

WORKING PRINCIPLES

FOR THE WISCONSIN NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM (WNEP)

Many Wisconsin individuals and families are facing economic challenges and the problem of food insecurity. They are confronted with difficult choices in the areas of food and shelter needs, credit obligations, and high medical bills. Compounding the challenge of insufficient financial resources, many families do not have the knowledge and skills they need to make healthful food choices. Additionally, there is an urgent need to address the rising epidemic of overweight and obesity in America. In response to these pressing and wide-spread needs of the economically poor, WNEP's purpose is to develop and implement community-based nutrition education programs, within a university research-based context.

WNEP will:

- help low income families, youth and elderly learn about nutrition through research-based education programs.
More specifically, participants will:
 - ◆ improve eating and physical activity behaviors in accordance with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid.
 - ◆ manage their food resources and use thrifty shopping practices for nutritious foods.
 - ◆ use safe food handling, preparation and storage practices.
- collaborate with community, state and federal organizations in the design and implementation of nutrition education programs.

Working with Our Communities

Our programs result from a partnership among Federal, State, and County Governments. While each partner has a significant voice in the direction of our work, a major strength lies in our responsiveness to local issues. The following activities improve our understanding of community-level concerns and are implemented in each community, as appropriate:

- assessment of community needs and resources.
- involvement of local elected officials and/or advisory committees in setting the overall direction and determining ways to evaluate the program.
- collaboration with agencies and non-governmental organizations providing services to limited income families.
- integration of nutrition education with other services targeted to families with limited incomes.

Understanding Our Audiences

Our programs take into account the rich diversity found among those living with limited economic resources. Our audiences are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, age, gender, faith, educational background, and household structure. This diversity results in WNEP programs being designed in light of:

- ongoing assessment of the needs and resources of individuals and families living on a limited income.
- an understanding, recognition and strengthening of the social networks of our audience.
- the degree and length of our audiences' dependency on society's safety net.
- eligibility requirements of funding agencies.

Disseminating Research-Based Content

Program content spans disciplines and is grounded in current research. Content areas include food and nutrition; food purchasing, preparation and safety; and family resource management to improve food security. University faculty support program staff by integrating their respective disciplines in program content that is relevant and accessible to diverse audiences with limited resources. Program content is designed to help participants learn:

- to choose a healthful diet for themselves (and their family) based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid.
- to increase their physical activity each day as recommended in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans
- to increase their food security by developing a spending and savings plan, and learning to live within a plan.
- to purchase and prepare healthful food and keep it safe to eat.

Modeling Effective Education

Program staff work with a variety of audiences in a wide range of settings. Given this diverse context, staff must be aware of and adept at utilizing a variety of educational approaches. WNEP educators take into consideration:

- the developmental characteristics of their audiences and the social context within which learning occurs.
- that change in behavior involves a series of stages or steps.
- appropriate teaching/learning models and methods.

Ongoing Assessment of Our Impact

The evaluation of WNEP programs acknowledges the concerns and questions of stakeholders at a variety of levels. More specifically, evaluation strategies are designed in light of:

- the evaluation needs and requirements of federal funding agencies.
- state level concerns that cut across county and/or district boundaries.
- evaluation questions of local elected officials, advisory committee members, participants, and local program staff.

Supporting Our Staff

WNEP staff work in different settings, with various audiences, utilizing many skills. The degree to which our programs achieve their goals depends directly upon the skills and competencies of our staff. Therefore, high priority is placed on initial and continuing staff training that will:

- help county coordinators and nutrition educators achieve excellence in their various roles.
- strengthen core competencies in educational process and program content.
- utilize various formats to meet staff needs (e.g. meetings, teleconferences, and compressed video conferencing).