**Purpose and Process**

The Community PSE (Policy, Systems, and Environmental change) Exploration Guide (the Guide) helps organizations better understand the communities they serve, builds organization capacity to make informed decisions for future PSE efforts, strengthens the foundation to improve health equity. “The Guide” is the electronic or hard copy of the materials (the Overview plus Steps 1, 2, and 3). “The Process” are the activities you and your team engage in while using the Guide.

The exploration Process focuses on uncovering PSE needs and deepening community engagement to increase the impact of your work. It is adaptable and flexible recognizing that your community’s assets, history, and challenges are unique. The exploration Process will help you answer questions like “What does the community need right now,” “What can SNAP-Ed do to help meet those needs,” and “How can we better align efforts to sustain these changes.”

The Community PSE Exploration Guide is made up of three steps:

1. **Community Discovery,** which includes gathering community information;
2. **Community Conversation and Prioritization**, which includes synthesizing the information and identifying priority strategies based on community needs; and
3. **Action Planning**, which informs future direction and clearly articulates action steps and outcomes.

This three-step Process follows best practices. The Guide also provides resources to assist in completing each step. If you have existing data, relationships, and/or relevant resources, that information can be utilized. And while some information can be found online, the exploration is meant to take you into the community.

Forming a team to complete this Process is integral to success. You are strongly encouraged to bring together a trusted and diverse group of committed partners and stakeholders to share responsibilities and insights that emerge from the PSE exploration Process. One of the best ways to improve health equity is through intentional and formal community-driven partnerships with invested partners who lead and support the steps. For the team to function well, it is important to set clear expectations and roles along with a realistic timeline.

You will complete Steps 1, 2, and 3 for each community you decide to work with on PSE. Each step has its own worksheet to help you complete the exploration activities, and each step builds on the previous ones. Review all the materials before you begin to help you understand the Process you and your team will be undertaking.

**Timeline**

The time it takes to complete each step will vary by community and depends on a variety of factors such as pre-existing assessments, the level of stakeholder engagement, and preceding PSE efforts. For most teams, this Process can be completed in a year—Step 1 (Community Discovery) takes four to six months, Step 2 (Community Conversation and Prioritization) takes three months, and Step 3 (Action Planning) takes about three months.

**STEP 1 — Community Discovery**

**Refer to the document Step 1 - Community Discovery**

In this step your team will explore various components of a community’s context and gather community information. The worksheets include guiding questions teams will answer about their community. When completing the worksheets, list ideas, notes, and answers collected. Refer to the Resources section of this Guide for additional guidance.

An effective discovery process requires that you and your team talk with community organizations, program participants, and other community members. Once the Community Discovery worksheets are complete, teams will have enough information to confidently move into Step 2: Community Conversation and Prioritization.

*Please note that each community has its own unique context; therefore, not all questions may be relevant for each community. If a question doesn’t apply to your community, answer the question with a brief description of why it does not apply.*

**STEP 2 — Community Conversation and Prioritization**

**Refer to the document Step 2 - Community Conversation and Prioritization**

Step 2 is a time to **reflect, prioritize, and begin planning for** **action** in each community. The Community Conversation and Prioritization will help gain clarity and consistency across organizations and present a unified and agreed-upon approach to PSE activities.

The Community Conversation and Prioritization contains six sections:

* Summary of Learnings
* Prioritize the Issue(s)
* Identifying PSE Strategies
* Prioritizing PSE Strategies
* Stakeholder Conversations
* Continuing the Conversation

Use the information from Step 1 when completing Step 2 worksheets.

**Refer to the document Step 3 - Action Planning**

Action Planning is the culmination of the Process. It operationalizes the steps you will take to integrate PSE strategies into your work. Using the Action Plan template, you and your team will set specific goals, define timeframes, and identify resources.

Future program decisions should be guided by this plan with room for opportunistic adjustments. Communities change, priorities shift, and you and your team will want to adapt your strategies according to evolving and emergent needs.

**STEP 3 — Action Planning**

**Resources**

The resources listed on the following pages are examples of tools that may be useful in your community exploration. This is not an exhaustive list, nor are the listed resources appropriate for every community.

**Explanation of PSE**

* [**What is Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change?**](http://healthtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2012-12-28-Policy_Systems_and_Environmental_Change.pdf)

This brief document outlines the meaning of each of these terms and provides a chart with examples of what each could look like in different settings.

* [**PSE Development Framework – Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change**](http://nyspha.roundtablelive.org/Resources/Documents/2013%20APHA%20Affiliate%20Mtg/Policy%20Framework%20and%20Tools/PSE_Framework_Dec12.pdf)

This is a high-level, seven-step guide to creating PSE changes in your community. Many of the questions and ideas addressed in this framework are embedded into this Guide.

**Assessment Tools**

* **[Community Assessment Tool Kit: Nutrition and Physical Activity](https://vnrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Fit_and_Healthy_Vermonters_Community_Assessment_Toolkit.pdf)**

This toolkit from the Vermont Department of Health covers the process of completing a community assessment and provides worksheets with example questions and physical environment audits.

* [**Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory**](https://wilderresearch.org/tools/cfi-2018/start)

This free online collaboration assessment and personal inventory helps assess collaborative groups. It’s a simple tool and allows for opportunity for deep discussion with community leaders around assets, strengths and weaknesses to achieve the partnership’s goals.

* [**Community Health Assessment and Group Evaluation (CHANGE)**](https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/tools/change/pdf/changeactionguide.pdf)

This CDC resource is a planning and data-collection tool that walks through a community assessment process and helps define and prioritize approaches with community-level data on current PSE strategies.

* [**AARP Walk Audit Toolkit**](https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/getting-around/info-2014/aarp-walk-audit-tool-kit.html)

This walk audit toolkit provides step-by-step instructions for examining intersections, sidewalks, driver behavior, and more to assess community walkability. It is meant to be user-directed, and would be a great tool to get community members involved in the assessment process.

**Community Engagement Tools and Strategies**

* [**Community Toolbox**](https://ctb.ku.edu/en)

The Community Tool Box provides support for community assessment, planning, advocacy, evaluation, and other aspects of community practice with over 300 educational modules and tools.

* [**Community Listening Session Tool Kit**](https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/livable-documents/documents-2018/Book-2-Roadmap-To-Livability-Listening-21318-lr.pdf)

This toolkit from the AARP Roadmap to Livability Collection walks through the process of preparing for and hosting a focus group or listening session.

* [**Developing Effective Focus Group Questions**](https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research_ready/focus_groups/effective_questions)

This webpage provides guidance on how to develop effective focus group questions.

* [**Identifying Community Assets and Resources**](https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/identify-community-assets/main)

This portion of the Community Toolbox focuses on identifying, mapping, and using community assets.

* [**North Carolina Guide to Incorporating Health Considerations into Comprehensive Plans**](https://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/North_Carolina_Guide_to_Incorporating_Health_Considerations.pdf)

This resource shares strategies to incorporate community voice into planning processes. It includes considerations based on strategies, like healthy eating, physical activity and emergency preparedness.

**Data and Mapping Tools**

* [**County Health Rankings and Roadmaps**](https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/)

CHR&R provides access to county-level health data, along with other resources to take action.

* [**CDC Social Vulnerability Index**](https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/placeandhealth/svi/index.html)

This tool uses Census variables to help identify high risk areas within a community. Social vulnerability refers to the potential negative effects on communities caused by external stresses on human health. Such stresses include natural or human-caused disasters, or disease outbreaks.

* [**City Health Dashboard**](https://www.cityhealthdashboard.com/)

This dashboard provides city-level data on 37 measures of health, allowing users to examine demographic differences, view data by neighborhood, and even visualize data.

**Example Policies**

The following examples are for illustration purposes only of different types of policies that can support healthy living. They are not meant to be implemented as part of your community PSE exploration.

* [**ChangeLab Solutions**](https://www.changelabsolutions.org/)

ChangeLab Solutions works across the nation to advance equitable laws and policies to promote healthy lives for all. The resources below offer policy strategies for healthier neighborhoods and food systems. In addition to policy explanations, the pages also include toolkits, funding strategies, recorded webinars, community anecdotes, and other advocacy resources.

* + [Food and Beverage](https://www.changelabsolutions.org/food-beverages)
  + [Food Systems](https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/episode-3-food-systems)
  + [Healthy Neighborhoods](https://www.changelabsolutions.org/healthy-neighborhoods)
* [**Active Living Research**](https://activelivingresearch.org/)

Active Living Research builds evidence on how to create communities that increase opportunities for physical activity, with the goal of supporting, sharing, and putting into practice research that can promote daily physical activity for children and families, especially among children of color and lower-income children.

* [**Healthy Eating Research**](https://healthyeatingresearch.org/)

Healthy Eating Research supports research on PSE strategies that have strong potential to promote healthy eating among children, especially among lower-income and racial and ethnic minority population groups.

* [**MSU Extension Community Food Systems**](https://www.canr.msu.edu/community_food_systems/)

MSU Extension supports community food systems in Michigan by providing resources and programs to develop local food policy councils, farm-to-institutional purchasing, food hubs, and farmers’ markets.

* **[Toolkit to Integrate Health and Equity into Comprehensive Plans (APA)](https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/publication/download_pdf/Toolkit-to-Integrate-Health-and-Equity-into-Comprehensive-Plans.pdf)**

This includes specific language and is good for planners and non-planners alike. It gives real-community examples and outlines the goals, policies, and actions for each.

* [**America Walks Resource Page**](https://americawalks.org/resources/)

This America Walks resource page includes social and mobility justice resources, policy and advocacy processes, and design tips to create a more inclusive and walkable community.

* [**The Best Complete Streets Policies of 2018**](https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/the-best-complete-streets-policies-of-2018/)

This Smart Growth America resources provides an overview of the best Complete Streets policies of 2018.

* [**Walk Friendly Communities – Planning and Policy**](http://walkfriendly.org/planning-and-policy/)

This webpage provides resources and examples for pedestrian and bike plans, developing an advisory committee, complete streets, and other policies that support those using non-motorized transportation.

**Other Resources**

* [**CDC Community Strategies**](https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/community-strategies/index.htm)

This webpage provides a variety of resources on increasing physical activity in communities.

* [**CDC Guide to Strategies to Increase the Consumption of Fruits and Vegetables**](https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/strategies-fruits-and-vegetables.pdf)

This guide provides strategies for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption in communities.