

Abstract

Evaluation of coalition effectiveness in a Mississippi-based obesity prevention program: Outcomes from focus group assessments

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Mississippi State University Extension is using a coalition-driven approach to address obesity risks in communities in the Mississippi Delta through its CDC-funded High Obesity Project. Stakeholder coalitions have been demonstrated as effective tools for identifying specific community needs and ensuring that programs and activities are community-led. Evaluating the progress of coalitions and their efforts can often be a difficult process, especially if the coalitions include stakeholders with diverse interests; however, process evaluation is necessary.

To evaluate efforts made by this program focus groups were conducted with coalition members from 8 counties. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed. The evaluation team used content and thematic analysis to assess coalition activities.

We conducted 6 focus groups with a total of 32 people. The average group was 60-90 minutes. Barriers to increasing access to fruits and vegetables and physical activity were identified. Issues related to the program staff efforts assisting these coalitions were also raised. These include the need to focus on enhancing communication between the research institution and the coalitions and increasing trainings on coalition building. Strengths found in the focus groups were helping local food pantries adopt the Client Choice model and collaborating with other local organizations.

Our focus groups highlight some of the issues inherent in our own approach and have helped us identify a roadmap for improving our way forward. These findings are also useful for other public health scientists and practitioners pursuing coalition-driven community health improvement projects.

Conduct evaluation related to programs, research, and other areas of practice

