

Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Success Story



Access to Healthy Food Events Uplifting Marginalized Communities

Background

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) partnered with Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement (APIFM) to increase access to healthy food by implementing expanded/mobile produce distributions in schools, parks and other community-based settings. APIFM is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to cultivate healthy, long-lasting, and vibrant Asian and Pacific Islander communities through community-centered engagement and education. They work on healthy food access and education, environmental justice, active living and transportation, and culture/community health throughout Los Angeles County. Los Angeles State Historic Park (LASHP) is a state park located near the border of Chinatown and Lincoln Heights in Los Angeles, managed by Los Angeles River State Park Partners (LARSPP) and California State Parks. Between October 2021 to September 2022, APIFM hosted 12 access to healthy food events there serving primarily low-income, first-generation Chinese older adults. Successful outreach is due to the coordination of APIFM staff, LASHP, and community champions such as community interpreters and active attendees. Thanks to multiple partnerships, APIFM hosted meaningful events for the attendees and serviced 100 to 160 families per event. In addition to the contributions of park staff support and community champions, APIFM has received engagement and physical support from the Teen Council and Librarian Lynn Nguyen of the Chinatown Branch Library, Endeavor Productions (a media company), Sweetgreen (restaurant chain), various university students (UCLA, Pepperdine, Claremont, and Loyola Marymount), and APIFM sustainers. Furthermore, the new partnership with another CalFresh Healthy Living (CFHL)-funded partner, Active SGV, to host physical activity classes and food demonstrations before the access to healthy food events positively impacted the attendees' experience.

Body

THE NEED: Challenge

There is a need to increase access to affordable fruits and vegetables in the Chinatown community for low-income older adults. To address this need, APIFM conducted an open and physical survey.

THE WORK: Solution



APIFM surveyed 15% of the 85 attendees to address this need. The survey consisted of 4 questions/statements printed on a large poster board. Participants used stickers to add to the answer options to indicate which answer statement relates to them. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Although the printed questions were in Chinese, some participants were illiterate. In addition, most of the participants were not familiar with engaging questionnaires. To combat this challenge, available interpreters who spoke English, Cantonese, Toisan, and Mandarin, assisted in interpreting the questions/statements and collecting participant responses. CFHL funding supported funding the interpreters' time, Chinese survey translation, and purchasing the large-sized print and poster board. The

evidence-based approach was a quantitative method to address the need to increase access to affordable produce. The reason to use this approach is that it is a much quicker method to collect the data than if it was a qualitative approach (like in a focus group setting). With limited staff capacity, surveying all 85 to 100 attendees would be time-consuming. The questionnaire had to be done in one event setting because participants have stated in the past, with other surveys, that sometimes they don't remember if they participated in a survey. The survey research includes structured questions to understand the trends and attitudes of the target audience.

THE IMPACT: Results

Participation number was low due to many factors: 1) not enough time to survey all the participants, 2) even with four questions, they were time-consuming due to the time length of interpreting the questions and answers, 3) there were no rewards or incentives to motivate participants to answer the questions, and 4) not all attendees were present at the time. The following presents APIFM's findings:

In the first question, "Does your household use EBT?", 85% of those surveyed indicated "yes." Next, in "Since the start of the pandemic, it has been harder to access affordable produce.", 92% indicated "yes." The third statement, "The monthly produce bags I

receive from this distribution are enough for my household.”, 54% specified “tremendously helped,” 46% “somewhat,” 0% “not helped,” and 0% “this is my first distribution.” Lastly, with the fourth statement, participants chose multiple answer options. It said, “I come to this site to...” 100% indicated “pick up free produce,” 85% “exercise,” 92% “hang out with friends,” 8% “harvest plants,” 70% “attend classes,” 100% “relax,” and 15% “volunteer.”

The assessment results indicated that most participants are low-income and rely on EBT to obtain food. Obtaining the once-a-month free produce bags from the access to healthy food events in their neighborhood has either somewhat or tremendously helped. All the participants surveyed attended the distributions to receive the bags and relax. The findings have also shown that hosting these distributions has expanded other opportunities for the participants. The events are a space for the community to enjoy exercising, socializing, and partaking in other park activities.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS:



APIFM staff was limited in providing additional events outside of the monthly schedule. As a solution, APIFM, with the help from Cedars-Sinai funding, conducted outreach to local Chinatown grocery stores and partnered with KFT Grocery Store and BH Mart (two of a few Chinatown grocery stores that sell culturally relevant produce and accept EBT) to encourage attendees to become customers of the two stores through conversations and food circular ads. In addition, APIFM’s Food Roots program leveraged the Cedars-Sinai funding, and supplied 100lbs of organic produce for each store to diversify their produce offerings to the community. Since the beginning of September 2022, the two stores shared that a few of their new customers learned about their store from the APIFM-designed food circular ads provided during the CalFresh Healthy Living

access to healthy food events at LA State Historic Park. APIFM plans to market the two stores more so the distribution attendees can also rely on these stores for produce in the future.

Favorite Quote

“The EBT amount I receive every month is not enough to feed me and my family. These produce distributions help me a lot.” - *A regular attendee*

Funding

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material. These institutions are equal opportunity providers and employers. For important nutrition information, visit www.CalFreshHealthyLiving.org.