



## **Building effective partnerships: The role of lay leaders in the implementation of a faith-based health promotion program with low-income families**

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### **Demonstrating Need**

- More than 83% of American adults are affiliated with a faith tradition (Pew Forum 2008)
- Over 62.8 % of North Carolinians are overweight or obese

### **Project Overview**

- Faithful Families (FF), a collaborative project between NC Cooperative Extension and the NC Division of Public Health, was designed using:
  - multi-level programmatic intervention (the socio-ecological model), and
  - community involvement in program design (community-based participatory research methods)
- Lay leaders form the backbone of program delivery. Lay leaders in each faith community:
  - co-lead a nine-lesson education system with staff from the county Extension office,
  - connect faith and health for individual participants,
  - serve as health ambassadors in their faith community and the community-at-large, and
  - encourage, plan and help implement policy and environmental changes.

### **Project Results**

- Over 35 faith communities in seven counties have participated in the program.
- Over 350 individuals have completed the nine lesson education series. Positive behavior changes include: 88% improved food resource management skills; 65% improved in food safety practices; 66% used food labels to make food choices more often; 48% increased consumption of calcium rich foods; 46% increased vegetable consumption; 49% increased fruit consumption; 30% of participants increased the amount of physical activity.
- Over 85 policy and environmental changes have been implemented. These include: serving fruits, vegetables, water at events; creating walking maps and routes on faith community grounds; opening physical activity facilities to public; creating community gardens.
- Qualitative evaluation (focus groups with 61 participants and lay leaders) demonstrates that lay leaders play an active role in program delivery and encouraging policy and environment change by:
  - connecting faith and health for participants during the lessons
  - using open-ended questions in the curriculum to explore policy and environmental changes that support healthy eating and physical activity in the faith community,
  - helping communities to plan and implement policy and environmental changes that support healthy eating and physical activity, and
  - forging county-level coalitions for nutrition and physical activity in the community-at-large.

### **Moving Forward**

- Be willing to make small shifts in your program plan to meet each faith community's needs and assets.
- Partnership at multiple levels (state, county, in each faith community) is important to ensure program success.
- Community change and genuine partnership take time – but the time is well worth the investment!

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For more on Faithful Families, visit: <http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/FaithfulFamilies/FaithfulFamilies.html> or contact David Hall at [david\\_hall@ncsu.edu](mailto:david_hall@ncsu.edu) or 919-515-1788.