Exploring How Community Research Partnerships May Affect Enrollment and Graduation Rates for the University of Georgia EFNEP

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Background

Federal nutrition education programs like EFNEP (the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program) use a peer educator model to teach low-income Americans about healthy eating behaviors.1 Collaborative partnerships are an essential means to the sustainability and reach of the EFNEP program.2 Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM) partnered with UGA Extension/EFNEP and Healthy Start to examine how a community nutrition intervention may affect nutrition outcomes of expecting mothers and fathers (Project DINE). Healthy Start aims to improve health outcomes before and after pregnancy and reduce racial and ethnic differences in rates of infant deaths and negative maternal health outcomes.3 Food Talk is the UGA EFNEP curriculum used for adults. It is an interactive educational series of eight sessions where participants learn to stretch their food dollars, improve nutrition practices, increase physical activity and prevent foodborne illnesses.4 This series–based nutrition education programming promotes nutrition and health behavior change and is a good model for measuring nutrition outcomes. UGA EFNEP has not previously measured the impact community research partnerships may have on enrollment and graduation rates for EFNEP programming.

Objective, Study Designs, Settings, Participants

Objective

To examine how the research process for recruiting, incentives offered, and continued contact with a community research partner affect UGA EFNEP enrollment and graduation rates.

Study Designs, Settings, Participants

Recruitment was done by the Healthy Start Initiatives and local health departments at the Project DINE intervention sites and collaboratively with Morehouse School of Medicine. Participants were African American, expecting a baby, and enrolled in Healthy Start. UGA EFNEP provided an eight-week virtual nutrition education to three counties in Georgia: Cobb/Douglas, Muscogee, and Laurens. Participants who completed the program by attending all eight sessions of Food Talk and who completed all Project DINE surveys and EFNEP nutrition/health behavior questionnaires (pre/post) received up to $200 per person ($400 per couple) in financial incentives.

Measurable Outcomes/Analysis

Enrollment, participation and graduation rates data (FY 21) were analyzed using the USDA NIFA Web–based Nutrition Education, Evaluation and Reporting System (WebNEERS). Study participants’ data were analyzed and compared to data for EFNEP participants in similar communities who were not enrolled in any research project to check for any measurable differences. Specifically, data were stratified and analyzed for Project DINE and "usual UGA EFNEP programming" participants in Cobb/Douglas, Laurens, and Muscogee counties.

Results

An equitable number of participants were recruited and enrolled into UGA EFNEP when comparing Project DINE (n = 82) vs. non–research (n=109), with slightly more non–research participants recruited. Graduation rates were significantly higher with Project DINE graduates (67% vs. 38% non–research EFNEP). Regardless of graduation rates, UGA EFNEP graduates participated in similar number of sessions, and hours of EFNEP programming. Overall EFNEP graduation rate (Project DINE + non–research participants) was 51%.

Table

**Table: Project DINE and Non-Research UGA EFNEP Graduates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Project DINE Graduates (n = 82)</th>
<th>EFNEP Non-Research Graduates (n = 109)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>EFNEP Graduate = Completes at least 6 of 8 sessions</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Project DINE Graduates (n = 55)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFNEP Graduation Rate</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number Sessions for Graduates*</td>
<td>7.3/8</td>
<td>7.4/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Hours for Graduates</td>
<td>7.8 hours</td>
<td>7.7 hours</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

Community research partnerships positively affect UGA EFNEP graduation rates. More research is needed to explore specific relationships between graduation rates and factors such as research recruitment methods, financial incentives, and target populations. Further research could also highlight any differences in nutrition/health behaviors between research participants, such as in this study, Project DINE and usual programming, non–research UGA EFNEP participants.

Acknowledgments

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References