

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana Foundation *Challenge for a Healthier Louisiana* Multilevel Approach to Community Obesity Prevention Worksheet

The goal of the Challenge for a Healthier Louisiana is to help communities reshape their environments to support healthy living and prevent obesity. Successful projects will address the root causes of obesity using a multi-level, evidence-based approach, and integrating changes in policies, norms, practices, social supports, and the physical environment. Traditionally, obesity prevention efforts have promoted change at only a single level – usually the individual. The Challenge Grant program emphasizes a shift away from the traditional approaches to true community-based obesity prevention. This worksheet is designed to aid applicants in mapping their program activities to the various levels at which they seek to promote change and to identify opportunities to strengthen program impact by incorporating activities at additional levels.

This graphic was presented during the information workshops last fall as an introduction to the Challenge Grant's multilevel approach. The graphic highlighted the fact that, to create meaningful change in an individual's behavior, it is important to create change in the various other levels that influence an individual's ability or desire to behave in a healthy manner. Said in a different way, the *National Prevention Strategy* (p. 22, link on the Challenge Grant resources page), notes that



Decision making is a complex process, influenced by personal, cultural, social, economic, and environmental factors, including individuals' ability to meet their daily needs, the opinions and behaviors of their peers, and their own knowledge and motivation.⁸⁵ Information alone is often not enough to change behavior—communities, workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods can support people in making and sustaining healthy choices.⁸⁶ Providing tools and information, making healthy choices easy and affordable, and improving the social environment and context in which decisions are made all support people in making healthy choices.⁸⁷

There are other ways to conceptualize multilevel, community approaches, however. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States* (link on the Challenge Grant resources page) emphasizes the importance of policies and environments in shaping behavior. Healthful policy and environmental changes also have the benefit of affecting many more people in a community than traditional obesity prevention programs and tend to be more sustainable. The perspective advocated by the CDC document is summarized in the box below.

Where People Live, Work, and Play Affects Their Health

Local policies and the physical environment influence daily choices that affect our health—and our weight (Bell & Rubin, 2007). For example, children who live in unsafe neighborhoods may be restricted to watching television indoors instead of playing outside after school. Families living in neighborhoods that are zoned exclusively for residential use must drive to work and school because it is too far to walk. Communities that lack full-service grocery stores and neighborhood food markets have less access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Moreover, policies that establish physical activity requirements and nutrition standards in schools and daycare facilities can promote the health and well-being of children. These are just a few examples of how policies and the environment can affect what we eat and how we move, which in turn affects our health.

To reverse the obesity epidemic, we must change our physical and food environments to provide more opportunities for people to eat healthy foods and to be physically active on a daily basis



Worksheet: How multilevel is your program?

Your target population: _____

The grid below combines elements from both graphics from the previous page. Place your major program activities into the appropriate box corresponding to the behavior and level that the activity is targeting. If your proposed project does not incorporate activities at the policy or community/environment level, it will be important for you to refer to the resources noted on the Challenge Grant website and in the RFP in order to transform your project into a true **community** obesity prevention initiative.

Level	Behavior	
	Nutrition	Physical Activity
Policy ¹ [Healthy Policies]		
Community ¹ [Healthy Environments]		
Organizational ²		
Family, Friends, Social Networks ³ [Healthy Behaviors]		
Individual ⁴ [Healthy Behaviors]		

¹ **Policy/Community:** Policy or Community-level strategies should have the potential to reach all, or a large number, of the community target population. See examples on p. 3 of the RFP. ² **Organizational:** Organization-level strategies are those initiated by an organization (or organizations) within your community that promote healthy behaviors in their members or employees. They may be important components of community initiatives but, unless the entire community is covered, will often not be sufficient. Organizational strategies may offer additional reinforcement of strategies at both the individual and community levels. It may be tricky to decide whether an activity is community-level or organizational-level. For example, a policy put in place by the school board that is mandatory in all schools would be acting at the community/policy level. But a policy that is implemented or enforced differently in different schools, and where only certain schools are planning to implement the policy fully, would be operating at the organizational level. ³ **Family/friends/social:** Strategies that specifically include both an individual and their family and friends, or attempt to promote change through social interactions, have the ability to influence both an individual's social support for behavior change as well as to influence the social "norms" within a community. This is an important bridge between positive environmental/policy change and actual behavior change by an individual. ⁴ **Individual:** Activities that promote behavior change through education, changing attitudes, and promoting skills, for example, are operating at the individual level. These activities depend on interactions with individuals for the program to have an impact.