**Lead Organization: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Community: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Community Discovery (Step 1) requires you and your team to take a wide lens approach and think broadly about policies, systems, and environmental change (PSE) issues in the community you are exploring. It requires talking with community members, community organizations, and program participants. There is no replacement for being out in the community, talking face-to-face (even if that is virtually), and listening to and learning about the needs of the people most impacted by your work.

Step 1 focuses on the current community landscape and what is needed. Strategies and solutions—especially as they relate to SNAP-Ed—come in Steps 2 and 3.

At least three information sources are useful to deepen the discovery in Step 1:

1. Existing data (e.g., Census, Community Health Needs Assessment, food and play desert maps).
2. Professional and partner data (e.g., organizational reports, anecdotal experiences from providers).
3. Information gathered from people who have high risks for poor health outcomes.

When engaging in conversations, create a space where participants feel comfortable to share their truth, even if it is uncomfortable for others to hear. Check out [**From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces**](https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/wp-content/uploads/sites/355/2016/06/From-Safe-Spaces-to-Brave-Spaces.pdf) and [**Communication Guidelines for a Brave Space**](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/581e9e06ff7c509a5ca2fe32/t/58f25fa937c58130853337df/1492279209799/04+AWARE-LA+Brave+Space+Guidelines+and+History.pdf). Links to other helpful documents on how to prepare for community conversations (e.g., hosting focus groups or listening sessions) are provided in the Resources section of the Guide Overview.

**Community Description**

**Background**

**1. Name and define your community and provide demographic data.**

**TIP:** Include details such as geographic boundaries (e.g., city of X or the neighborhoods located between A and B), demographics (e.g., race, ethnicity, income, age, education, etc.), and priority areas in the community.

Type answer here…

**2. What inequities (challenges that disproportionately impact specific populations) exist in your community that negatively impact health outcomes?** Also describe who is most impacted by these inequities.

**TIP:** The goal is to understand the context that contributes to these inequities. Seek information (e.g., health data or results of community surveys) from partner organizations and use the tools listed in the Resources section of the Guide Overview. In addition, review the data with community members to learn potential root causes. In rural environments or niche communities, it may be challenging to use pre-existing data and talking with residents may be your best source of information.

Type answer here…

**Community Context**

**Community context plays a vital role.** Every community has its own culture, assets, history, successes, and challenges on which to build. Fully recognizing and understanding these unique community dynamics will help your team identify and leverage a variety of tactics that considers community context.

**TIP:** Check out the Resources section of the Guide Overview for ideas about how to gather information about your community. Pages 14 and 15 of the CDC’s [**CHANGE Tool Action Guide**](https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/tools/change/pdf/changeactionguide.pdf) share pros and cons of different ways to collect information.

**Residents, Culture, History, Assets, and Challenges**

It is important to ask people about their experiences related to health and well-being. Although your organization may focus on a certain set of issues, there are many factors in peoples’ lives that affect their ability to engage in healthy behaviors (e.g., limited transportation, access to healthy food, or bigger community issues such as gun violence, racism, or earning a living wage). Providing people with space to talk about the challenges they face will create connections and potential solutions to underlying challenges. Often, these challenges are rooted in community- or systems-level policies, structure, design, or facilities.

**3. Who are the local residents, including youth, that influence community improvements?** *You will talk with these people (mostly in Step 2) to gather input from those that are already involved in community work.*

**TIP:** Be mindful of how to engage community members respectfully and inclusively by reducing barriers to participation. Consider language, transportation, time of day, etc. and always thank them for their time. Think about ways to include diverse voices instead of relying on the same people.

Pay attention to how people interact in group settings (e.g., in a neighborhood association meeting), noticing who is asked to speak at events, or to whom people defer to when decisions are being made. It may also be helpful to ask people who they think is leading change in their community.

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**4. Describe the unique cultures (which could be defined by ethnicity, religion, language, etc.) within your community.** Which organizations, individuals, and events might enable you to learn more about these cultural groups? How do these unique cultures impact the health of community members? What strengths are already in place to help solve these issues? Remember the critical role community members will play in answering these questions.

**TIP:** Remember the critical role community members will play in answering these questions.

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**Government, Businesses, Nonprofits, and Coalitions**

Elected officials and leaders of government agencies have considerable control over community resources and policy-making processes and may be trusted, powerful allies and champions. Business leaders can have a keen understanding of economic opportunities resulting from a healthier community, can contribute financial and in-kind resources, engage in advocacy, and participate in local coalitions. Even if local leaders seem unsupportive of your initiatives, it can be beneficial to identify common ground.

Nonprofit and service organizations typically serve vulnerable populations. They are often effective advocates, have frequent contact with residents and civic groups, and may be capable of securing grants and complementary resources. Likewise, advisory boards and community coalitions can offer their networks, knowledge, and diverse perspectives. Often, and especially in rural areas, leaders may not always hold formal titles yet can have considerable influence and help your team understand unique factors that can impact PSE.

Many communities have a long history of formal and informal resident engagement through neighborhood associations, youth councils, faith organizations, and civic participation. These venues offer opportunities to engage with people where they are already meeting.

**5. Identify groups that support healthy community efforts even if issue areas are different than yours (such as student achievement, mental health, or affordable housing). Identify a) businesses, b) elected or appointed officials, c) nonprofit organizations and association, and d) collaboratives,** **coalitions, boards, task forces, etc.**

*For each entity listed, describe what they value and how they can support mutually beneficial community health goals. Including young people in these conversations will increase the likelihood for success.*

| 1. **Businesses** | 1. **Elected or appointed officials** | 1. **Nonprofit organizations and associations** | 1. **Collaboratives, coalitions, boards, etc.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **TIP:** Consider businesses owned by under-represented groups such as people of color, people with disabilities, and women. | **TIP:** Ask stakeholders which policymakers and decision makers should be considered and who else you should be talking to. Check voting records of city council members, mayors, county managers, etc. to see what issue areas they prioritize. Read key messages in annual reports, speeches, or other materials. | **TIP:** This is usually discovered by asking stakeholders about who else is doing work to improve quality of life in the community. | **TIP:** If you are not sure whether these groups exist, talk to representatives from departments of health, parks and recreation, hospitals, foundations (e.g., United Ways), etc. |
| Type answer here… | Type answer here… | Type answer here… | Type answer here… |

**Programs, Policies, Plans, and Systems**

Local policies and plans can present opportunities for and barriers to, health. Existing programs can build demand for healthier community environments and help people advocating for supportive policies. Such programs may be offered by local nonprofit organizations, childcare centers, and health departments and parks and recreation.

Changes to local and regional systems—such as community development, criminal justice, education, transportation, healthcare, housing, parks and recreation, and food systems—also represent integrated, comprehensive, and sustainable opportunities to improve the health and address root causes that contribute to health disparities.

**6. What programs, groups, or activities are offered in the community that support positive health outcomes, especially established programs and promotional efforts?** How might these programs and promotional efforts potentially support healthy community work?

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**7. Identify specific community-level policies and plans that influence health outcomes.** How might these policies and plans support or hinder community health efforts?

**TIP:** For example, does your community have a transportation plan that prioritizes the needs and safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and/or people with mobility challenges? Are there guidelines that mandate where and how produce is sold? Are there regulations that govern where physical activity programs are (or are not) allowed in public spaces?

See sample policies beginning on page 4 of the Resources section of the Guide Overview.

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**8. What systems influence health outcomes in your community** (e.g. community development, criminal justice, education, etc.)? How do those systems impact health outcomes? How can you work within or change these systems to address negative health impacts?

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**Physical Features and Other Resources**

Built and natural environments present opportunities for and barriers to health. For example, access to places that sell healthy, affordable food can increase opportunities for better nutrition. Safe and accessible parks, school playgrounds, sidewalks, and trails can increase opportunities for physical activity and recreation.

The community’s geographic location may also offer unique opportunities. For example, a community bordering a Great Lake may be different than one located inland. Rural and urban communities differ in terms of land mass and geographic proximity, and those in the northern areas may have better conditions for outdoor winter activities. All these factors should be considered when identifying strategies that are most likely to be successful.

In addition, existing resources may be used to leverage financial and in-kind investments from local foundations, corporations, governments, and other key stakeholders. These can complement and accelerate community change efforts. For example, vacant lots can become pocket parks, playgrounds, or community gardens.

**9. What unique physical features in the community create opportunities or barriers to health**? How do these physical features (e.g., streets, rivers, food environments, railroads) impact the health of the community, including a connection/disconnection to the places they want or need to go?

**TIP:** If you do not already know this information, ask community members to share where they spend time during different times of the day and week. Observe these locations and the associated features during key times (e.g., before or after school, weekends). See how the community’s natural assets and infrastructure either enables or prohibits safe walking, biking, play or healthy eating. Consider conducting [**walking audits**](https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/livable-documents/documents-2016/Walk-Audit-Tool-Kit/AARP-Walk-Audit-Tool-Kit-100416.pdf) with community members, or using other similar strategies to gather additional information.

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**Reflections**

It is important for your team—together or separately—to take time to reflect upon everything you are learning throughout this Process.

**10. Reflect upon what you have learned and what community members, including youth, have told you matters most to them and what changes they would like to see in their community to improve health. Describe your key reflections so you can use them as you continue this Process.** Consider what broad issue areas impacting health were identified and lifted up multiple times.

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**11. Reflect upon and begin listing potential PSE activities that could improve the health outcomes for this community.**

Type answer here…

**TIP**: It is understandable that community members may have shared problems that impact them personally. Think about policies or systems level activities that could change those issues that individuals are experiencing. Consider how you will continue to explore and/or begin testing these opportunities.