared that even their children were able to redeem the vouchers at checkout, when needed
 - Participants highly valued the increased access to produce that is restricted through other assistance programs, like WIC
 - Participants liked that they could get pre-cut, premade produce (bagged salads, pre-cut fruit)
- Aside from the pain points experienced during the first few instances of redeeming the voucher, some participants shared they also experienced issues redeeming that led to loss of funds. Participants shared they would like to:
 - easily understand and check the balance of the card (via receipt, app, over the phone in addition to website)
 - receive reminders to use funds before the end of the month. Some participants were too busy and missed opportunities to redeem because they forgot about the benefit
 - have clarity about out of pocket expenses up front

Both paper and card users with high and low redemption rates alike perceived the lack of food retailer options as the most significant pain point and barrier to redemption

- Participants shared they struggled with accessing the program due to the limited food retailer options and underscored the following issues:
 - Lack of variety, quality produce at store/farmer's market (wilted, rotting produce)
 - food retailer was sold out of produce desired
 - Extremely limited store hours and food retailer options (particularly paper voucher users)

- Participants highlighted the desire to go to grocery stores that they already frequent and are closer to home
- Participants recommended food retailer alternatives, like Rouses, Winn Dixie and Dollar General to expand access to produce

Paper voucher users struggled with limited food retailer options and poor produce quality, and would have preferred to use a card instead but liked getting all of their paper vouchers up front

Participants underscored that the program increased the ability to include other family members in the shopping, cooking and meal preparation process

- Son made pesto! Daughter selected carrots as a snack! Participants both highlighted the challenges with getting kids to eat vegetables, but perceived the program as a facilitator for increased fruit and vegetable consumption

Participants identified the following program enhancements:

- ability to roll over funds month to month
- ability to order produce online/participate in curbside pick up (recommendation from card user with 30% redemption rate)
- desire for program expansion
 - continuing program beyond 6 months
 - expanding items included (staples like milk, bread, eggs, cheese, convenience items like meal replacement supplements, protein packs)
- market as strong WIC supplemental program
- highlight that participants can use double bucks, coupons to maximize their funds
- ability to utilize app (one user had a strong desire to use the app to check balance, review instructions, etc. and shared the app is not currently functioning)
- every group shared the limitations around the programs allotment of one card per household, but was unsure about how to better distribute funding aside from allocating funds per child rather than household

Participants perceived the communication methods used favorable, but identified a variety of methods through which they'd like to be communicated with that account for different learning styles and preferences

- Participants made recommendations for advertising and program related resources, stating they highly value visuals, less text, step by step instructions, and easy to read, one-pagers
- Participants shared that receiving information through paper (via mail), text and email were all preferred
 - Participants elevated the importance of having something to return to and review, explore the possibility of creating instructional videos for participants to review asynchronously

Opportunity Areas

Program Integration

Continue integrating program promotion into existing trusted community spaces, particularly within school-based health centers, WIC centers, etc.

Explore ways to promote program and enroll participants outside of quick, infrequent well-child visits

Broader Awareness of HFPRx

Consider nuances of relationship development with stakeholders, including both food retailer and participants

Improve awareness of and fluency in program participation and administration with dynamic, inclusive educational materials

Food Retailer Partnership Expansion

Prioritize critically important element of developing strong partnerships with a wide variety and range of food retailers

Learner Centered Resource Development

Create program materials/resources and training tools with clear, accurate information with more dynamic, inclusive design considerations (video, in-person, auditory, etc)

Resources

[Powerpoint](#)

[Facilitation and Synthesis Resources:](#)

- [Interview Methods](#)
- [Group Interview](#)
- [Synthesis Directions](#)

[Miro board](#)

[Focus Group Notes and Synthesis](#)