



Nudges: Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

A how-to guide on utilizing low cost distribution methods for your food bank and agency members.



There is no “one-size fits all” model for delivering nutrition education. Nonetheless, there are some widely accepted nutrition education and public health best practices, including simple changes to food distribution environments that “nudge” clients to select healthier options. With that in mind, Feeding America has taken note of the increased interest in applying nudge interventions to food bank and food pantry environments. Within this toolkit you will find ways to create a strategy that fits your food bank or food pantry’s needs to maximize the impact that nudges can make with your clients.

Developed by: Feeding America

Community Health and Nutrition Team

Note: This resource is geared to be used by food banks, food pantries and others interested in exploring and expanding upon solutions that address nudge intervention designed to make the healthy choice the easy choice in a food pantry distribution.



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The Power of Nudges Video

Featuring:

- David Just PhD | Cornell University
- Michele Berger Marshall MS RD | Director of Community Health and Nutrition Feeding America
- Christine Rivera RD | Community Health and Nutrition Network Engagement Manager Feeding America
- Karen Joyner | CEO of Virginia Peninsula Foodbank



Feeding America has been working with Cornell University on evidence-based nutrition education strategies to help increase the consumption of healthy foods by those served across the nation. This video highlights one strategy in particular, known as “nudges.” These small environmental cues or changes in one’s environment can make an impact on food choices and, ultimately, health. Additional information can be found under the Nutrition Education section of this site.

A special thank you to the ConAgra Foods Foundation and their generous funding which made this film possible. In addition, we appreciate the participation of Feeding America network food banks and pantries, as well as David Just, PhD with Cornell University in the making of this film.

- Find the video [here](#)



Post-Viewing Conversation Points

As stated in the video, nudges are meant to be low cost, non-invasive, and easy to implement nutrition education strategies to help food banks and pantries increase the nutritional value of the foods their clients are receiving.

Potential Video Viewers

Food Bank or Food Pantry Internal Staff:

- Leadership Staff Members
- Operations Staff
- Programs Staff

Community or External Partners:

- Local Funders
- Local Government
- Local Donors

Getting the Conversation Started

1. Nudges can be anything from extra signage, to more elaborate displays for healthy food products and anything in between. Whole foods and produce has taken a back seat to easy-to-access, convenient foods. As Dr. Just mentioned, we are simply stacking the deck so the healthiest choice is the one that is most likely to place. Currently, what is influencing your client's decisions when they are visiting your food pantries and food banks?
2. As stated in the video, people tend to respond to really visible, attractive, and conveniently presented foods. Everywhere around us, subtle environmental queues are shaping our decision making. How can you make the foods that you are distributing more attractive to clients when they visit food pantries?
3. From an operational standpoint, perishable items have trouble making it all the way through our network. How many pounds of perishable items is your food bank disposing of because it is not making it through your food bank or food pantry fast enough? Are their nudges posted on the next page that could help increase the speed and volume at which your perishable food items are being distributed?
4. As we noticed at the Virginia Peninsula Food Bank, the only change was a simple rearrangement of the environment where pantry staff come to pick up food. They noticed a change pretty quickly in their distribution patterns. What does your distribution environment look like right now? Could it be rearranged to help make healthier choices easier for member pantries?
5. At Feeding America, we pride ourselves in empowering our clients. How can you empower your clients to make their own decisions on increasing the overall quality of their life?



What Foods to Nudge?

The *Foods to Encourage (F2E)* framework was designed to more accurately evaluate and describe the nutritional contributions of the food categories in the food banks' inventories. The *Detailed Foods to Encourage* framework below serves as the Feeding America national office recommendation, not requirement, for network food banks. Below are the qualifications required for the product categories to be listed within our Foods to Encourage.

Foods must meet all criteria below to qualify. Criteria is based on a per serving basis.

Fruits and Vegetables

- Fresh with nothing added
- 100% Fruit or Vegetable Juice
- Canned, dried, frozen, with no partially hydrogenated oil, that meet criteria below:
 - **Sodium:** ≤230mg | **Total Sugar:** Fruit in lite syrup or 100% Juice or ≤ 12g
 - **Saturated Fat:** ≤2g | **Trans Fat:** 0g

Grains

- 100% whole grain (e.g. Rolled Oats, Barley, Wild Rice)
- Bread and Pasta with "WHOLE GRAIN" listed as the first ingredient
 - Bread and Pasta with >10% DV or ≥ 2.5 grams dietary fiber
- Cereal with "WHOLE GRAIN" listed as the first ingredient & >3g of fiber
- Bread, pasta and cereal that meet criteria below:
 - **Sodium:** ≤230mg | **Total Sugar:** Bread/Pasta ≤10g Cereal ≤12g
 - **Saturated Fat:** ≤2g | **Trans Fat:** 0g

Protein

- Eggs
- Nuts, Seeds, Beans, and Lentils with nothing added
- Beans, Meat, Poultry, and Seafood that meet the criteria below:
 - **Sodium:** ≤ 480mg | **Saturated Fat:** 2g | **Trans Fat:** 0g
- Nuts/Seeds and corresponding spreads that meet the criteria below:
 - **Sodium:** ≤ 230mg | **Total Sugar:** <4g per 2T or 1oz.
 - **Trans Fat:** 0g

Dairy

- Flavored skim/non-fat milk or yogurt
- Unsweetened milk Substitutes
- Unflavored/Unsweetened low-fat (1%), or skim/non-fat milk or yogurt
- Cheese that meets criteria the below:
 - **Sodium:** ≤480mg | **Saturated Fat:** ≤ 2g | **Trans Fat:** 0g
- Flavored milk, milk substitutes and yogurt to meet the criteria below:
 - **Sodium:** ≤480mg | **Total Sugar:** ≤22g (milk) ≤30g (yogurt)
 - **Saturated Fat:** 3g | **Trans Fat:** 0g

Information on this page is taken from the *Detailed Foods to Encourage* document, found here: <http://healthyfoodbankhub.feedingamerica.org/resource/foods-to-encourage/>



Identified Nudge Interventions

1. Recipe card placement near Foods to Encourage (F2E) items

- **Settings:** WIC Clinics | Grocery Stores
- Having recipes that include fresh produce leads low-income mothers to serve more fresh fruits and vegetables (Birmingham, Schulz and Edlefsen). This is because having access to the recipe leads them to be more confident that they will be able to use the produce. More than 40% of supermarket shoppers would like to be given healthy recipes in the store (FMI).

Birmingham, B., J. A. Shultz and M. Edlefsen. Evaluation of a Five-a-Day Recipe Booklet for Enhancing the Use of Fruits and Vegetables in Low-Income Households. *Journal of Community Health* 29(2004):45-62.

Food Marketing Institute. *Helping Shoppers Overcome the Barriers to Choosing Healthful Foods*, 2010.

2. Suggesting an amount to help normalize a behavior of taking more F2E

- **Settings:** Grocery Stores
- Signs informing clients that the average family takes 5 produce items increases produce takings by more than 10%. Signs were placed inside of shopping carts facing the client. Signs included some positive imaging (a happy face, with a thumbs up sign). By indicating how much others take, the signs create a social norm. Individuals who take less feel they should increase their takings. However, we must also worry about people who already choose more than 5 choosing less. This can be avoided by including positive reinforcement regarding the decision to choose more. In this case, we have included the thumbs up sign, associating the choice of produce with something positive.

Payne, Collin R., Mihai Niculescu and David R. Just. "Shopper Marketing Nutrition Interventions." *Physiology and Behavior*, forthcoming.



3. Pairing F2E items to create a package meal idea (to help consumers know how to pair more F2E together and make a meal idea simple) aka bundling food

- **Settings:** Lunch Rooms | Restaurants | Grocery Stores
- When foods are bundled together for convenience, up to 18% more will take the bundled food – even if the bundled food is relatively healthier. This can also result in up to a 25% reduction in consumption of unbundled less healthy items (Hanks et al., 2012). This is true even when there is no price advantage for the bundled foods. Consumers view this bundling as a social norm and thus value the bundled food more than they would if the foods were not bundled together (Sharpe and Staelin, 2010).

Hanks, A. S., Just, D. R., Smith, L. E., & Wansink, B. Healthy convenience: nudging students toward healthier choices in the lunchroom. *Journal of Public Health* 34(2012):370-376.

Sharpe, K.S., R. Staelin. Consumption Effects of Bundling: Consumer Perceptions, Firm Actions and Public Policy Implications. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 29(2010):170-188.

Food Marketing Institute. Helping Shoppers Overcome the Barriers to Choosing Healthful Foods, 2010.

4. Signs for priming

- **Settings:** Grocery Stores
- Placing material that highlights specific attributes of a particular item (posters, floor arrows, shopping cart placards, etc.) at strategic locations: waiting areas, bottlenecks, pathways. These work to increase an item's salience and prime individuals for when they are presented the opportunity to select the item. Content on the sign may communicate a social norm, highlight the desirability of the item with an appealing image, or simply direct the individual towards the good. Floor arrows were found to increase sales of fruit and vegetables by 9% (Payne et al., working paper). Placards within grocery carts led to a 16% increases in produce purchases (Payne et al., 2015).

Payne, C. R., Niculescu, M., Just, D. R., & Kelly, M. P. (2015). Shopper marketing nutrition interventions: Social norms on grocery carts increase produce spending without increasing shopper budgets. *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 2, 287-291.

Payne CR, Niculescu M, Just DR, Kelly M. Social norms in the grocery store: increasing fruit and vegetable purchases without increasing budgets. Working Paper.



5. Front & center product placement

- **Settings:** Lunch Rooms
- Placing produce in a prominent location where it is easily reached and seen can increase the selection of produce by more than 100% (Just and Wansink). This has been confirmed in multiple settings including grocery stores, bodegas and convenience stores. Just placing an item first in a line can increase takings by more than 11% relative to other places in the line. Finding a way to make healthy foods more prominent and attractive, for example, by placing produce in an attractive bowl or basket, goes a long way toward reminding clients of just how good that orange or apple can be. Placing a fruit item on two separate locations on the line can increase takings in some cases by more than 300%. The first time a fruit appears it may trigger a latent desire to eat the fruit, but by the time the individual realizes the desire they may have passed the item. But they will be ready the second time.

Just, David R., and Brian Wansink. "Smarter Lunchrooms: Using Behavioral Economics to Improve Meal Selection." *Choices* Vol. 24 No. 3 (2009).

Wansink, B. and D. R. Just Healthy Foods First: Students take the First Lunchroom Food 11% More Often than the Third. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 43(2011):S8.



More Resources

I. Healthy Food Bank Hub – Nudge Page

<http://healthyfoodbankhub.feedingamerica.org/nudges/>

II. ACPN Presentation 2014

<http://healthyfoodbankhub.feedingamerica.org/resource/acpn-2014-the-power-of-nudges-making-the-healthy-choice-the-easy-choice/>

III. Environmental Changes at the Oregon Food Bank

<http://healthyfoodbankhub.feedingamerica.org/resource/environmental-strategies-for-encouraging-healthy-choices>

IV. Strategies and Tools for Food Shelves

<http://healthyfoodbankhub.feedingamerica.org/resource/strategies-and-tools-for-food-shelves/>

V. Nudges: Signage with Shelf Tags

<http://healthyfoodbankhub.feedingamerica.org/resource/nudges-signage-with-shelf-tags/>

VI. Detailed Foods to Encourage Handout

<http://healthyfoodbankhub.feedingamerica.org/resource/foods-to-encourage/>