

## The Exploring Food Project: Pre-testing Messages for a Healthy Food Campaign

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### **Abstract**

The Community Transformation Grant Project (CTGP) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is interested in understanding and addressing barriers to accessing and purchasing healthy food among food decision-makers in communities of lower wealth. As part of the Exploring Food Project, this public service project uses a collaborative model to develop campaign messages and media content to promote healthy and local produce among populations living in Western North Carolina. Based on the common themes discovered through the community-based research, I worked with the Exploring Food team to develop campaign messages and a pretesting framework and tool. During pretesting, I obtained feedback from community members at various community sites to better understand their comprehension, appeal, and intent related to each of the draft messages and slogans for a social marketing campaign. At the time of drafting this abstract, we have collected data from sixteen individuals. Early responses indicate that the messages related to benefits of healthy food consumption for one's self and loved ones have the greatest impact on our population when making a purchasing decision. Based on the results, I will recommend how the Exploring Food team should proceed with the social marketing campaign. The Exploring Food Project ties together my studies and passions in the areas of sociology, nutrition, and food access. This real-life application of community-based research and assessment brings me insight on the hidden issues lower-wealth areas face when obtaining and valuing healthy food.

**Key Words: Community Health Assessment, Food Access, Pretested Marketing Campaign**

## Origins of the Project

Although there are many health benefits associated with eating fruits and vegetables, here in Western North Carolina members from communities of lower wealth report multiple barriers to purchasing and consuming healthy food (Larson, 2009). In North Carolina the Community Transformation Grant Project strives to increase the purchase and consumption of healthier foods, particularly fruits and vegetables through improving access to farmers markets and produce at convenience stores and other local outlets. In a survey conducted by Green Opportunities (GO!) of Asheville, only 3% of individuals from communities of lower wealth shop at farmers markets. “In response, researchers have focused on the environmental context of diet such as food access and availability, which can shape dietary habits. The impact of socio-economic factors such as race/ethnicity, income, employment and education on health and weight is well reported. For example, several studies show a relationship between lower economic status and poorer diet quality, higher prevalence of food insufficiency and higher obesity rates compared with individuals with higher socioeconomic status. Consumption of fruits and vegetables is also higher among people with higher socioeconomic status and education.” (Budzynska,2013).

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services’ Dietary guidelines for Americans, “Americans currently consume too much sodium and too many calories from solid fats, added sugars, and refined grains. These replace nutrient-dense foods and beverages and make it difficult for people to achieve recommended nutrient intake while controlling calorie and sodium intake.” (US Department of Agriculture) Green Opportunities (GO!) survey also revealed that many communities in the Western North Carolina area face large barriers in transportation and access to obtaining healthy food. “There are many neighborhoods and communities without access to supermarkets, with this being more likely for residents of rural, minority, and lower-income neighborhoods. For residents in these areas, convenience stores and other corner stores may be more common” (Rose, 2004). As Jacquineau Azétsop from BioMed Central states, “Lack of accessibility to healthy food is an important aspect of food insecurity, as good nutrition plays an important role in the optimal growth, development, health and well-being of individuals in all stages of life.” (Azétsop, 2013) With an unhealthy diet the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some types of cancer rise. With easy access to low-nutrient dense food, combined with lower prices, low-wealth communities have suffered higher rates of illnesses as well as large cost in medical coverage.

In May 2013, the Region 2 Community Transformation Grant Project team contracted with University of North Carolina Asheville to conduct community-based research to inform a social marketing campaign. The Exploring Food Project was created with the help of Dr. Ameena Batada from the University's Health and Wellness Promotion Program in order to develop campaign messages and channels to promote purchasing and consumption of healthy and local produce among populations living in Western North Carolina. The collaborative method of data collection provides a wide platform to explore and discover perceptions and habits of this population and in specific, those receiving Food and Nutrition Services (FNS). “Establishing the presence, nature, and implications of neighborhood differences in the physical availability of more- and less-healthy foods is necessary to properly inform the development of responsive

public health policies and interventions that may help reduce inequalities in health.” (Larson, 2009) Exploring Food is a multi-phase community-based and participatory communication project. The first two phases included a *Collaboration and Pilot Research* process and *Project Training and Data collection*. At the time I joined the Exploring Food Project team we were entering the third and final phase of the project -*Analysis and Translation into Action*. I entered this project with enthusiasm because the result of my efforts will lead to higher knowledge in the perceptions of eating healthy in local lower-wealth neighborhoods as well as offer recommendations for future healthy food marketing campaigns to the Department of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“The presence of strong residential segregation by income and race/ethnicity in the United States also suggests that the local food environment may contribute to socioeconomic and racial/ethnic differences in health.” (Moore, 2006). In other words, the economic class and majority of race within a neighborhood have a large impact on its population’s healthy behavior choices. Through a pre-test survey, I have gained insight from multiple neighborhoods on the internal factors that influence food decision makers as they purchase food for themselves and families. The Exploring Food Project is unique as the objective is to understand the perceptions and relationships that are held within lower wealth communities. I plan to use the knowledge I have gained to create recommendations for a healthy food campaign that is able to eliminate the barriers of unhealthy perceptions individuals in these communities face.

## **Methods and Work Undertaken**

Joining the Exploring Food Project team during the third phase of action I was first asked to understand the work that had already been accomplished in order to carry it on correctly. So far, my team had been primarily engaged primarily on cultivating relationships with community partner organizations and collecting and compiling data. The team soon realized that their collaborators enjoyed working directly with them as they collected data on demographics, food relationships and barriers in accessing and consuming healthy food. They developed six key themes to serve as the lens through which members of each community and neighborhood can examine their relationships with food. The themes are:

- Connections- how people connect with their food
- Conceptions- how people define terms such as “healthy” and “local”
- Barriers- what keeps people from purchasing healthy, local food
- Motivators- what motivates people to purchase healthy, local food
- Solutions- what strategies encourage people to eat healthy food
- Communication Channels- how people receive health information

Once I understood the themes and looked over the data collected by the team during phases one and two, I met with my professor Dr.Ameena Batada and Kevin Rumely, a former University of North Carolina Asheville student and project coordinator. We met to discuss my role in the project as well as brainstorm ideas, slogans and messages that would later be used for a pre-test social marketing campaign. From the analysis of data collected, the team had previously determined the three most common themes in their research that described peoples’ connections,

responsibility and strategies for a change towards healthy food. Specifically we discussed how each of these themes relate to the individual, their family and/or a spiritual connection. As Emily Kennedy wrote in her research, “It’s easy to grow out of touch with the meal, our food, and being present to our senses when we eat. Grab-and-go convenience foods that require no shopping for fresh produce, or cooking, detach us from the kitchen and the earth. We begin eating for all the wrong reasons, just to cope with life.” (Kennedy, 2014) I then understood my role to go out and talk with people to understand the perceptions and relationships held regarding healthy food in lower wealth communities.

After, I took the knowledge and ideas from brainstorming and organized a pre-test survey to take out into the community for discussion and feedback. The survey used was broken into three categories of specific slogans- connections, responsibility and strategies. Under each of these categories I tested the individual(s)'s comprehension, appeal and likelihood to change after hearing each possible slogan. The surveys were all completed in casual settings with me reading the questions aloud as they followed along on a hard-copy flip book that displayed each slogan printed out. Throughout all three sections of the survey, comprehension was tested by receiving feedback to the questions, “what would it make you think of?” and “what does it mean to you?”. This is where most of the data was collected as it was an organic process and the conversation led where the participant felt passionate. The appeal portion of each section was tested by asking the individual(s) to rate each slogan depending on how much they like it from 1-5, with 1 being not very much and 5 being a lot. When discussing the participants likelihood to change after hearing each slogan, I asked them to visualize a healthy choice as well as an unhealthy choice. I then asked them to listen to each slogan, think of the two choices and then score each of them from 1-5, with 1 being not at all likely the slogan would influence them to pick the healthier option and 5 being positive they would. After communicating through the three categories of slogans, I then asked four questions in order to gain a higher understanding of the wants and needs in the specific communities. They touched on the subjects of comparing prices of food choices, adding information about farmers markets on ART busses, adding local produce to convenience stores and whether an individual(s) is currently receiving food assistance. At the end of each survey, I privately recorded the demographics of each respondent by their gender, race and age.

At the time of creating the survey I also partnered with a UNCA New-Media major to create three graphics that relate and depict a select few of the slogans. However, with the length of the survey before adding the graphics to it, the Food Exploring Team decided to hold off on testing these currently.

Once the survey was ready for pretesting, I met with Kevin Rumely again to discuss contacting the community partner organizations that had worked with us in the past. Within the short timeline to complete this research, I was able to connect with four of the community organization leaders. Each leader individually invited me to join them at their community events, church services or come by their job site to acquire as many surveys as I could complete. In total, I was able to go out and survey six times. When I arrived to each of the on-site locations I was immediately welcomed and felt very comfortable starting conversations around me in order to complete the surveys. I consciously followed the guidelines that were given to me and did not interview anyone under the age of eighteen, and tried to collect as many surveys as I could from

the population of individuals who are the food purchaser and preparers in their households. I did not find resistance in finding people to sit down with me one-on-one or in a group to talk through my questions. Although all of the surveys completed had a demographic of “non-white” in the race portion, I purposely diversified my sample population by selecting participants in all ages and both genders. While talking with each individual(s) I lead the conversation without hindering or altering any of their already based perceptions on healthy food. I used active listening and open-ended questions in order to gain as much feedback and information as they were willing to share. I feel I made true connections with not just select individuals but within each community.

After pretesting as many surveys as time allowed, I entered the data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in order to analyze what I had collected. Please refer to the “Results” section below for specific information on the analysis. Upon the deadline of this report, I feel I have still more to learn from these communities and I plan to continue my work throughout the summer in order to complete phase three. I have meeting times set with community partners to continue surveying with them after the deadline of this paper. Eventually, I plan to create recommendations to be used when planning healthy food campaigns and new infrastructure.

### **Ties to Academia**

As a Health and Wellness Promotion major, I have been able to connect my academic courses and experiences in the community to my role on the Exploring Food Project Team. My required coursework in Nutrition and Physiology has provided knowledge on the human body and what it means to eat healthy. This information was invaluable as I discussed with the survey participants about their choices and what they perceive as “healthy”. For example, through my Nutrition course I learned the science of food and I was able to explain to participants what technically makes a food “healthy”. The course Health Promotion Theory and Practice encouraged me to be an active force in my community, and offered information and tools on how to proceed. The course discussed techniques to plan programs and implement projects in the community that provide education or fulfill a community health need. I used my studies through my role as I completed the needs assessment, community-based research, analyzed data and designed a pretest social marketing campaign. I learned how the determinants of a community, such as the level of social justice, societal resources and physical environment, can impact the individual within. Through my project I got the opportunity to explore my course work hands on, and experience how a community can alter perceptions and actions towards healthy behaviors.

Through my liberal arts education and sociology minor, I have taken related courses such as Contemporary Social Problems, Social and Cultural Inquiry, and Society, Culture and Poverty. I learned in these classes about the inequality of resources through economic class in the United States and specifically in the lack of access to healthy food. “The high cost of nutrient-rich foods, inadequate SNAP benefits, limited access to purchasing healthy foods, and environmental factors associated with poverty were identified as barriers that influence nutrition among low-income households in the United States.” (Leung, 2013). My studies in sociology taught me economic, political, and sociological factors that continue to perpetuate food insecurity and allow little opportunity for change. With the knowledge I have gained on the sociological factors behind poverty, I am passionate to work towards change in the health of low-wealth communities.

I find I have learned the most in my education at University of North Carolina Asheville through the hands-on experiences I have gained in the community. Through six service learning classes and internships, I have gained real-world experience, learned about myself and understood the importance of public health. Working with partner organizations, I have learned the importance of organization, flexibility and professionalism. I strive to make connections with the partners I work with in order to create good relations for the university and myself. Through these connections I have learned my strengths and weaknesses as well as my likes and dislikes. In specific, I learned I prefer to work with people and organize events than analyze research. The Exploring Food Project gave me new learning experiences and highlighted the importance of public health and promotion. While completing this research, I recalled back to my academic information and it connected me too the importance of health and how it can truly affect every aspect of my life.

### **Challenges Faced and Responses to those Challenges**

The most challenging barrier I faced while working on this project, was the short amount of time allowed to complete the work. First I had to do the preparation work before I could survey. This took a few weeks to complete, as I had to understand previously collected data, have multiple meetings with my team to brainstorm, and then organize and produce the survey as well as optional graphics. As I came onto the project late, I then had to connect with the existing community partners and find events and times that I could survey. Only half of the partners responded to my email, and most times available to survey were past the deadline of the project so that left me with just a few options. With spring break and a few rained out events, I was only able to make it out to survey five times, but this was not from lack of trying. Throughout this project I continually tried to contact partners and organize my work load so I could stay a week ahead on my tasks. Although I did not complete my task of creating the recommendations prior to the writing of this paper, I plan to continue surveying and completing the tasks this project requires.

Another large challenge for me was writing this report. I have multiple learning disabilities related to writing, and I have never been comfortable expressing my understandings through written words. My Dyslexia and Attention Deficit Disorder make writing papers a very long, tedious process that can last as long as an hour per paragraph. I am passionate about the work that I did and the lessons I have gained through this experience, yet I feel I cannot convey them accurately in a research paper. Although this is true, I am grateful for the opportunity to improve my writing and challenge myself to something I once thought was beyond my capacity. I understand that writing will always be a challenge in my life, but also that it is inevitable in the business world and I cannot just avoid it. To complete this report I finished all other school related-work weeks in advance in order to block off seven consecutive days to organize, write, and edit. I first read other examples from the University's key center, brainstormed section outlines and then wrote multiple drafts. I sat down friends, my professor and a student in the campus writing center to talk through issues they see and receive feedback on how to improve. The Exploring Food Project made me see clearly that my strengths do not lie in writing but in organizing, verbal communication and flexibility.

## Results

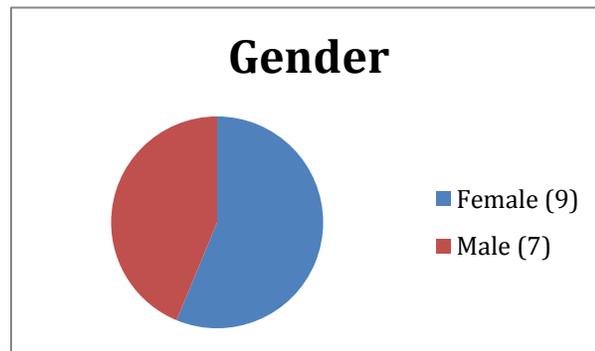
### Method of Data Analysis

At the time of writing this report, sixteen surveys were completed. Broken up into the three categories of connections, responsibility and strategies, the slogans listed below have been pre-tested for a future marketing campaign that will promote purchasing and consumption of healthy and local produce among low-wealth populations living in Western North Carolina. Each slogan was tested for comprehension, appeal and likelihood to choose the healthier option after exposure. This analysis includes the average rank of all survey participants (1-5) in appeal and likelihood, as well as key themes and perceptions arisen from feedback and discussion. I will also discuss the feedback received on the importance of price and healthy food, adding Farmers Market information to city transportation, and ways to promote healthy eating in low-wealth areas.

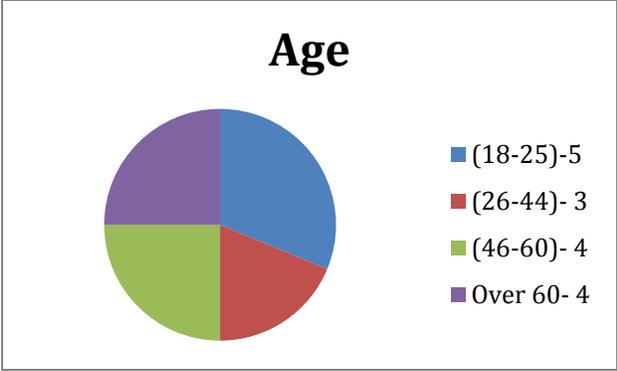
### Demographic of survey participants

Total Number of Participants- 16

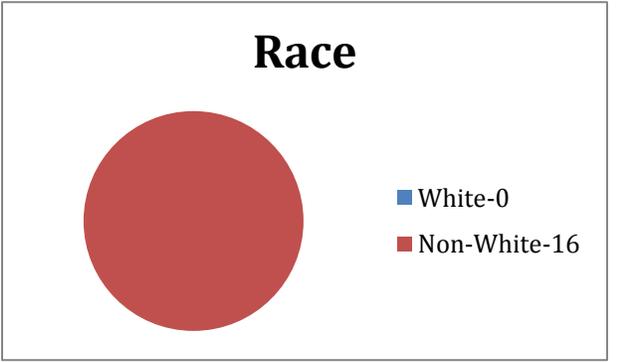
- Gender
  - Female-9
  - Male-7



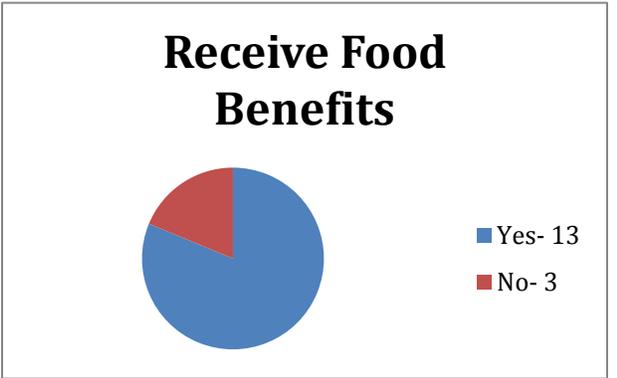
- Age
  - (18-25)- 5
  - (26-44)-3
  - (45-60)- 4
  - Over 60- 4



- Race
  - White-0
  - Non-white-16



- Receive food assistance or benefits
  - Yes-13
  - No- 3



**Connections**

Pre-tested Slogan	Rate of Appeal	Rate of likelihood to change after exposure	Combined average of appeal and likelihood to change
Reconnect with your	3.6	3.25	3.42

food			
Reconnecting with your food is reconnecting with your spirit	3.9	3.3	3.6
Reconnecting with your food is reconnecting with your family	3.4	3.4	3.4
Reconnecting with your food is reconnecting with your children	3.75	2.8	3.275
Reconnecting with your food is reconnecting with your self	4.1	4.1	4.1
Connecting to Mother Earth	3.1	3.1	3.1
Reunited and it feels so good	2.5	2.4	2.45
<b>Average of all-</b>	3.47	3.19	3.3

The following information is concluded through the comprehension portion of the pretested survey-

- *Reconnect with your food-*  
This slogan arose past memories of childhood home-cooked meals. Much of the older population discussed their mother's recipes and how they grew up with family fellowship at meal time. Others mentioned connecting with food through gardening and the experience they get when growing their own food.
- *Reconnecting with your food is reconnecting with your spirit-*  
Six respondents did not connect how food and spirit are related. Others mentioned ways they feel growth spiritually through healthy food decisions such as their physical health, meditation and gardening, and through biblical practices. The feedback received on this slogan was very sporadic with little synchrony in comprehension.
- *Reconnecting with your food is reconnecting with your family-*  
This slogan's feedback was divided into three categories of comprehension. Five respondents stated they cannot connect to this wording because they do not eat with their families often due to altering schedules or hold no value in its importance. A male aged

18-25 stated, “I do not eat with my family, never have. No one has time for that anymore”. Six respondents found this slogan to be true as many discussed the importance of family mealtime and the impact it has made on them personally and in family dynamics. The last five respondents were all from Rock Hill Baptist church and make up the third category of response to be fellowship. A quote from *Food and Christianity* states “We contribute food wisdom and, in small ways, food itself to our communities” (Echlin, 2014). This summarizes the feedback gained through this slogan as they view food as secondary to the company during consumption. This includes the nuclear family as well as the family through god. A women commented “Food is used to spread love, good nutrients, and health to all the people I love. I do this at my house, church and wherever God will allow me to spread his gifts.”

- *Reconnecting with your food is reconnecting with your children-*  
 Much of the feedback suggested that this slogan would not influence a decision when purchasing or consuming healthy food. Some state their children do not like healthy food and they will not make their choices for them. A mother of three children stated, “I don't eat meat because I don't trust the amount of hormones used and the production process. However, I do feed it to my kids. I let them make their own choices”. Others agreed that providing healthy nutrients to their children is important because they want the best for them in the long run; however, there was no comment or response on how this decision “connects” them to their family.
- *Reconnecting with your food is reconnecting with your self-*  
 Only two survey respondents did not understand the value of this statement. With the highest approval rate in the “connections” category, feedback suggests that this slogan creates a strong reaction to this population. The common perception was that consuming healthy food leads to better physical strength, mind/body wellness and soulful connection. Many feel the connections with their food every day as they purchase, prepare and consume it. After reading this slogan many respondents told personal stories of how food has affected their health in both positive and negative ways. Whether the slogan created positive or negative memories for each respondent, they connected food and themselves for that moment.
- *Connecting with Mother Earth-*  
 The common response to the slogan was to think of gardening and plant based foods. Although this was an immediate connection to growing your own food, many did not connect it to their daily food decisions. A male in the 18-25 age group discussed how the term “Mother Earth” is new-agey and they cannot connect to all the “hippy-types” in Asheville.
- *Reunited and it feels so good-*  
 Only the youngest respondents connected this slogan to food choice. One commented. “Yeah, I would like to be reunited with some chicken wings!” All respondents over the age of 26 showed no connection to healthy food decisions but to the Peaches Herb 1980’s hit.

**Responsibility**

Pre-tested Slogan	Rate of Appeal	Rate of likelihood to	Combined average
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		<b>change after exposure</b>	<b>of appeal and likelihood to change</b>
Eat Healthy for you	4.5	4.5	4.5
Your family will thank you	4.4	4.4	4.4
Your body will thank you	4.6	4.5	4.55
Your children will thank you	4.5	4.8	4.65
Healthy options are everywhere	2.8	3.5	3.15
Know where your food comes from	4.9	4.8	4.85
<b>Average of all-</b>	4.3	4.4	4.35

- *Eat healthy for you-*  
The respondents who showed no connection to this slogan stated that they were raised on processed foods so they do not see any benefits. Most respondents however agreed that there are many benefits to eating a healthy diet which can be shown through physical abilities, longevity of life and good feelings. A woman stated that “Eating healthy is personal responsibility and it is a learned skill to understand what is truly healthy”. Discussion then followed how the word “healthy” is used to often in the food industry for people to really understand what is nutritional optimal.
- *Your family will thank you-*  
Once respondents looked deeper into the slogan than the taste of food, many agreed that in the long run their family will thank them. “They may not verbally thank me while I give it to them, but their actions so the food did its job”, stated a mother of four. “Maybe when they are older and don't have all the sickness and disease that come with a bad diet”, stated another participant. The common theme was with a serving healthy food to your family there is more time together in the end of life and ultimately you are helping your loved ones.
- *Your body will thank you-*  
Multiple survey respondents suggested that this slogan has already been used for a marketing campaign and it is overused. However, there was a strong theme of connection to it as people could relate personally the improvements a healthy diet can make on their bodies. A younger male stated “I can tell when I eat good because I feel strong and my body feels less sluggish”. The personal relationship each individual has with their body connects them to this slogan.
- *Your children will thank you-*  
The feedback from the respondents with children varied. Some stated that their children do not thank them; they would rather have a less healthy option. However, one woman stated this is statement is true to her because of her age. With all her children parents of their own the now thank her for teaching them good choices as well as making their bodies strong and healthy. She told me, “They used to hate it! Now they are all calling me for healthy recipes to cook for their

children.”

- *Healthy options are everywhere-*

The immediate response to this slogan was that it is a lie. A large theme throughout all the feedback in surveys was distrust in the food industry. Due to little access to supermarkets and economical restrictions much of their food is bought from convenient stores and cheap fast food restaurants. A woman commented, “McDonalds has all these “healthy” choices but they still have as many calories and processed items, I might as well but the cheaper option- they are probably the same nutrition wise!” Multiple examples from the feedback show that labeling on packaging and vague terms such as “healthy” do not hold a significant value.

- *Know where your food comes from-*

This slogan was agreed upon by all respondents as important and valuable the feedback supported the idea that people would like to know where their food comes from, however one woman described the barrier to fully understand. “That’s what I believe but to truly understand this you would have to research each stage in production for all ingredients. This is just too overwhelming for people.” She brings up the point that the only way a person can truly know their food’s origins is by growing it themselves. She believes that in a community with no education of nutrition, people will choose to ignore the harmful effects of packaged food as they do not know better.

## Strategies

Pre-Tested Slogan	Rate of Appeal	Rate of likelihood to change after exposure	Combined average of appeal and likelihood to change
When life’s hard, make the easy decision	2.5	3.2	2.85
Eat what is real	4.2	4.4	4.3
The easiest decision you will make today	2.9	2.7	2.8
<b>Average of all-</b>	3.2	3.4	3.3

- *When life’s hard, make the easy decision-*

Many people simply laughed at this slogan as it seemed silly in context to healthy food. A respondent stated “food is never an easy choice, it's like eating money”. In specific, it was mentioned that it is easier to choose an unhealthy choice because it is local and cheap. “Supermarkets, as compared to other food stores, tend to offer the greatest variety of high-quality products at the lowest cost. In contrast, convenience stores sell mostly prepared, high-calorie foods and little fresh produce, at higher prices.” (Larson, 2009)

- *Eat what is real-*

Feedback indicates this slogan was popular because it is simple and individuals can connect to it in different ways. The word “real” was picked apart in this data as garden grown vegetables, non-processed foods and food fuels the body. Because the word is perceived differently by each individual there was also distrust shown by some who

asked what “real” meant. A male stated, “With everything pumped with chemicals and processed crap, I don't know what is real anymore.”

- The easiest decision you will make today-

This slogan showed very little positive reactions. Many stated that money is first priority in their lives and “easy decisions” do not relate to food choices.

### **Feedback and Analysis of open-ended questions**

Due to a time limit three survey participants did not answer these questions-

1. If we were going to show comparisons of prices for healthier snacks, such as an apple, versus a less healthy snack, such as a fruit roll-up, would knowing that the apple (or healthier item) is cheaper encourage you to choose it?

- Yes-6
- No-7
- Why? Only two respondents showed no concern to nutritional value of their food regardless of price. The other answers were mixed but all had the common theme that money determines purchasing option. A man stated, “I have a family, so I am going to buy whatever feeds all of them.” Another women mentioned, “If I am able to buy the healthier option I always do so”. With a constant struggle just to eat and feed a family on a budget many respondents felt that health is secondary to hunger.

2. What do you think about putting signs for farmers markets on ART buses? Would they encourage you to go to the farmers market?

- Yes-11
- No-2

Why? One of the respondents who answered no stated, “No One goes to those places, CVS has chips for 99¢”. All other eleven respondents were enthusiastic about this suggestion as they feel it could make a large impact. A younger male commented, “The busses are a community, people ride them all day, with the information shown over and over, I’m sure they will go”. However, while discussing this question I heard more barriers than reasons why they would go. The perception held is that farmers markets are expensive and they do not accept EBT cards. Many expressed that they would like to go to them but have no idea how, where or what times.

- What kinds of information do you think the signs should include?  
The automatic response was the bus route numbers, times, dates, and locations. One woman did offer more however when she discussed the multiple farmers markets she goes to and how they do accept food assistance. She suggested listing these on the signs as well. This link is direct access to this information-  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ebt/learn-about-snap-benefits-farmers-markets>

3. If your local convenience store or gas station started offering more fresh fruits and vegetables or there was a new farmers market located near you, how do you think we should let people know?

“Much of the literature on U.S. food access disparities has described African-American or low-income areas as having little to no access to supermarkets and greater access to other store types, like small corner groceries.” (Bordor, 2010) With little options known for alternatives, the Exploring food team desires to know what the most effective way is for sharing this information. Flyers and personal contact within the communities was a key theme in these findings. Many

stated that this survey was an example of how to create conversation and possible action. With a lot of distrust for the food industry, respondents suggested having farmers and growers come out and introduce themselves. For the population in lower-wealth communities to step out of their comfort zone at a farmers market, many would like to see that they are welcomed.

Would it get you excited to buy more fruits and vegetables if you saw billboards or signs advertising these new changes?

Respondents were enthusiastic about having a campaign specifically targeted at them. It was suggested to use wording such as “locally grown”, “natural” and “affordable” to attract attention. These words have positive influence on this surveys participants as distrust is high in food producers and big business.

### **Recommendations**

- *Top three slogans:*  
Know where your food comes from  
Your body will thank you  
Eat what is real
  
- *Pre-tested wording to use:*  
Natural  
Locally grown  
Affordable  
Community

Due to the preliminary data collected during the first two phases of the Exploring Food Project, the survey pre-tested slogans categorized by connection, responsibility and strategies. I divided them as such in purpose to determine which category of messages people respond the best to. The numbers above clearly show the “Responsibility” group of messages has a higher rate of appeal as well as a much higher chance of effecting a purchasing decision. I recommend using slogans from this group because survey participants understood the consequences of consuming unhealthy foods. They knew this chooses affects the long run of life which weighs heavily on populations with high rates of chronic illness and early morbidity. Even if they did not personally value physical health and healthy foods, they understood the decision to purchase and consume healthy food is a personal responsibility.

The “Connections” group of slogans had a mixed response from the surveyed population. The participants who ranked these slogans high were educated on the importance of nutrition and in many cases had been eating healthy for many years. They liked these messages because they connect with their food daily through activities such as gardening, family meal time and trying new healthy recipes. This group of participants was excited to talk about the value of nutrition in their food and how they try to share it with their community. The group of participants that ranked these slogans low also discussed how they do not connect with their food and seemed confused at the thought of it. Many used examples on how they disconnect with their food such as buying chips for .99 cents just to fill their stomach. Most of these survey respondents did not do activities such as gardening, family meal time or trying new foods as they feel they are too busy. There was a large theme of distrust in packaged food so for them there is no difference in chips or a processed banana- they both carry harmful substances. I recommend using the

“Connections” messaging for populations that are previously educated on the importance of healthy food rather than the general population in lower wealth communities.

The “Strategies” portion of the survey had unison of results from all participants. Most agreed the easiest decision of daily life very rarely had to do with healthy food choices. With money needed for housing, clothes and survival expenses they stated it is not easy to grocery shop for cheap healthy options. A woman stated, “For my family to eat healthy I would have to travel across town and buy half the amount of food because it is so expensive”. I would recommend not using the words “easiest choice” in campaign messaging as the low wealth population perceives this as “spending five dollars at the local CVS to feed the whole family”. However within the “Strategies” category, the message “Eat what’s real” received high ratings. This message is recommended to be used because it is simple and perceived positive by most.

## **Sustainability**

The work done through the Exploring Food Project is sustainable through a tangible product of healthy food campaign recommendations targeted at Western North Carolina’s lower wealth communities. Unfortunately the Community Transformation Grant funds will be cut as of September, 2014. However the Exploring Food Project team plans to continue this project through summer 2014 and complete the recommendations. In the coming months, I will be able to work with more community organizations and complete a larger sample size of surveys. Once I have collected as many surveys as possible, I plan to work with a professional graphic designer to create images that will relate to the slogans and messages previously tested. My understanding of the perceptions and relationships regarding healthy food within lower wealth communities will allow me to design the campaign logo and marketing materials. I will then create a packet of healthy food marketing campaign recommendations for the Department of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to use as a reference as they design their own campaigns and new infrastructure.

## **Conclusion**

The Exploring Food Project was designed in collaboration with University of North Carolina Asheville and the Community Transformation Grant. This project utilizes a collaborative model to develop campaign messages and channels to promote purchasing and consumption of healthy and local produce among low-wealth communities in Western North Carolina. My role included organizing a survey for pre-testing, contact, communicate and meet with community partners, and analyzing the feedback received. Both my academic and community work experience was used throughout my project in order to understand the value of the information collected. This project allowed me to relate my studies to real life examples in the importance of health promotion and the reality of health disparities. Although the short time allowance for completion kept me from receiving as much feedback as originally hoped, I made real connections to the individuals and organizations in Asheville’s community. The work I have done so far underlines the perceptions held in low-wealth communities about healthy food choices and what wording, slogans and concepts is most effective when designing a marketing campaign. This report is only

the starting point for a packet of recommendations that the Department of Disease Control and Prevention will receive. I have enjoyed my time working on understanding the perceptions held by communities that are overlooked when advertising healthy food.

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