

# The Healthy Communities Initiative: Gathering community input during COVID19

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## Background

The Louisiana Healthy Communities Initiative, led by the LSU AgCenter, guides SNAP-Ed policy, systems, and environmental change efforts. Prior to COVID19, agents held in-person community forums to gather input on the food system and physical activity environment, and to rank ideas by impact and ease of implementation. COVID19 spurred innovation in gathering community input.

Although many states have used videoconferencing services to host public meetings, **lack of functional internet** access posed a barrier for many communities in our state.

## Objective

To gather **broad community input** through Qualtrics surveys in order to assess needs and assets, guide project prioritization, and gather feedback on previous projects.

## Study Design, Settings, Participants

Links to Qualtrics surveys were distributed via email to **community members** and **stakeholders** identified by Extension agents and **partner agencies** serving low-income audiences. Three surveys solicited feedback in areas with existing Healthy Communities coalitions (n = 45); one survey gathered initial input in a county with a newly formed Healthy Communities coalition (n = 63).

## Measurable Outcome/Analysis

Survey responses were separated by counties and analyzed through qualitative content analysis. The research team worked with Extension agents to conduct **member checking** through discussing survey results with participants.

## Results

**108 responses** were received from 4 communities. Extension agents reported high satisfaction with the process. The surveys provided action items and **potential new coalition members**. Across all four communities, common themes included acknowledging **racial health disparities**, a need for greater community involvement in coalition efforts, and a **lack of healthy food options**.

## Takeaways

- Qualtrics surveys → effective tool to gather community input
- Qualtrics surveys → **wider participation** than would have been possible with a virtual meeting
- Post-COVID: community input = Qualtrics surveys + face-to-face forums
- **Qualtrics surveys → valuable tools for lower income and rural communities** where **transportation** and **internet** may pose **barriers to participation**

