



United States Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture

NUTRITION EDUCATION: EFNEP CALL TO CONVERSATION

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SUMMARY:

Changing demographics of nutrition insecure families, an increasing number of Americans at or below the poverty line, and burgeoning educational technologies are presenting new challenges and opportunities for nutrition education programs. For this reason, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) implemented a Calls to Conversation series, which gathered key stakeholders to address nutrition education in a changing America, specifically the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

The first Call to Conversation was held June 14 – 15, 2017 in St. Louis, Missouri. Sixty-four stakeholders, representing the EFNEP audience and frontline staff, program and university leadership, and federal, state, and organizational partners met to begin a discussion of how to efficiently and effectively scale up nutrition education efforts to expand program reach, while also maintaining its high rate of return. Participants were charged to think long-term – “Having nearly 50 years of experience with EFNEP, and knowing what we know, if we were to start with a blank slate, what should programming look like in 30 years?” From this meeting came a [C2C Nutrition-Education Report Sept 27 2017](#) and [Executive Summary Nutrition Education 27 September 2017](#), which were used to inform further discussion.

The second Call to Conversation was held on October 31 – November 1, 2017 in Washington, D.C. A working group of 15 attendees, representing key audiences of the EFNEP community, further explored the question “What should EFNEP programming look like in 30 years?” The purpose of this second conversation was for attendees to discuss necessary actions to address the future needs of EFNEP. Over the course of two days, attendees worked through a series of exercises to develop a response by establishing:

- Recommended actions required for future EFNEP programming, including continued use of well evaluated peer-educator based programming; funding to develop technological approaches and delivery strategies; and equitable funding levels for different types of land-grant universities and colleges, which would allow EFNEP to be seen as the leader among healthy eating and active living programs.
- Goals with defined outcomes to greatly expand EFNEP reach, maintain high program impacts and positive return on investment, alignment with other programs for collective nutritional health impacts, and adoption of strategies to meet demographic, social, and technological change, which should be pursued in coordination with other public and private partners.

INTRODUCTION

EFNEP, a national nutrition education program of Cooperative Extension, is funded through NIFA, and operates within the larger context of existing non-profit, public, and federal nutrition education programs. EFNEP provides a high positive return on investment determined by contemporary research and accountability reporting ([EFNEP Research and Cost Benefit Studies](#) and [EFNEP reports](#)). Consistently, annual data indicates that more than 90 percent of adult EFNEP participants report improved behaviors following participation in the program. Although research is limited, there is some evidence that improved behaviors are sustained ([EFNEP Research Database](#)). Since 1969, the program has reached 33 million low income families and youth, and taught ways to enhance their health by improving their nutrition, food safety, and physical activity practices.

Although EFNEP continues to have a high return on investment, changes in the national context call for new focused approaches to remain relevant and reach intended audiences. In a 2017 study, the Economic Research Service showed that 50 million households in America are food insecure. About 3 million households have children that are intensely food insecure ([Economic Research Report No. ERR-237, September 2017](#)). The nation is also facing the dilemma of chronic disease due to food quality. In the U.S. 1.3 billion Americans take daily doses of Lipitor for cholesterol, baby Aspirin for heart disease, Metformin for type II diabetes, and other medications for hypertension. One in five adults take those drugs for normalcy. Additionally, demographics in America are changing. People migrating to this country are coming from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The face of poverty that used to be predominantly African-American, Native-American or Hispanic-American is also increasing. According to a Health and Human Services 2016 report, there are still tens of millions of people living in poverty post-recession ([Poverty in the United States: 50-Year Trends and Safety Net Impacts, March 2016](#)).

EFNEP was founded in the 1960s as part of the war on poverty and has morphed throughout the years to meet the needs of low income audiences. Periodically, the program has realigned to meet changes in the nation at the time. Examples are the movement from individual to group settings as people spent less time in their homes, and the inclusion of 1890 land-grant institutions along with 1862 land-grant institutions in delivering the program. As EFNEP approaches its 50th anniversary, it faces a very different socio-economic, demographic, technological, and learning environment across all states and U.S. territories. Additionally, what constitutes success needs to be revisited. For example, success to Native Americans in the Southwest may be different from the Somali population in Minneapolis, from the Burmese population in Portland, from African Americans in Louisiana, and from White Americans in the Appalachians. Further, EFNEP was not available through 1890 institutions – a key source of access to the target population – even 15 years ago. For these reasons, a conversation was convened and questions were asked to define changes needed for EFNEP's future:

- How do we make sure EFNEP is effective – are we delivering on the promises made?
- Is EFNEP efficient – are we deploying program resources in the most efficient manner?
- Are all involved partners held accountable for EFNEP's success?
- What does success look like?

- How do we continue to scale-up EFNEP while also retaining its high return on investment?
- Are we being equitable?

PROCESS

First Call to Conversation

The first EFNEP Call to Conversation was held in St. Louis, Missouri, on June 14-15, 2017 and was hosted by Lincoln University and the University of Missouri-Columbia. Sixty four diverse stakeholders representing the EFNEP audience and frontline staff, program and university leadership, and federal, state, and organizational partners were charged with thinking long-term about what programming should look like over the next 30 years by responding to the following questions:

- Who in the target audience would not be served if EFNEP remains the same in 2047 – 30 years from now?
- What do we need to do to reach these audiences, given efficiently used commensurate resources?
- What barriers and challenges exist for making needed changes, and how might these be overcome?
- What is the role of partners – who are potential partners, why are partnerships important, and what are the mutual benefits in having partnerships?
- What are your recommendations for the future of nutrition education?

Following the session other EFNEP program and university leadership were also invited to respond to these questions via the NIFA website at <https://nifa.usda.gov/nifa-calls-conversation-meeting-series>. Thirteen additional responses were received, representing both individual and collective thinking. An analysis of all responses was conducted and a [C2C Nutrition-Education Report Sept 27 2017](#) and [Executive Summary Nutrition Education 27 September 2017](#) were prepared to inform the second conversation. Respondents to the first conversation mainly addressed the “who” and “why” aspects of the dilemma.

Second Call to Conversation

The second EFNEP Call to Conversation was held in Washington DC, on October 31 – November 1, 2017 and was hosted by the University of the District of Columbia. Fourteen attendees from the first Call to Conversation and one website respondent who represented the EFNEP community participated. This two-day conversation was divided into exercises to not only determine what EFNEP should look like in 30 years, but also develop a framework for success and consider how to scale-up the program for long-term success.

What should EFNEP programming look like in 30 years?

Workshop participants were asked to reflect on the question “how to efficiently and effectively scale up the program to expand reach while maintaining the program’s high rate of return.” They were instructed to individually reflect on the conversation discussed in the first EFNEP Call to Conversation and to establish additional ideas. Then they shared their ideas with the group and placed each idea into one of the following

categories: affirmations, gaps, trends, themes, and interesting outliers. Group discussion took place and attendees voted on each idea by writing a star on those they deemed most significant.

Defining Success: Development of a Framework

Each participant recorded three words to describe EFNEP in 30 years. These words were analyzed to develop a framework to define success. This framework informed the creation of potential goals, outcomes, and strategies to guide the future of EFNEP. Critical components of success include:

- Efficiency
- Effectiveness
- Accountability
- Scale alignment
- Return on investment
- Equity

How to Scale up EFNEP for 30 More Successful Years

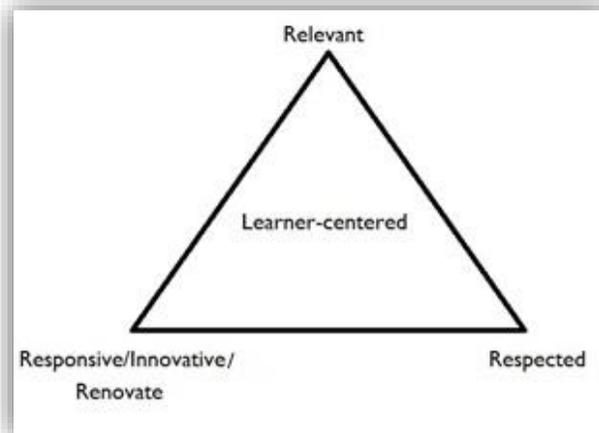
Participants then placed their ideas into one of four categories: greatly expanded reach, maintaining high program impacts and positive return on investment, alignment with other programs for collective nutritional health impacts, and adoption of strategies to meet demographic, social, and technological change. Attendees determined goals for each category and posed possible outcomes to reach each goal. Attendees further notated strategies to accomplish each outcome. Throughout the Call to Conversation process, the web portal mentioned on page 3 has remained open for comments.

OUTCOMES

What should EFNEP programming look like in 30 years?

- **Affirmation**
 - Focuses on outcome-based evaluation and reporting
 - Uses peer-educators as nutrition educators
- **Gap**
 - Supports funds to develop and test technological approaches, and research dollars to test new delivery strategies
- **Trend**
 - Funds 1862, 1890, and 1994 institutions at equitable levels to address demands for the program
- **Theme**
 - Is seen as the leader among healthy eating and active living programs through program outcomes and research findings
- **Interesting Outlier**
 - Carries out policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) work through peer educators and professional staff

Defining Success: Development of a Framework*



**Developed from analysis and categorization of participants' "three words" exercise to define success of EFNEP in 30 years*

How to Scale up EFNEP for 30 More Successful Years

Greatly expand reach

- **Goal** | Equity of service so that where one lives does not determine access to EFNEP.
 - Outcome 1 | Institutions are funded equitably through a changed funding model that addresses shifts in demand for the program. The model would also include how funds can be utilized to support scaled up outreach.
 - Outcome 2 | Culturally appropriate strategies, staff, and materials are in place to meet the increasing diversity of audiences.
 - Outcome 3 | EFNEP is promoted and recognized as a preventive nutrition education program to improve health of communities, and to benefit businesses through worksite wellness, decreased health care costs, and decreased absenteeism in the workplace.
- **Goal** | Program alignment with audience learning styles and preferences.
 - Outcome 1 | Develop a new definition for lesson, series, and dosage using a variety of educational strategies – online, self-paced lessons, face-to-face experiences, social media, texts, etc.
 - Outcome 2 | Research methodologies and funding exist to improve program implementation effectiveness.

Maintain high program impacts and positive return on investment

- **Goal** | EFNEP is a premier USDA healthy eating, active living program with high impact and cost effectiveness to ensure accountability.
 - Outcome 1 | EFNEP has a reliable national model for cost effectiveness evaluation conducted at a national, regional, and/or state level, which is replicated every five years to measure program accountability and impact.

- Outcome 2 | EFNEP achieves strong program fidelity through efficient national program implementation standards that are informed by relevant research.
- Outcome 3 | EFNEP participants demonstrate improvements in nutritional health outcomes, food security, and quality of life.

Align with other programs for collective nutritional health impacts

- **Goal** | National nutritional health outcomes align across agencies and organizations.
 - Outcome 1 | Common outcomes exist across programs to increase effectiveness.
 - Outcome 2 | Organizational roles and strengths for each agency/organization are understood and applied to increase efficiency and effectiveness.
 - Outcome 3 | Common measures are utilized to ensure documented outcomes and accountability in reaching program goals.

Adopt strategies to meet demographic, social, and technological change

- **Goal** | Provide innovative education solutions encompassing PSE approaches to nutrition to meet societal and demographic needs of limited resource audiences and related food, dietary, and health outcomes.
 - Outcome 1 | Reach to new target audiences increases by 50 percent.
 - Outcome 2 | Use of technological strategies identified in policy documents increases through partnerships and collaboration.
 - Outcome 3 | Evidence base is more substantive, relevant, and specific to the target audience served through the inclusion of pilot projects to demonstrate new education solutions.

CONCLUSION

America faces the challenge of high nutritional insecurity. EFNEP must stay current with the growing and changing demands of the nation to stay relevant efficient, and effective. Through the Call to Conversation process, EFNEP stakeholders identified needs and opportunities and determined key program changes to implement. These proposed changes will help focus future program direction and lead to positive long-term outcomes for the low-income populations served by EFNEP.

Appendix: Groups represented in EFNEP Calls to Conversation

Frontline – former program participants, peer educators, and local supervisors

Children's Mercy Hospital and Clinics
Colorado State University Extension
Cornell Cooperative Extension
Lincoln University Cooperative Extension
Ohio State University Extension
Pennsylvania State University Extension
Tennessee State University Extension
University of Arizona Cooperative Extension
University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension
University of California, Extension
University of Kentucky
University of Maryland, College Park
Utah State University

State Level Program Leadership (Coordinators and Directors)

Auburn University
*Colorado State University
*Cornell University
*North Carolina State University
Prairie View A&M University
*Tennessee State University
University of Guam
University of Vermont
Washington State University
*West Virginia State University

State Level Extension/University Leadership

Kansas State University
Lincoln University
*Louisiana State University
North Carolina State A&T University
Prairie View A&M University
*Purdue University
South Carolina State University

Texas A&M Agrilife
*The Ohio State University
*University of Alaska
*University of Illinois
University of Florida
University of Maryland, College Park
University of Missouri, Columbia
University of Tennessee
*University of Wyoming
Board on Human Sciences
Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP)

Other Universities/Colleges

Bay Mills Community College (1994)
Teachers College Columbia University
*United Tribes Technical College (1994)

Program Partners (Federal, State, Private/Non-Profit, and Professional Associations)

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Association of SNAP Nutrition Education Administrators (ASNNA)
Food and Nutrition Board, National Academy of Sciences
*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Missouri Department of Health – WIC
North Carolina Division of Public Health
Partnership for a Healthier America
Share Our Strength
USDA - Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion
USDA - Agricultural Research Service
*USDA Food and Nutrition Service

In a few cases, more than one person from a single institution was invited. In such cases the institution is only listed once.

*Includes organizations represented at both the first and second Calls to Conversation.