

**Using Community Circles to Engage North Carolina Communities in Conversations about
Poverty, Racism, and Food Insecurity.**
A SNAP-Ed Program Plan

by

April D. Aviles

A paper presented to the faculty of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Public Health in the Department of Maternal and Child
Health. Chapel Hill, N.C.
April 11, 2017

Approved by:

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Needs Assessment.....	3
Needs Assessment Methodology	3
Needs Assessment Findings	3
<i>Demographic Characteristics of SNAP-Ed Target Audience.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Diet-Related Health Statistics on Target Population</i>	<i>6</i>
Description of Project.....	9
Objectives and Goals	9
Audience	9
Project Description	10
<i>Program Activities</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Timeline</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Location</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Facilitation.....</i>	<i>15</i>
Evidence Base.....	15
Policy, Systems, and Environmental Changes	20
Use of Existing Education Materials.....	20
Evaluation Plan	21
Type	21
Approach, Data Collection, and Analysis.....	22
Key Performance Measures/Indicators.....	23
Use of SNAP-ED Evaluation Framework	24
Coordination Efforts.....	25
Staffing.....	26
Budget Information	26
Budget Summary	26
Budget Justification.....	27
Conclusion	28
References.....	30

Abstract

In order to develop a network of engaged community members to increase food security in their communities, discussion must be initiated within the community about poverty, racism, and food insecurity. Dialogue-to-change programs can assist people from a variety of backgrounds with examining the gaps among racial and ethnic groups where they live, exploring approaches to creating greater equity, and creating lasting change in their community. The mission of the Community Circles Program is to mitigate the effects of poverty and racism on food security by understanding a community as a system and the role residents can play in enhancing a healthy environment, economic security, and social inclusion. Community Circles serve a social capital bridging function by offering individuals a way to see the full context of their community and visualize themselves as interconnected members of that larger community. Community Circles will consist of a diverse group of 8-12 SNAP-eligible residents in Orange, Warren, Lenoir, Rockingham, Sampson and Duplin counties. Groups will meet together for five, two-hour sessions to discuss the impact of poverty, racism, and food insecurity and the various actions they could take to solve these problems in their community. In the final session, participants decide on Action Ideas that best fit their community. The program's goal is to mitigate the effects of poverty and racism on food insecurity by providing SNAP-eligible residents the opportunity to discuss important community issues, build social capital, and develop sustainable solutions that enhance long-term food access, economic security, and social inclusion in their community.

Needs Assessment

Needs Assessment Methodology

This needs assessment utilized existing demographic, economic, and health-related data from the US Census American Community Survey, Feeding America Map the Meal Gap, and County Health Rankings. Sources of data include obesity and food insecurity rates, poverty and unemployment rates, racial/ethnic differences, and educational attainment data. All data sources are less than five years old and reflect the most current county-level statistics.

Needs Assessment Findings

Demographic Characteristics of SNAP-Ed Target Audience

This SNAP-Ed program will serve SNAP-eligible residents living in six counties in North Carolina: Orange, Warren, Lenoir, Rockingham, Sampson and Duplin counties. The locations of all six counties vary, with Orange County located in Central North Carolina, Warren and Rockingham located in the Northern region, and Lenoir, Sampson, and Duplin located in the Southeastern region of North Carolina. The racial/ethnic background for each county differs (Table 1). For example, Warren and Lenoir counties have the highest population of Black residents. Warren and Sampson counties also have the highest population of American Indian/Alaskan Native. Warren is home to the Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe and Sampson County is home to the Coharie Indian Tribe. Sampson and Duplin have the highest Latino populations.

Table 1: Race/Ethnicity for Orange, Warren, Lenoir, Rockingham, Sampson and Duplin counties

County	2015 Race/Ethnicity by County (%)						
	White	Black	Latino	Asian	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	Two or More Races
Orange	75.0	11.7	8.3	7.3	0.4	0.0	3.0
Warren	39.3	50.9	3.8	0.3	4.6	0.0	3.2
Lenoir	55.2	40.2	7.1	0.6	0.3	0.0	2.0
Rockingham	75.5	18.4	5.9	0.5	0.5	0.1	2.3

Sampson	61.2	25.7	17.9	0.4	1.6	0.0	2.6
Duplin	61.9	25.0	21.2	0.5	0.3	0.0	1.3

Source: US Census, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015)

One of the key aspects of promoting healthy eating and active living is acknowledging the importance of economic and racial equity determinants in a community. Poverty is a complex problem in which diverse factors interact with one another to shape and reshape the nature of the challenge. Poverty in the United States is one of many factors associated with food insecurity. When income is constrained or limited, households may be forced to make difficult decisions about how to adequately secure food, resulting in a less-than-adequate supply of food. Among those living below the poverty line nationally, communities of color make up the majority, with Native Americans holding the highest poverty rate at 29.5% (Elsheikh and Barhoum, 2013). In North Carolina, while the poverty rate has fluctuated with the state of the economy, there has been no underlying decrease in poverty for six years in four of the six SNAP-Ed counties (Table 2). Five of the six SNAP-Ed counties had a poverty rate in 2015 that was higher than both the national average (13.5%) and the state average (16.4%). According to the US Census (2015), Lenoir County has the highest percentage of SNAP users at 26%, followed by Sampson, Duplin, and Warren counties (21.6%, 21.1%, and 20.8%, respectively). Rockingham had the second lowest percent of SNAP users with 17.4% and Orange County has the lowest with 8.2% (US Census, 2015).

Table 2: Poverty rate for Orange, Warren, Lenoir, Rockingham, Sampson and Duplin counties

County	Poverty Rate (%)						6-year Change in Poverty Rate
	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	
Orange	15.8	16.8	17.8	17.4	16.9	16.3	-0.5%
Warren	24.1	24.8	26.2	24.4	27.1	27.0	-2.9%
Lenoir	23.2	23.7	23.7	24.9	24.4	22.7	+0.5%
Rockingham	18.7	18.8	17.9	17.2	15.8	15.6	+3.1%
Sampson	25.5	24.7	22.8	21.3	21.0	20.4	+5.1%

Duplin	26.7	26.9	26.3	24.4	22.7	23.7	+3.0%
--------	------	------	------	------	------	------	-------

Source: US Census, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2010-2015)

Although progress has been made in North Carolina around racial inequities, potent challenges still remain. Structural racism refers to the accumulation and incorporation of long-standing racialized practices into all of our social and economic structures. Over time, these structures perpetuate and produce cumulative, durable, race-based inequalities (Smedley, 2012). For example, income inequality is a widespread issue in North Carolina. Table 3 shows the unadjusted (crude) poverty rates by race in the six SNAP-Ed counties. In 2015, Black and Latino residents in all six counties had higher poverty rates than White residents. The poverty rate for American Indian/Alaskan Natives was higher than Whites in five of the six counties. Poverty rates for Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander varied across counties but each one still expressed some level of income inequality in at least one or more counties. Similar race-based inequalities can be seen in both the unemployment rates (Table 4) and educational attainment rates (Table 5) of all six counties. In most cases, communities of color continue to face higher unemployment rates and lower educational attainment rates than their White counterparts.

Table 3: Unadjusted Poverty Rate by Race/Ethnicity for Orange, Warren, Lenoir, Rockingham, Sampson and Duplin counties

County	2015 Poverty Rate (%) by Race					
	White	Black	Latino	Asian	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
Orange	12.4	26.9	28.9	11.8	25.8	41.9
Warren	13.1	29.8	33.5	11.5	39.3	0.0
Lenoir	11.8	33.2	54.3	0.0	13.1	100.0
Rockingham	14.5	29.3	31.7	45.9	19.6	0.0
Sampson	15.3	32.4	45.2	4.5	19.9	100.0
Duplin	14.8	32.9	48.0	13.3	0.0	0.0

Source: US Census, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015)

Table 4: Unemployment Rate by Race/Ethnicity for Orange, Warren, Lenoir, Rockingham, Sampson and Duplin counties

County	2015 Unemployment Rate (%) by Race						
	White	Black	Latino	Asian	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	Two or More Races
Orange	5.6	10.4	7.4	4.0	12.9	0.0	19.3
Warren	7.7	12.4	23.9	41.5	15.9	N/A	26.2
Lenoir	9.9	17.6	10.2	20.2	11.2	N/A	17.2
Rockingham	9.4	16.2	6.6	1.9	11.1	0.0	7.8
Sampson	6.0	18.4	11.6	12.5	0.0	63.6	28.2
Duplin	8.9	15.4	14.6	0.0	37.0	N/A	18.7

Source: US Census, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015)

Table 5: Educational Attainment by Race/Ethnicity for Orange, Warren, Lenoir, Rockingham, Sampson and Duplin counties

County	2015 Educational Attainment (High School Graduate or Higher) by Race (%)						
	White	Black	Latino	Asian	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	Two or More Races
Orange	96.0	86.1	59.5	91.8	82.6	100.0	92.7
Warren	87.0	74.3	44.8	100.0	53.5	N/A	64.1
Lenoir	87.3	75.6	23.6	74.8	77.7	100.0	81.5
Rockingham	82.8	78.3	42.4	74.0	54.4	100.0	83.0
Sampson	83.1	80.8	26.8	87.1	79.3	N/A	72.9
Duplin	82.4	74.0	29.2	65.2	100.0	N/A	85.9

Source: US Census, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015)

State Specific Diet-Related Health Statistics on Target Population

Food insecurity is a problem that is plaguing our country to the point where 1 in 7 Americans are struggling to get enough to eat (Feeding America, 2016). In 2015, 42.2 million Americans were classified as food insecure, including more than 13 million children (Feeding America, 2016). In 2014, five of the six SNAP-Ed counties had a food insecurity rate that was higher than the national average (15.4%) and two of the counties had a food insecurity rate higher than the state average (17.7%). While each county has seen a decrease in food insecurity (Table 6), the

three-year change is extremely small and much work still needs to be done in order to ensure more people in North Carolina have access to healthy, nutritious food.

Table 6: Food Insecurity rate for Orange, Warren, Lenoir, Rockingham, Sampson and Duplin counties

County	Food Insecurity Rate (%)			3-year Change in Food Insecurity Rate
	2014	2013	2012	
Orange	14.6	15.4	15.6	-1.0%
Warren	23.4	23.3	23.5	-0.1%
Lenoir	21.6	21.5	22.1	-0.5%
Rockingham	17.3	18.0	18.1	-0.8%
Sampson	17.0	17.0	17.9	-0.9%
Duplin	17.0	17.8	18.6	-1.6%

Source: Feeding America, Map The Meal Gap

Food insecurity is also one of the most glaring examples of racial inequities within the U.S. food system. In fact, 1 in 5 African American and Latino households are classified as food insecure, as compared to 1 in 10 White households (Feeding America, 2016). Access to safe and healthy food reflects the wider racial, ethnic and class disparities in the U.S. that are caused by structural inequality in health, social, economic, and political domains that continue to limit communities of color to access better socio-economic opportunities (Elsheikh and Barhoum, 2013). Consequently, racialized outcomes that stem from other domains (i.e. housing, education, transportation, and income inequality) severely impact accessibility to healthy food and add to the increased food insecurity within many communities of color. When communities of color lack access to adequate and healthy food, they receive both fewer and worse economic opportunities, thereby exacerbating existing racial disparities (Elsheikh and Barhoum, 2013). To make sense of this we must understand how communities are shaped by a complex set of past

and current policies that affect how they access and afford food and how their families earn a living (Giancattarino and Noor, 2014).

Lacking constant access to food or exercise opportunities is also related to other various negative health outcomes. Like many underserved communities in the United States, these six SNAP-Ed counties face challenges of chronic disease, physical inactivity, and food access. Table 7, based on data from the 2017 North Carolina County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, highlights a sample of the challenges facing the six SNAP-Ed counties in relation to the rest of North Carolina. Of North Carolina's 100 counties, Orange County ranks the highest of the six counties as 2nd in overall health outcomes and 4th in health behaviors (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2017). Lenoir County ranks the lowest as 88th in overall health outcomes and Warren County ranked the lowest as 95th in health behaviors (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2017). Every county except Orange County also had worst health statistics in every category (Table 7) than the state average.

Table 7: Health Measures for Orange, Warren, Lenoir, Rockingham, Sampson and Duplin counties

Measure	County						NC Average
	Orange	Warren	Lenoir	Rockingham	Sampson	Duplin	
Adult Obesity	23%	39%	37%	35%	37%	32%	30%
Physical Inactivity	17%	31%	31%	30%	34%	29%	24%
Access to Exercise Opportunities	85%	39%	55%	70%	40%	32%	75%
Diabetes Prevalence	8%	14%	16%	14%	14%	14%	11%
Children Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch	32%	92%	98%	98%	71%	72%	57%

Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (2017)

Description of Project

Project Title: Community Circles Program

Goals and Objectives

Goal: To mitigate the effects of poverty and racism on food insecurity by providing SNAP-eligible residents the opportunity to discuss important community issues, build social capital, and develop sustainable solutions that enhance long-term food access, economic security, and social inclusion in their community.

Objectives

1. Objective 1: Improve knowledge, attitudes, and awareness of poverty, racism, and food insecurity in the community.
2. Objective 2: Develop community advocacy capacity to influence community change on local issues of poverty, racism, and food insecurity.
3. Objective 3: Build social capital and inclusion of SNAP-eligible residents in the community.

Audience

The target audience for this SNAP-Ed program will be SNAP participants, low-income individuals eligible to receive benefits under SNAP, and individuals residing in communities with a significant low-income population (USDA, 2017). The Community Circles will be open to SNAP-eligible residents of all ages – including youth living in SNAP-eligible households, gender, sexual identity, race/ethnicity, and political and religious backgrounds. The Community Circles are structured to be as inclusive as possible for all SNAP-eligible members of the community, transcending any implicit or explicit barriers of race/ethnicity in particular. While outreach efforts will be to SNAP-eligible populations in the community, we will not turn away any members of the community who are interested in participating in the Community Circles.

During the recruitment process, we will work through our existing community partners in each county – we have 3 community partner organizations in each county and upwards of 15-20 people we are engaged with – to recruit the target audience. Therefore, we will start with our community partners and have them recruit community members who they think will be interested. This will be a self-selection sampling where participants will volunteer to participate. The Community Outreach Coordinator will assist with organizing the recruitment process and provide any additional support to the community partners throughout recruitment.

Project Description

A critical aspect of every successful social movement is a mobilizing network through which individuals with common objectives are brought together (Economos et al., 2001). In order to develop a network of engaged community members, discussion must be initiated within the community about poverty, racism, and food insecurity. To help facilitate those critical conversations, the Community Circles Program will develop formative focus groups, known as Community Circles, that serve a social capital bridging function by giving SNAP-Ed eligible individuals an opportunity to discuss ways of bringing about positive change in their community. These individuals are residents in their local community and possess insight about the context in which poverty and food insecurity exists. Thus, building capacity in these individuals to see themselves as change agents in their community and equipping them with the skills and knowledge to accomplish their desired goals can lead to long-term sustainable improvements in food access and poverty alleviation in their community (Dyk et al., 2016). The expectation is not for SNAP-Ed eligible residents to operate these desired goals and solutions alone. Instead, they will need to be included as partners in the overall process involved in broad transformational change. This community-driven approach will provide a new and strategic framework for

concerned stakeholders to work together to stimulate more effective action in addressing these urgent and complex issues (Economos et al., 2001).

The aim of the Community Circles Program is to engage SNAP-eligible participants in a concerted effort to tackle the diverse factors that contribute to poverty and food insecurity. When building any type of community capital there must be a collective will of numerous community members working towards wellbeing for their community (Monroe et al., 2016). The Community Circles will stimulate community engagement so that community members can identify the issues they face and develop their own solutions with minimum outside intervention. The conceptual framework for this program draws heavily from the Horizons Program and Tides Program, discussed later in the Evidence Base section.

Program Activities

A Community Circle is a step-by-step process for examining difficult issues that communities are facing today, like poverty, racism, and food insecurity (Southern Rural Development Center, 2009). The goal of these dialogues is to create a space in which community members can openly discuss these topics and consider what actions they could take to solve local problems. Community Circles will consist of a diverse group of at least 8-12 SNAP-eligible residents within the community that meet several times to talk about poverty and food insecurity. Community Circles will occur in six counties: Orange, Warren, Lenoir, Rockingham, Sampson and Duplin.

Each session of the Community Circle builds on the one before it. Groups will meet together for five, two-hour sessions. The time each session will occur will vary by county but will most likely happen on evenings or weekends in order to have the most participation. In the first session, community members come together to think about how poverty has touched their

lives. During the second session, participants share their thoughts and beliefs about why poverty continues to exist. Next, they look at different ways to reduce poverty and food insecurity, including discussions on any benefits and costs associated with each possible approach. In the final session, participants decide on the Action Ideas that they feel are the best fit for their community. Afterwards, they work together to take action on the best ideas they have selected to tackle poverty and food insecurity (Southern Rural Development Center, 2009).

Upon completion of all Community Circles, a community-wide Action Forum will be scheduled in each county to collectively discuss Action Ideas with other residents. At the Action Forum, community members will work through a consensus process to identify the Action Ideas that the group feels will work best for their community. The Action Forum will be scheduled near the ending of Community Circles as a way of maintaining momentum and interest. People can then sign up to join various Action Teams to help put the selected plans into motion (Dyk et al., 2016). With coaching, support, and resource linkages via UNC Center for Health Promotion & Disease Prevention (HPDP), Action Teams will develop work plans to achieve their vision. This is then where the implementation phase will begin. Intervention type(s) may vary for all six participating counties but will all focus on the goal of reducing poverty and food insecurity in the community. Action Ideas will be incorporated more formally into programs in the SNAP-Ed Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19) plan.

In order to be effective, poverty reduction strategies must be customized to address the diverse personal and community realities of each SNAP-Ed county. If the problems are interlocking, then so must the solutions. This program provides an opportunity for SNAP-Ed eligible residents to focus on the often under-recognized strengths that enable them to persevere. Taking an asset-based approach will provide a different way to think about poverty and various

solutions to address it. An increase in assets – whether they are tangible, such as an increase in income, or intangible, such as improved neighborhood social ties – shows progress in reducing poverty (Gamble, 2010). At the core of this program is the creation of a new collaborative entity that empowers local people to work together in innovative ways to tackle the multiple and interdependent issues that contribute to poverty (Gamble, 2010). Thus, involving SNAP-eligible residents can put issues on the table that might otherwise have been overlooked. When community members take the time to share what they think and learn about the viewpoints of others, they are much more likely to “own” the actions arising out of their conversations (University of Minnesota Extension, 2011). In a dialogue-to-change program, the dialogue portion can be seen as a “down payment” on the sustainable community action (or “change”).

Timeline

The Community Circles program is a year-long formative research process. The timeline for the year-long process will be laid out as follows:

Action Items	Year 1 (FY 2018)			
	Q1 (Fall)	Q2 (Winter)	Q3 (Spring)	Q4 (Summer)
Facilitator Training				
Participant Recruitment				
Community Circle Sessions				
Action Forums				
Evaluation (surveys, focus groups)				

The Community Outreach Field Staff will be hired prior to the start of the program. All Field Staff (most likely 1-2 staff members in each county) will complete the facilitator training during Quarter 1. Once training is complete, Field Staff will work with the Community Outreach

Coordinator to begin recruiting participants for the Community Circles. We will aim to have 8-12 SNAP-eligible residents per Community Circle with a reach of 72 SNAP-eligible participants in total. Each county will conduct five, two-hour Community Circle sessions over a span of two months (Quarter 2). Upon completion of all Community Circle sessions, each county will then schedule a community-wide Action Forum during Quarter 3. Evaluation of the program will occur post-program (Quarters 3 and 4) and also before the start of the Community Circles (Quarter 1).

Location

Times, dates, and location will be planned with the communities themselves. Most likely community locations such as libraries, schools, or churches will host the Community Circle sessions. The Community Outreach Coordinator will work with our community partners to coordinate the meeting location logistics for each county and also ensure that the meetings are held in location/venues that generally serve low-income persons. This would include, locations/venues located in census tract areas or other defined areas where at least 50 percent of persons have gross incomes that are equal to or less than 185 percent of the poverty threshold or children in schools where at least 50 percent of children receive free and reduced priced meals (USDA, 2017). This will be documented by using the USDA Area Eligibility Map (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/areaeligibility>), Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Averaged Eligibility Map (<https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sponsor-center/averaged-eligibility-map>), and the Food Research and Action Center's (FRAC) Summer Food Mapper (<http://www.fairdata2000.com/SummerFood/>).

Facilitation

All six counties will be provided with financial support to hire 1-2 part-time Community Outreach Field Staff. The Community Outreach Field Staff will serve as skilled facilitators who will assist with leading the Community Circles. Community Outreach Field Staff will be members of their respective communities. The Field Staff will ensure quality discussion in each circle and effective small group deliberation. Once facilitators are identified, they will receive a series of trainings to prepare them for leading the Community Circles process.

Evidence Base

To examine the feasibility of the successful implementation of a SNAP-Ed program such as the Community Circles Project, preliminary efforts must be made to obtain information about current, past, and future programmatic attempts related to this intervention strategy. A literature review was conducted to seek information on existing community-based programs with a focus on economic development and asset development opportunities. Preference was given to programs with a focus on urban agriculture, racial equity, and/or social capital. PubMed and Google Scholar were searched using the following search terms “urban agriculture AND economic development” and “poverty alleviation AND community engagement”. The search was expanded using combinations with other terms such as “social capital, community assets, community programs, SNAP-Ed” and “racial equity” through Google to find additional unpublished programs that fit the criteria of interest. Each program was assessed for useful components for the program plan. Each program was also assessed for its evaluative process and results. This literature review provides further insight for the design of the infrastructure of the Community Circles Project.

Social capital can be defined as the various benefits that emerge from the trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation that characterize social networks (Ohmer and DeMasi, 2008). Social capital plays an important role in strengthening the social and economic fabric of communities. It is social capital that allows community members to function effectively together to solve common problems, improve the quality of life, and take advantage of opportunities. Increasing social capital requires building the internal capacity of communities by focusing on their strengths and assets, rather than their deficits. Temkin and Rohe (1998) found that social capital is a key factor determining community stability over time, including the overall sense of attachment and loyalty among residents to leverage their relationships and networks into effective community action. Studies show that residents who live in communities with high levels of social capital experience greater wellbeing than those with lower social capital characteristics (Dyk et al., 2016). In addition, research has shown that broad-based community involvement can be used as a predictor for program success and program sustainability (Monroe et al., 2016). Communities see positive change when community members engage in structured civic dialog, resulting in collective public action and an increase in social capital. Hence, social capital is a construct of considerable interest to this program as we examine community member involvement in addressing the challenges faced by distressed communities (Dyk et al., 2016).

The poverty alleviation and community engagement search terms revealed five programs, two of which were more relevant to the focus of this program. These two programs all had a focus on asset building and increasing social capital in communities as a way of alleviating poverty (Morehouse and Stockdill, 2008; Monroe et al, 2016). The Horizons Program and Tides Program are two programs that provide a practice-based evidence level that speaks to the effectiveness of dialogue-to-change programs and the impact Community Circles

can have on a community. Both programs also provided in depth information on their evaluative process and results.

A Study Circle is part of a dialogue-to-change process where a small, diverse group of 8-to-12 participants meet for about two hours over a period of several weeks to address critical public issues in a collaborative way. Dialogue-to-change programs consist of three core components: organizing, dialogue, and action (Everyday Democracy, n.d.). Study Circles occur in the dialogue component of the program framework. In the past, Study Circles have been used as a participatory tool for social and community development to help communities at the local level overcome interracial tensions, solve economic problems, improve community relationships with police, and engage youth in a dialogue process (Everyday Democracy, n.d.). Study Circle sessions progress over time with first discussing personal experiences on the specific issue, then moving to examining other points of view, and finally to generating ideas for action and change. For the purpose of our program, we will only be using the dialogue component and will refer to Study Circles as “Community Circles” in order to emphasize the importance of having various community members at the same table.

Horizons is an 18-month program designed to build community leadership and capacity to address poverty (Morehouse and Stockdill, 2008). It includes leadership education, community discussion, visioning and action for rural communities. While in the program, Horizons communities receive training, support and resources that strengthen community leadership and generate discussion about poverty and the future of the community (University of Minnesota Extension, 2011). The program is designed in four phases: Study Circles, leadership trainings, community visioning, and community coaching and action. The Study Circles are facilitated community conversations on poverty, based on the model developed by Everyday

Democracy discussed earlier. The leadership trainings utilized the LeadershipPlenty curriculum, where each community had 25 people or more complete 30-40 hours of training on community leadership and skill-building exercises (Morehouse and Stockdill, 2008). The community visioning phase required communities to engage at least 15% of the community in developing a plan to reduce poverty. Each community with an approved plan becomes eligible for a \$10,000 grant provided by Horizons (Morehouse and Stockdill, 2008). Lastly, coaches are assigned to each community to provide a wide array of support, training, and other resources to help put community plans into action. Currently, 283 high poverty, small, rural and reservation communities have completed the Horizons program, with over 100,000 people – close to 30% of the population in those communities – participating in the program (Morehouse and Stockdill, 2008). Action steps in these communities have varied but include decisions such as creating new community businesses, conducting financial planning/debt reductions courses, leading community dialogues on racism, and starting community gardens/farmers' markets.

Evaluation of the Horizons Program showed that 87% of Horizons panel study communities believe they were “better off” because of the program and 90% of communities would participate again (Morehouse and Stockdill, 2008). Participants saw the Study Circles as the most valuable component, engendering both new knowledge and a deepening understanding of poverty and its ramifications in communities (Morehouse and Stockdill, 2008). Survey respondents also said the program brought residents together, engaged the community in working towards a common vision, identified community assets and skills, identified new leaders in the community, and created hope and optimism, replacing fear and pessimism (Morehouse and Stockdill, 2008). Over 70% of respondents agreed that their community was more optimistic now about the future than when Horizons began (Morehouse and Stockdill, 2008).

Turning the Tide on Poverty ("Tide") Program is a community engagement program inspired by Horizons that was initiated by the Southern Rural Development Center. The program operated in fourteen communities within thirteen Southern states (Monroe et al, 2016). The Community Capitals Framework was used by Tides as a theoretical framework to help understand the community systems encountered and to help analyze indicators of community climate, leadership, race relations, champions, and sustainability (Monroe et al, 2016). They focused on four aspects of capital – social, human, political, and financial – as a way to determine program sustainability. Evaluation of the program highlighted the social capital bridging function provided by the Study Circles (Monroe et al, 2016). For example, participants stated that Tide positively changed how community members interacted and saw each other (Monroe et al, 2016). By coming together across boundaries of race and socioeconomic status, participants deepened their community's social capital by establishing mutual understanding and trust. Overall, sustainability was most evident in follow-up data collected in communities that also had a positive community climate, improving race relations, positive perceptions of leaders, and the leadership of an inclusive community champion during their engagement with the Tide project (Monroe et al, 2016).

Overall, the challenges communities face are large but they are not challenges in isolation. Creating a dialogue about poverty, racism, and food insecurity will help participants feel more comfortable thinking about their experiences through a racial/ethnic/cultural lens and discussing difficult topics with one another. It will also help participants identify how their problems intersect with other problems across sectors. In the context of scholarly research, a dialogue-to-change program can prove to be a beneficial way of increasing community assets by strengthening community leadership and generating discussions about poverty and the future of a

community. Therefore, taking this programmatic approach will enable communities to identify how the challenges to achieving healthy and sustainable communities are linked across issue areas and the most effective ways of creating equitable opportunities for children and families (Elsheikh, and Barhoum, 2013). While the Community Circles Program is focused on creating a dialogue around poverty, race, and food insecurity for SNAP-eligible community members, the structure of the program will be adapted from the Horizons and Tides Program.

Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change

As mentioned in the Program Description, each county will hold an Action Forum to collectively discuss Action Ideas with other residents and identify the Action Idea(s) that would work best for their community to implement. While each community's Action Ideas may differ, all idea will utilize a policy, systems, and/or environmental change (PSE) approach, such as a multi-level intervention or community/public health approach (USDA, 2017). Utilizing a PSE approach will ensure that efforts affect a large segment of the community, rather than targeting the individual or a small group. With coaching, support, and resource linkages via HPDP, Action Teams will develop work plans to achieve their vision and utilize best practices from evidence-based interventions as appropriate. Action Ideas will be incorporated more formally into programs and will be evaluated in the SNAP-Ed Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19) plan.

Use of Existing Education Materials

The Horizons Program and Tides Program provide a great deal of existing education materials that can be used for the Community Circles Project. These education materials can be found on their websites at: <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/horizons/information-for-communities/study-circles-materials-and-forms>, <http://srdc.msstate.edu/tide/training.html>, and <http://srdc.msstate.edu/tide/resources.html>.

Materials for the facilitator training:

- *A Guide for Training Public Dialogue Facilitators* (Everyday Democracy)
- *Study Circle Facilitator Packet* (Horizons Program)

Materials for the Study Circles:

- *Thriving Communities Study Circle Guide* (Everyday Democracy)
- *Organizing Community-Wide Dialogue for Action and Change* (Everyday Democracy)
- *Facing Racism in a Diverse Nation* (Everyday Democracy)

All materials are available in English but can be adapted to Spanish if needed. All materials are also available for free download on the programs' websites, except *Facing Racism in a Diverse Nation* which can be purchased for \$30 per copy. Other materials are also available on the respective program websites that can be utilized throughout the process such as talking points, action idea templates, discussion guides, project timelines, and various Powerpoint presentations. The Community Outreach Coordinator will work with the Community Outreach Field Staff to modify the materials as necessary to meet the needs of each county participating in the Community Circles Project.

Evaluation Plan

Type

The Community Circles Program will utilize two types of evaluation: process evaluation and formative evaluation. Broad data collection and monitoring will be conducted through surveys, focus groups, self-sign-in attendance records and other methods for a process evaluation. Through these methods we will collect process data on recruitment, facilitator

training, and Community Circles. Conducting a process evaluation will assist with measuring effectiveness of the Community Circles program, any barriers to implementing the program, and other lessons learned throughout the process.

The formative evaluation will be used to gain a better understanding of the target population and how the program can work best to serve the needs of each community. Focus groups and surveys will be the primary method used to evaluate the Community Circles as an effective way of developing Action Ideas that are culturally appropriate and relevant to each specific community. This formative research serves a critical role in ensuring the implementation phase in FY19 is acceptable and feasible before launching.

Approach, Data Collection, and Analysis

We will conduct baseline and post-intervention surveys of Community Circle participants to ascertain their beliefs and actions related to civic involvement, change in knowledge, level of participation, and satisfaction with the program structure. This survey will be adapted from the Tide Program's pre and post surveys: <http://srdc.msstate.edu/tide/files/resources/turningthetide-communitysurvey-01111.pdf>, http://srdc.msstate.edu/tide/files/resources/turningthetide-communitysurvey_post-01111.pdf (Southern Rural Development Center, n.d.). Both participants and facilitators will also complete a facilitator evaluation survey to assess the effectiveness of the facilitator role. We will also use the Tide's Program facilitator evaluation survey: http://srdc.msstate.edu/tide/files/training/facilitator_evaluation_form.pdf (Southern Rural Development Center, n.d.). Focus groups will serve a similar purpose as surveys but will provide more in-depth feedback on the Community Circle process. Upon completion of the program, 1-2 focus groups will occur in each county to assess changes in baseline survey responses. The focus groups will also help us better understand what has changed in the community during this period

and to explore emerging insights about how the initiative should proceed. The focus groups questions will be adapted from the Tide Program's key informant interview questions: <http://srdc.msstate.edu/tide/files/resources/keyinformantinterviewquestions.pdf> (Southern Rural Development Center, n.d.).

To assess changes, we will use descriptive statistics to illustrate change in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Data from the baseline and post-intervention surveys of Community Circle participants and the facilitator evaluation surveys will be analyzed with paired-samples t-tests. Data from the focus groups will be coded, transcribed, and analyzed for common themes related to the purpose and objectives of the study. Self-sign-in attendance records will be used to document and analyze participation rates.

Key Performance Measures/Indicators

Objective 1: Improve knowledge, attitudes, and awareness of poverty, racism, and food insecurity in the community.

- Indicator 1.1: % of Community Circle participants with increase in knowledge of local poverty, racism, and food insecurity issues
- Indicator 1.2: % of Community Circle participants with increase in understanding of other people's perceptions and perspectives of poverty, racism, and food insecurity
- Indicator 1.3: % of Community Circle participants with increased awareness of local poverty and food insecurity reduction strategies

Objective 2: Develop community advocacy capacity to influence community change on local issues of poverty, racism, and food insecurity.

- Indicator 2.1: # of Champions identified in each community by end of Quarter 3 **(ST6)**

- Indicator 2.2: % of Community Circle participants with increase in personal commitment to doing more in the community
- Indicator 2.3: % of Community Circle participants with increased confidence in addressing community issues **(ST5)**
- Indicator 2.4: # of Community Circle groups with a common vision and action plan for poverty and food insecurity reduction strategies

Objective 3: Build social capital and inclusion of SNAP-eligible residents in the community.

- Indicator 3.1: % of Community Circle participants who feel that their local community is a place where people from different backgrounds can get on well together
- Indicator 3.2: % of Community Circle participants who report having a positive outlook for the future of their community
- Indicator 3.3: % of Community Circle participants who feel a sense of belonging with other members in their local community
- Indicator 3.4: % of Community Circle participants with a positive change in feelings of community support

Use of SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework

The SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework provides standardized, evidence-informed methods that can be utilized by SNAP-Ed program when developing goals and objectives (USDA, 2016).

The SNAP-Ed Evaluation and all of its indicators can be found at:

<https://snapedtoolkit.org/framework/index/>. The Community Circles Program will ensure the

goals and objectives for the program align with the various indicators listed in the SNAP-Ed

Evaluation Framework. This program will serve as the formative research before the initiation of

any community programming and thus aligns with the Readiness and Capacity aspects of the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework. Objectives 2.1 and 2.3 are both short-term indicators from the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework (ST5 and ST6) that will be utilized to assess the needs and readiness of the community, as well as identify community Champions. Specific community programming that aligns with the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework will be discussed and evaluated more formally in the SNAP-Ed FY19 plan.

Coordination Efforts

As a community-driven program, the survival of the program relies heavily on community engagement and investment. SNAP-Ed staff will continue to engage the established SNAP-Ed gardens in Orange, Warren, Rockingham, Lenoir, Sampson and Duplin counties (18 gardens total) in Community Circle efforts. Garden managers from the local SNAP-Ed community gardens will have the opportunity to serve as Community Outreach Field Staff in their county. Research has consistently shown that successful social change movements need leaders who “champion” the cause over a long period as it develops and grows over time (USDA, 2016). Part of the Community Circle process will be encouraging individuals or groups of people to step forward to champion the collective public action. Training local community members – such as SNAP-Ed community garden managers – to assist with Community Circle facilitation and community outreach can lead to long-term program sustainability. These champions will provide sustained leadership that successfully advocates for, creates appeal of, or supports the goals of the Community Circle Program. These individuals are instrumental in getting other people involved, mobilizing community members, and effectively linking external resources (Worthy et al., 2016). Having champions emerge in the early phases of the program

can lead to added enthusiasm and embracement of the SNAP-Ed Action Items implemented in FY19.

Staffing

Project Name: Community Circles Program				
1. Position Title	2. FTEs charged to SNAP-Ed	3. Description of Job Duties		4. SNAP-Ed Salary, Benefits, and Wages
		Percentage of SNAP-Ed Time Spent on Management/ Administrative Duties	Percentage of SNAP-Ed Time Spent on SNAP-Ed delivery, including all approaches described in Guidance Section 1	<i>Federal Dollars only</i>
Community Outreach Coordinator	One 0.75 FTE	90%	10%	\$22,230
Community Outreach Field Staff	Six 0.5 FTEs	10%	90%	\$30,000
Total				\$52,230

Budget Information

Budget Summary

	Expenses	Carry-in from Previous FY	Current FY Budget	Non-Federal Support
1.	Salary/Benefits	\$0	\$52,230	\$0

2.	Contracts/Sub-Grants/Agreements**	\$0	\$0	\$0
3.	Non-Capital Equipment/Supplies	\$0	\$5500	\$0
4.	Materials	\$0	\$750	\$0
5.	Travel	\$0	\$9,000	\$0
6.	Building/Space	\$0	\$0	\$0
7.	Maintenance	\$0	\$0	\$0
8.	Equipment and Other Capital Expenditures	\$0	\$0	\$0
9.	Total Direct Costs	\$0	\$54,308	\$0
10.	Total Indirect Costs	\$0	\$13,172	\$0
11.	Total Federal Funds	\$0	\$67,480	
12.	Estimated Funds Carry-over from Current FY to Next FY, if any		\$0	\$0

Budget Justification

Personnel (Total: \$52,230)

- Community Outreach Coordinator** – This is a 0.75 FTE position with a salary of \$18,058, not including payroll taxes and fringe benefits (\$4,172). The Community Outreach Coordinator is responsible for the overall administration of the initiative, as well as for providing coaching to communities. This position will be responsible for the evaluation of the Community Circles, including conducting the pre/post surveys, focus groups, and analyzing all data. They will provide technical assistance as necessary, assist with implementing work plans, and sustaining the work of each Action Team.
- Community Outreach Field Staff** – All six counties will receive \$5,000 to hire part-time Community Outreach Field Staff (\$30,000 total). They will serve as skilled facilitators who will assist with leading the Community Circles and recruiting

Community Circle participants. Community Outreach Field Staff will be members of their respective communities. The field staff will ensure quality discussion in each circle and effective small group deliberation. Once facilitators are identified, they will receive a series of trainings to prepare them for leading the Community Circles process.

Non-personnel (\$17,100)

- **Non-capital equipment/supplies** – A total of \$5,600 is needed to cover expenses for the Community Circle sessions and Action Forums in each county. With an estimated \$100 budget for food and drink for each Community Circle session, the total of \$3,500 accounts for 30 Community Circle sessions and 6 Action Forums. A total of \$1,000 will cover food and drink expenses for the facilitator trainings in each county. The additional \$1000 is needed for office supplies such as pens, flip charts, etc. As well as reserving funds for any printing costs (paper, ink).
- **Materials:** This \$750 will cover the cost of purchasing any training materials that will be needed for both the facilitator training and the Community Circle sessions.
- **Travel:** We will reimburse all staff for mileage incurred during any trips that will need to be taken to the six counties. This includes evaluation, recruitment, Community Circle, and Action Forum trips to the communities.

Conclusion

A vibrant community is one where committed citizens work together to build a community that is caring, prosperous and sustainable. Dialogue-to-change programs can help individuals from a variety of backgrounds examine the gaps among racial and ethnic groups where they live, explore approaches to creating greater equity, and create lasting change in their

community. When a community mobilizes together to reduce poverty and promote equity, they take an important step in building a stronger, healthier community. The Community Circles Program demonstrates the leadership role that SNAP-eligible residents can play in revitalizing their community. The overall purpose is fundamentally to strengthen the will and capacity of communities to tackle poverty from various angles. This program will result in more collaborative approaches to solving issues like poverty, racism, and food insecurity in communities. It will engage citizens in inspired action as they work and learn together on behalf of their communities to create and realize bold visions for the future. Utilizing the dialogue-to-change approach has the ability to change communities, and under the right conditions the impact can be powerful.

References

- County Health Rankings and Roadmaps. (2017). North Carolina County Health Rankings. Available from: http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/north-carolina/2017/compare/snapshot?counties=37_061%2037_107%2037_135%2037_157%2037_163%2037_185
- Dyk, P. H., Monroe, P. A., Tyler-Mackey, C., Welborn, R., & Worthy, S. L. (2016). Turning the Tide on Poverty: History, theoretical frameworks, and methods. *Community Development*, 47(3), 287-303.
- Economos, C. D., Brownson, R. C., DeAngelis, M. A., Foerster, S. B., Foreman, C. T., Gregson, J., & Pate, R. R. (2001). What lessons have been learned from other attempts to guide social change?. *Nutrition Reviews*, 59(3).
- Elsheikh, E., and Barhoum, N. (2013). Structural Racialization and Food Insecurity in the United States. Available from: [http://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/Structural%20Racialization%20%20%26%20Food%20Insecurity%20in%20the%20US-\(Final\).pdf](http://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/Structural%20Racialization%20%20%26%20Food%20Insecurity%20in%20the%20US-(Final).pdf)
- Everyday Democracy. (n.d.) Study Circles. Available from: http://www.civicus.org/documents/toolkits/PGX_B_Study%20CirclesFinalWeb.pdf
- Feeding America. (2016). The Impact of Hunger & Food Insecurity. Accessed March 3, 2017. Available from: <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger/>.
- Gamble, J. (2010). Evaluating Vibrant Communities 2002-2010. Available from: http://vibrantcanada.ca/files/vc_evaluation_complete_report.pdf
- Giancattarino, A., & Noor, S. (2014). *Building the case for racial equity in the food system*. Center for Social Inclusion. Available from: <http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Building-the-Case-for-Racial-Equity-in-the-Food-System.pdf>
- Monroe, P. A., Tyler-Mackey, C., Dyk, P. H., Welborn, R., Worthy, S. L., Lowe, C. H., & Pickett, N. J. (2016). Turning the Tide on Poverty: Sustainability of community engagement in economically distressed communities. *Community Development*, 47(3), 358-374.
- Morehouse, L. D., Stockdill, H. S. (2008). Northwest Area Foundation Horizons Phase II Program Final External Evaluation Report. Available from: <http://www.extension.uidaho.edu/horizons/reports/H2%20Final%20Version%20101508%20revised.pdf>
- Ohmer, M. L., & DeMasi, K. (2008). *Consensus organizing: A community development workbook: A comprehensive guide to designing, implementing, and evaluating community change initiatives*. Sage Publications.

Smedley, B. D. (2012). The lived experience of race and its health consequences. *American Journal of Public Health, 102*(5), 933-935.

Southern Rural Development Center. (n.d.). Turning the Tide on Poverty: Resources. Accessed March 26, 2017. Available from: <http://srdc.msstate.edu/tide/resources.html>

Southern Rural Development Center. (n.d.). Turning the Tide on Poverty: Training Materials. Accessed March 26, 2017. Available from: <http://srdc.msstate.edu/tide/training.html>

Temkin, K., & and Rohe, W. (1998). Social capital and neighborhood stability: An empirical investigation. *Housing Policy Debate, 9*(1), 61-88.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2016). The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) Evaluation Framework: Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention Indicators: Interpretive Guide to the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework. Available from: <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/>

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2017). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education Plan Guidance: Nutrition Education & Obesity Prevention Grant Program. Available from: https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/snap/Guidance/FY_2017_SNAP-Ed_Guidance_%20508-Compliant.pdf

Weaver L., Borne P., & Whaley L. D., (2010). Approaches to Measuring: Community Change Indicators. Available from: http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/316071/Practice_Vibrant_Communities/measuring_community_change.pdf

Worthy, S. L., Downey, L., Dyk, P. H., Monroe, P. A., Tyler-Mackey, C., & Welborn, R. (2016). Turning the Tide on Poverty: Community champions as critical elements of success in economically distressed communities. *Community Development, 47*(3), 341-357.