



NUTRITION AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

MICHIGAN HEALTH ENDOWMENT FUND

2017 COHORT REPORT

NOVEMBER 2020



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	8
SUSTAINABILITY	10
COLLABORATION AND LEVERAGE	14
PROCESS ACCOMPLISHMENTS	17
EFFECTIVENESS AT AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL	20
EFFECTIVENESS IN SYSTEM-LEVEL CHANGE	23
LESSONS	26



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grant stream seeks to enhance health outcomes by making healthy living more accessible, through systems, community, and individual change. It funds projects related to food, nutrition, fitness, and wellness. Through grant streams like this and other investments, the Michigan Health Endowment Fund strives to empower pathways to greatly improve the health of Michigan residents.

GRANT-FUNDED PROJECTS

This is a report on the results of the first Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles cohort to ever be funded. This cohort consisted of 13 grants awarded in 2017, and the grant timelines varied from 12 to 35 months. The grant activities were carried out in a large number of counties across Michigan, and included work in larger cities such as Grand Rapids, Detroit, and Lansing, as well as rural communities, including counties in the Upper Peninsula.

The programming topics and target audiences were addressed by grantees as the Health Fund intended. The 2017 Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grantees created projects that covered nutrition, healthy food access, food security, wellness, and fitness; and most of the projects focused on both food and wellness or fitness. The audiences targeted most commonly were under-resourced populations (n=9) or youth aged 6-17 (n=8), and most projects (n=8) actually targeted multiple populations. Within an award, the “project” often comprised multiple components or programming, each with different intended audiences and intended impacts—and each with different levels of evidence for the program model.

EVALUATION SCOPE

This report provides the findings of an overarching evaluation, spanning across all 13 grant awards. The emphasis is on the aggregate outputs and outcomes of this first cohort, as well as the key lessons that have emerged from the cohort.

The Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles evaluation methodology relied on both administrative and primary data-collection techniques, including a series of interviews with grantee leadership. The Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles evaluation was also informed by other interactions with grantees, including technical assistance to grantees, which started near the end of the first year.

KEY FINDINGS

IMPLEMENTATION SUCCESSES

Sustainability

- Grantees identified and pursued a number of paths to ensuring sustainability, such as diversified funding, leveraging partnerships, and moving toward systems change.
- By the end of the grant period, most grantees had secured funding to sustain program elements, and some continued to seek additional funding. They lessened their need for philanthropic funds by diversifying funding; e.g., public and private sources, revenue-generating models, in-kind services, and investing in tools or equipment for ongoing use.
- Specific features of the grant-funded work will be sustained beyond the grant period; including programming, partnerships, tools, and staff positions. Nearly all of the grantees will continue implementing one or more programs, but several may be scaled back or adjusted.

Collaboration and Leverage

- Overall, grantees came into their projects with strong collaborations, leveraged them effectively, managed challenges successfully, and were well-positioned to continue collaborating after the grant.
- Partnerships were indispensable to projects and operational success. Strong partnerships offered value through their expertise, resources, and access to target audiences.
- The grant was credited with a positive impact on collaboration that would go beyond the grant period. For example, collaboration was expected to be evident in later programming, as well as scaling up existing programs, fundraising, and de-duplication of effort.

Process Outputs

- Grantees successfully and extensively engaged with partners to implement interventions for better nutrition and healthy lifestyles. Many grantees set and achieved quantifiable goals for partner engagement, especially in the realm of schools, early childhood, and community development. For example, at least 71 schools (of 69 planned) were engaged across four projects. Also, a nationally established program expanded its reach to 291 early childhood settings in Michigan, which included 861 classrooms.
- Process accomplishments (outputs) included completions of environmental assessments of schools, early childhood education sites, and community food resources. Virtually all of the school sites used pre-assessments to build action plans, and post-assessments to identify changes over time.
- For communities, activities enabled grantees to develop and expand networks and connections, assess local resources, and expand their reach to target audiences. For example, one grantee

developed a statewide tribal food-access community of learning across six tribes. Another grantee project successfully expanded the geographic reach of the nationally recognized Double Up Food Bucks initiative, and integrated new technology that provides efficiency for retailers and customers.

- Grantee activities also resulted in new infrastructure, capacity, and resources. Several grantees realized their aspirations for the development of new research, new technology, and online data mapping. Examples include the following:
 - One grantee’s research project created a dynamic online mapping system, using GIS to map out six layers of food insecurity measures. It also developed a first-of-its-kind report with county-by-county standards for self-sufficiency for the state of Michigan.
 - Another example of lasting infrastructure was the comprehensive Healthy Kids U.P. Resource Guide. This is an interactive map with data for each of the 15 counties, showing fitness, nutrition, and health resources for youth. Partners include schools, school districts, county health departments, and nonprofits in each geography.
- The grantees’ reach to individuals was extensive, with projects collectively engaging at least 38,000 individuals in the Michigan—primarily youth. This volume of reach met or exceeded expectations (per project) and offered significant windows of opportunity to enhance healthy lifestyles, grow knowledge, and improve access to healthy food through programming such as fitness and nutrition education, train-the-trainer, experiential learning, culinary training, and race training.

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL OUTCOMES

The Health Fund’s 2016 and 2017 grantmaking provided an opportunity to refine its technical assistance efforts and grantmaking strategies to support grantee success.

- **Dietary behavior:**

Six projects tracked dietary changes in individuals, primarily assessing changes in fruit and vegetable consumption. Targets for change were formulated as the percentage of people who increased the number of fruit or vegetable servings per day, ate at least 5 servings per day, or increased fruit or vegetable intake. Almost all projects met or exceeded a benchmark of dietary change, or showed strong improvement of dietary behavior.

- **Physical activity and screen time:**

Five projects measured increases in physical activity, and three of these also intended to decrease digital screen time. Few projects met specific performance objectives they had established, yet most demonstrated very positive gains in physical activity or fitness. Digital screen-time results also had very positive trajectories, despite most not meeting their target threshold.

- **Self-efficacy around healthy eating:**

Three of the projects that focused on consumption and/or knowledge of healthy food, also hoped to impact individual self-efficacy around healthy eating. All results were in a positive direction, but only one project met its performance objective.

- **Knowledge of health-related behaviors:**

Three of the projects that focused on consumption and/or knowledge of healthy food, also hoped to impact individual self-efficacy around healthy eating. All results were in a positive direction, but only one project met its performance objective.

COMMUNITY AND SYSTEM-LEVEL CHANGE

Aiming to increase community capacity to promote and support healthy behaviors, grantees demonstrated some gains in creating community change and many made significant strides toward systems change. However, the reported outcomes often did not meet or were unclear about their targeted performance threshold, and some results were not reported as planned.

Efforts to impact community and system-level change were most commonly focused on local food access, clinical screening, and environmental assessments. Results showed that redemption programming helped to make local food accessible at a community level. One of two nascent efforts to increase clinical screening was successful. All school or early child care environmental assessments showed improvements over time (even where the target was unclear).

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The key takeaway from the evaluation is that the 2017 Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles cohort made great strides toward addressing the intended goals of the Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles cluster.

The cohort's collective efforts revealed that partnerships are indispensable to projects and operational success. Strong partnerships offer value through their expertise, resources, and access to target audiences. It is clear that the Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grant funding can help grantees strengthen and build relationships.

- Potential grantees without strong existing partnerships may benefit from a planning grant or adequate planning time early in the grant period before implementation begins.

Overall, the cohort effectively impacted individual participants' knowledge, skills, and behavior. The cohort accomplished behavioral changes in diet and activity that have well-established clinical relationships to health outcomes. Therefore, these activities and their results are consistent with the intended goals of Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles to enhance health outcomes by making healthy living more accessible through systems, community, and individual change.

Systems change is a complex process that takes time to achieve, and further change is expected to occur as a longer-term impact of efforts.

- To better understand the longer-term impacts of grants on systems change, it would be illuminating to follow up with grantees a few years after their grant project.

While all grantees focused on achieving sustainability, what precisely that will look like will vary across projects.

- There is a clear need for investment in grants of all kinds—planning, pilots, research, and implementation grants, as well as replication and scaled-effort grants—each of which fills a different niche in leveraging innovation and evidence to reach the ultimate goal of healthier lives.

The Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grant stream is intended to have impacts in the policy arena. Several grants stood out for their potential impact (e.g., influencing state academic standards; informing state and federal food policy via USDA Farm Bill). However, it is not feasible for these types of impacts to be fully realized in the timeframe of the grant.

The Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grant stream is intended to have impacts in empowerment and engagement, and to address root causes of health disparities. These topics have been addressed in prior reports, but it should be noted that the benefits from the Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grant awards will accrue almost entirely in disproportionately barriered groups, as the collective impact was primarily vested in vulnerable children.

The Health Fund has an interest in helping individual grantees improve capacity to measure outcomes and to improve future programming.

- Future grantees would benefit from evaluation technical assistance at multiple stages of the project, from pre-implementation planning to analysis and reporting.
- It would be particularly beneficial to support grantees to measure medium-term outcomes, such as behavior change or changes in food insecurity status. The need is acute, because it is a more rigorous measure of change that relates directly to longer-term health indicators.



INTRODUCTION

Michigan Health Endowment Fund (Health Fund) endeavors to be a catalyst in improving the health of Michigan residents. Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles is one of its proactive grant streams, which seeks to enhance health outcomes by making healthy living more accessible through systems, community, and individual change. The grant stream funds projects related to food, nutrition, fitness, and wellness.

The need is great in Michigan for efforts like those funded by the Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grant stream.

ABOUT THE PROJECTS

This report focuses on the 13 grantees that were awarded Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grants as part of the 2017 cohort. All 13 were awarded one-year grants, and of these, 3 had short no-cost extensions, and 8 were provided an additional 13-23 months to carry work forward.

PROGRAMMING

The topics covered in the 2017 Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grants included nutrition, healthy food access, food security, wellness, and fitness. Nearly all of the projects (11) had a focus on nutrition or food. Most commonly, the projects focused on both food and wellness or fitness. The topics of the grants were fully in keeping with the categories of efforts relevant to the Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles umbrella.

The populations targeted in grants include under-resourced, families, seniors, children and youth, as intended by the Health Fund. Of these categories, the most common target population was under-resourced populations (n=9) or youth 6-17 (n=8). Only two grants focused on seniors. Most of the grants (n=8) targeted multiple populations of interest to the Health Fund.

In terms of the Health Funds cross-cut goal areas (cross-cut integrated care model across systems, workforce capacity for healthcare personnel and technology for healthcare personnel), only one project actually dealt with these. However, some projects were relevant to workforce (n=4), technology (n=4), or other cross-sector work(n=6).

Awards were given to projects with varying levels of evidence supporting that the interventions would be effective. This approach to awards was in keeping with Health Fund intentions, as well as being sound philanthropic investment practice. Frequently, there were multiple key components within a grant with different levels of evidence for programming (n=5); these multi-faceted projects are reflected in the evidence category totals presented below.

- **Evidence-based (n=6):**

There is published peer-reviewed research and evaluation providing empirical evidence that the proposed actions should work.

- **Promising-practice (n=8):**

There is strong quantitative and/or qualitative data showing positive results for the proposed actions, but does not yet have enough research to be generalizable.

- **Emerging (n=4):**

No strong data yet, but incorporates characteristics of other positive interventions.

ABOUT THE NUTRITION AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLES REPORT

This report presents aggregate outcomes of the Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles 2017 awards portfolio and the extent to which the cohort collectively moved forward towards the Health Fund's objectives for Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overarching evaluation aimed to support the Health Fund as a learning organization and effective grantmaker. A larger set of research questions have been addressed in a series of prior reports, but this report offers the first comprehensive look at the final outputs and outcomes of the entire cohort.

The key research questions answered in this report are:

- How well has this cluster of grants collectively been able to address the intended goals of the Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles cluster?
- What are the key lessons emerging from the collective Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grants?

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Although the collective results of grantees are described in the report in discrete units of outputs, individual-level outcomes, and community- and system-level outcomes, it should be noted that the intended levels of impact are deeply interrelated. Behavior change leading to a healthier lifestyle requires multiple, reinforcing messages, resources, and opportunities. Collectively, the programming of the grantees reflected this understanding.

The audiences for this report include: past, present, and future grantees; the Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles field; and the Health Fund staff and Board of Directors.

SUSTAINABILITY

Grantees identified and pursued several means to sustainability, to good effect. Much of the programming—albeit with adjustments, including scaling back and scaling up—will be sustained beyond the grant period, as will partnerships, tools, and staff positions. Most had succeeded in securing funding to sustain program elements, and had even lessened their need for philanthropic funds by diversifying funding sources.

Finding: Grant-funded work will sustain beyond the grant period.

Grantees planned for sustainability early in the grant period, and this continued to be a significant focus over the course of their projects. The evaluation team conducted a formal assessment at the outset of the awards, which revealed high or very high potential for sustainability for all grantees. Toward the end of the grant, grantee optimism was high. Grantees were confident that program elements would be sustained and had identified several pathways to sustainability. However, one grantee accomplished few of their grant-funded goals and, therefore, there remains a question whether it is realistic that their program will sustain.

EVIDENCE

In surveys and interviews conducted near the end of their grant projects, grantees noted that specific programs and elements of their grant-funded work would continue beyond the grant period, including:

- **Programs (12 mentions):**

Virtually all grantees that implemented grant-funded program(s) indicated that specific programs would live on beyond the grant period.

- **Partnerships (10 mentions):**

Many grant-funded programs will continue with the help of partner organizations.

- **Tools (6 mentions):**

Several grantees developed online resources that they and their partners will continue to use.

- **Staff position (2 mentions):**

Two grantees will continue to fund staff positions related to their grant-funded work

Regarding programs, however, five grantees indicated that they may need to scale back or make adjustments to their program in order to sustain. An additional grantee expressed certainty that one of their grant-funded programs would not sustain.

The most common approaches to sustainability included:

- Securing additional funding to carry forward their work
- Developing and strengthening partnerships, collaborations, and networks

- Developing or purchasing equipment, structures, or materials for ongoing use beyond the grant period
- Diversifying and acquiring funding from non-philanthropic funding sources, such as the state budget, federal grants, or fee-for-service program models
- Educating and making a case for the work through evaluation and storytelling
- Creating systems change, such as policy changes or institutionalized changes in operation

Finding: Grantees have secured funding to sustain program elements.

Nearing the end of their grants, most of the grantees had secured funding beyond the grant period, and some were continuing to seek additional funding. Philanthropies remain an important funding source. However, grantees have lessened their need for philanthropic funds by:

- Securing funding from public and private sources
- Moving towards a revenue generating model
- Having invested current grant funds in tools or equipment for ongoing use
- Securing in-kind services

Grantees rightly see a diverse funding stream and a reduced reliance on philanthropic funds as a pathway toward sustainability.

EVIDENCE

Most of the grantees had secured funding beyond the grant period.

- **Secured funding (8 mentions):**

At least eight grantees had secured funding to sustain program elements, including philanthropic or charitable, public, and private funding.

- **Seeking additional funds (7 mentions):**

Seven grantees stated that they were seeking sustainability funds, including both philanthropic and public funding.

- **Additional funds not required (1 mention):**

One grantee did not require additional funds to sustain an open-source tool, but was considering seeking funds for expansion.

Non-charitable funding sources of grantees:

- **Fee-for service model (5 mentions):**

Three grantees were bringing in revenue to sustain through a fee- or reimbursement-based program model. Two other grantees were moving towards this model.

- **Public funding (5 mentions):**

Four grantees had secured ongoing public funds, such as federal grants or matching dollars from school districts. Two of the grantees were also seeking additional public funds.

- **Private funding (2 mentions):**

Two grantees indicated private organizations would be covering costs.

Most grantees used grant funds to cover non-recurring program costs, such as those associated with purchasing equipment, small physical structures, training materials, and curriculum. Investment in one-time or capital costs for ongoing use lessens immediate future funding needs.

Finding: Systems change was a key tactic to bolster sustainability.

Systems change refers to fundamentally altering the operations or functioning of an organization or other structure, through policies, resources, relationships, power structures, and cultural norms and values.

Attempting to create systems change was a common sustainability approach from the beginning of grant projects. Nearing the end of their projects, some grantees believed that they had realized systems change and many expected further systems change as a longer-term impact of their work. However, the fruits of their efforts are still unfolding. This is not unexpected as systems change is a complex process that takes time to achieve.

EVIDENCE

Creating systems change to sustain programs was a common tactic communicated throughout the course of the grant period. It was evident from early administrative documents (e.g., work plans, proposals) and held true throughout the grant period. Overall, at least eleven grantees indicated that they were pursuing systems change, such as institutionalizing practices, changing school culture, or influencing policy.

Of the eleven grantees that aimed for systems change, seven reported systems change as an impact or expected impact of their grant:

- **Impact (5 mentions):**

Five grantees perceived that systems change was an impact of their grant. Examples include obtaining funding in the state budget; developing a pipeline for youth interested in food-systems careers; changes in school nutrition and physical activity policy at a school district; schools; and child care centers. However, it should be noted that not all the grantees had established specific measures of system or community change. In at least two cases, grantees were estimating the aggregate benefits of their efforts; and in at least two other cases, the definitive indication of sustainable change could not reasonably happen in the timeframe of the grant. The extent of systems change is difficult to claim in the short term.

- **Expected impact (7 mentions):**

Four of the five grantees who perceived systems change as an impact of their work, expected further systems change in the future. Three other grantees had not yet realized systems change,

but expected it as a longer-term impact. Examples of expected impact include coordinated care in health systems and continuing culinary nutrition programs in a hospital system.

Finding: Demonstrating impact was salient throughout the grant period.

Demonstrating impact was a common sustainability theme throughout the grant period. Grantees planned to use evaluation, and to a lesser extent storytelling, to demonstrate their impact and build awareness of their work.

EVIDENCE

Attempting to demonstrate impact was a sustainability tactic of most, if not all, grantees (at least 9 mentions). The importance of demonstrating impact came up in all three sets of grantee interviews. Grantees planned to demonstrate impact through the direct experiences of program participants and the results of program evaluation, a required component of the grant. Storytelling was also a tactic for getting the word out about program impacts and successes. It was anticipated that evaluation and storytelling would build demand for programs and position grantees to acquire resources, such as further grant funding.

“We need to make sure we continue to collect good data and that we use that data to tell a story of the program in a way that is acceptable for policymakers, decision-makers, funders. . . .”

Some grantees also planned for a threshold number of promotions of their events or success stories via the media or presentation at conferences. Dissemination activities for a data development project included a statewide press tour, engagement of policy makers, and availability of a printed report.

While grantees felt positive about data collection and evaluation efforts, the methodologies used did not necessarily permit attribution of changes to grant activities, and evaluation findings may not be generalizable beyond the specific context.



COLLABORATION AND LEVERAGE

Overall, grantees came into their project with strong collaborations, leveraged them effectively, managed challenges successfully, and were well-positioned to continue collaborating after the grant. Strong partnerships offer value through their expertise, resources, and access to target audiences.

Finding: Grants facilitated stronger partnerships that were expected to carry forward.

All of the grantees planned from the beginning of their projects to do their work collaboratively. The grantees carried forward with these plans by strengthening existing partnerships and building new ones.

The grantees expected that their projects would continue to have a positive impact on their collaboration and partnership with other organizations beyond the grant period. Most grantees strengthened their relationships with their partners throughout their grant projects and were therefore well-positioned to continue collaborating.

EVIDENCE

Grantees intended their projects to be collaborative with external partners. From the beginning of the grant period, it was evident that:

- All of the grantees planned to work collaboratively with partners
- Many projects were leveraging existing partnerships to carry out the work

During the grant period, the grantees strengthened their partner relationships. Most of the grantees perceived that the grant had helped them build new and strengthen existing relationships. Grantees noted that the grant allowed them to meet and learn from other grantees.

Nearing the end of their projects, grantees were optimistic that collaborations would be ongoing after the grant period. Many grant-funded programs will continue with the help of partner organizations.

The grantees mentioned specific examples of how their grant could continue to have a positive impact on collaboration beyond the grant period. For example, the survey of the eight grantees that received extension on their grant projects, found that grantees expected this collaboration to manifest in the following ways:

- **Programming (6 mentions):**
Including the continued implementation of grant-funded programs with other funds or in-kind resources

- **Scaling up existing programs (2 mentions):**

Working to expand grant-funded programs to other communities or across the state

- **Fundraising (2 mentions):**

Working with partners to seek additional financial support for joint programming

- **Reducing duplication of effort (1 mention):**

By coordinating program information across organizations through an open-source asset map

“We set up a structure for future collaboration and partnerships, including specific partnerships for programming and funding.”

“We are building new programs with our partners at this time, while sustaining existing programs.”

“We wouldn’t have engaged partners without the grant. It wouldn’t have happened.”

“As far as us to connect with our local partners, it gave us an opportunity that we would have never had before.”

“We have forged new partnerships and strengthened existing partnerships in order to support one another and meet each other’s needs and goals collectively.”

Finding: Partnerships were essential for success.

Partnerships were indispensable to the operational success of the grant projects. Strong partnerships from the outset of the grant helped program implementation go smoothly. They offered value through their expertise, resources, and access to target audiences.

As noted previously, near the end of the grant period, partners were a common mechanism for sustainability; in many cases, they were expected to carry forward or expand grant-funded programs.

Although essential, partnerships were not without their challenges. Effective partnerships took effort, and grantees were willing to put in the work. Grantees understood the importance of effective collaboration for their program success and sustainability.

EVIDENCE

Partners had a high level of investment in the grant work. They contributed to program success by helping grantees reach and engage people targeted by grant programs. Partnerships provided knowledge of stakeholder communities, access to networks, and credibility. At least five grantees found that existing relationships or structures for partnering were particularly helpful in moving the grant work forward smoothly.

Grantees were adept at navigating the challenges of effective collaborations. Over the course of their grants, at least six grantees at least one change in their partnerships, including losing partners, gaining

partners, partner staff changes, and changing nature or roles of partner relationships. Two grantees had similar initiatives in overlapping geographies that caused initial confusion, but after consulting across teams, ultimately resulted in greater efficiency and less duplicative services.

Partnerships with schools were essential for certain projects, as gatekeepers to reaching students. These types of projects also faced specific challenges around scheduling, with a very long horizon needed to align school and project calendars. Furthermore, projects with school partners tended to have more changes in partnerships from the outset of the grant.

“The work done through the grant has demonstrated how effective partnerships can accomplish community goals and make effective change.”

“Collaboration and networking really takes the load off the work that people do... why recreate the wheel when there are other people who are looking for the same outcomes. By sharing information you advance the work of everyone.”



PROCESS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

On the whole, the activities of the grantees resulted in a vast array of process accomplishments. Successes included, for example, deep engagement with partners for implementation; environmental assessments of schools, early childhood education sites, and community food resources; expansion of networks; and development of new infrastructure, capacity, and resources. Most grantees met or exceeded their goals to reach individuals, thereby offering opportunities to enhance healthy lifestyles, grow knowledge, and access healthy food.

Finding: Grantees successfully and extensively engaged with partners to implement the projects.

Partner engagement was largely in the realm of schools, early childhood (one project), and community development. Not only did partners implement activities as planned (for the most part), but partners were engaged in ways that increased their own capacity to attend to and deliver interventions for better nutrition and healthy lifestyles.

EVIDENCE

- Many grantees set and achieved quantifiable goals for partner engagement, especially in the realm of schools, early childhood, and community development. For example, at least 71 schools (of 69 planned) were engaged across the four projects that engaged with schools. Also, a nationally established program expanded its reach to 291 early childhood settings in Michigan, which included 861 classrooms.
- Process accomplishments (outputs) included completions of environmental assessments—in 36 schools, in 52 early childhood education sites, and community food resources in 6 communities. Virtually all of the school sites used pre-assessments to build action plans and post-assessments to identify changes over time. In another example, an early childhood project trained 1,154 early childhood educators to deliver programming. Although this figure was impressive, it fell short of the grantee's goal of 1,450 educators.
- For communities, activities enabled them to develop and expand networks and connections, assess local resources, and expand their reach to target audiences. For example, one grantee developed a statewide tribal food access community of learning across six tribes. This project also more than doubled the number of ties to community partner organizations related to community food resource access points and supports. Another grantee project successfully expanded the reach of the nationally recognized Double Up Food Bucks initiative geographically, and integrated new technology that provides efficiency for retailers and customers.

Finding: Grantee activities developed infrastructure, capacity resources, and dissemination.

The process measures reflect aspirations for the development of infrastructure and other resources, as well as their dissemination. The objectives were not always met, but those with the largest ambitions—those involving new research, new technology, and online data mapping—succeeded.

EVIDENCE

Several grantees realized their aspirations for the development of new research, new technology, and online data mapping.

- For example, one grantee’s research project created a dynamic online mapping system, using GIS to map out six layers of food insecurity measures. It created a “Food Balance Score” with GIS data at census tract level, which identifies communities that suffer from food insecurity in Michigan. It also developed a publicly available report with county-by-county self-sufficiency standards for the state.
- Another project greatly exceeded its target to increase the availability of nutritional resources that include Native American culture and traditional foods. The grantee organized and shared resources on an online platform and highlighted the primary audiences for each (clinicians, families and educators).
- Another example of lasting infrastructure was the comprehensive Healthy Kids U.P. Resource Guide. This is an interactive map with data for each of 15 counties, showing fitness, nutrition, and health resources for youth. Partners include schools, school districts, county health departments, and nonprofits in each geography. This is publicly available at <http://healthykidsup.org>.

Finding: Grantees’ reach was extensive, interfacing with thousands of individuals.

Most of the grantees tracked on one or more indicators of progress in reaching and retaining their desired audience. Programming—such as fitness and nutrition education, train the trainer, experiential learning, culinary training, and race training—reached tens of thousands of individuals in Michigan, primarily youth. This volume of reach (in nearly all projects) met or exceeded expectations and offered significant windows of opportunity to enhance healthy lifestyles, grow knowledge, and improve access to healthy food.

EVIDENCE

- The grantee projects collectively engaged at least 38,000 individuals in the Michigan, primarily youth.
- Nearly all of target numbers for reach, engagement, and retention were met.

- Outreach accomplishments also included dissemination of newly developed assets (e.g., continuing education credits for providers; online recipes), and existing resources.
- Several of the projects reported the launch of new, specific outreach events. These included, for example, 11 new school farmer market events, 15 nutrition awareness events at retailers, 48 wellness events at 12 schools, and three schools (of five planned) developing community-engagement actions.



EFFECTIVENESS AT AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Overall, grantees effectively impacted individual participants. Projects that had goals to improve individual outcomes largely succeeded in demonstrating improvements by meeting or exceeding benchmarks, or in very positive gains. These improvements included dietary behavior; physical activity; digital screen time; self-efficacy around healthy eating; and knowledge and interest in food- or health-related careers, and college opportunities.

9 of the 13 projects had established indicators of change at the individual level:

- Alpena Area Senior Citizens Council, Inc.
- Munson Healthcare Foundations
- Wayne State University
- Health Net of West Michigan
- Delta-Schoolcraft ISD
- National Kidney Foundation of Michigan
- Public Health, Delta & Menominee Counties
- Sparrow Foundation - Sparrow Health System
- Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association (MEMSPA)

Finding: Project participants demonstrated improved dietary behavior.

Addressing healthy behaviors related to eating typically means decreasing consumption of sugary drinks and increasing fruit and vegetable consumption. Targets for change were formulated as the percentage of people who increased the number of fruit or vegetable servings per day, or who ate at least five servings per day, or increased fruit or vegetable intake (impression rather than servings counted). Almost all of the projects met or exceeded a benchmark of dietary change, or showed strong improvement of dietary behavior.

EVIDENCE

- 7 of 10 indicators showed improvement or met or exceeded a specific benchmark of dietary change across 3 of 6 projects that tracked dietary behavior. For example, in one project, consumption of fruits and vegetables (combined) increased from 3.1 to 4.2 servings per day. This was a statistically significant difference that also exceeded the target to increase consumption by 30%.
- 3 of 7 indicators of dietary change (not specific to number of servings) in 3 of the projects were not met. For example, in a project that focused on changing early childhood environments and children's behavior, 80% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their children ate more fruit, and 69% said

their children ate more vegetables, which was short of the planned impact (83% and 74% respectively).

Finding: Amounts of physical activity and screen time were improved.

Five projects measured increases in physical activity, and three of these also intended to decrease digital screen time. Although few projects met their specific performance objectives, most demonstrated very positive gains in physical activity or fitness.

EVIDENCE

- Of the five projects that aimed for increases in physical activity, only one met their objectives, although most showed very positive gains. For example, in one project, 70% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their children were more physically active. However, this positive development did not meet their target of 76%. Another project aimed to increase by 30% the percentage of students who engaged in at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity five days a week, but showed an actual increase of 19.8% over pretest in year one.
- Another project found that youth increased average physical activity from 1.2 to 1.8 hours per day. This was a statistically significant difference, and also met their performance goal of 30 minutes per day increase.
- Digital screen time results also had very positive trajectories, despite most not meeting their target threshold. For example, one intervention resulted in a 27% decrease for students in overall screen time from 5.5 hours per day to 4 hours. Another project decreased by 17% the proportion of students who spent more than 3 hours a day on screen time, which was shy of a goal of 20%.

Finding: Self-efficacy around healthy eating showed positive trends.

Three of the projects that focused on changing consumption and/or knowledge (health-oriented, or awareness of healthy food access) also aimed to impact individual self-efficacy around healthy eating. All results were in a positive direction, but only one project met its performance objective.

EVIDENCE

- One project exceeded its goal to increase self-efficacy in adults and seniors by 10% over baseline. According to a pre- to post-intervention self-report, confidence increased for over one-third of adults in each of several indicators of self-efficacy. Increases were seen in confidence in one's ability to prepare healthy recipes (44%), choose healthy food options (42%), or improve health through choosing healthier foods (35%).

Finding: Projects helped to increase participant knowledge of health-related behaviors.

Five of the grantee projects planned to increase the knowledge of their target audience in terms of awareness of healthy food availability, or health. Nearly all of the projects reported increases in participant knowledge of health-related behaviors or awareness of healthy food access points.

EVIDENCE

Examples of increases in participant knowledge included the following.

- One project expected a 5% increase in scores of health knowledge and skills from pre- to post-test of students receiving the Michigan Model for Health™ Nutrition and Physical Activity Unit lessons. Of the 22 schools included in the pre- and post-test analysis, all exceeded the target of a 5% increase, with an average increase across schools of 29%, and a range between 7.5% to 74% increase in score per school.
- One of the projects that measured change in students adopting healthier behaviors also tested student understanding of healthier behaviors. After their curriculum was completed, two specific indicators of student knowledge met the intended 65% benchmark:
 - 79% knew that entertainment screen time should be less than two hours per day
 - 82% knew that one should get 60 minutes of physical activity each day
- One of the projects that educated youth in nutrition and kitchen skills demonstrated an increase from pre- to post-test of knowledge of health-related behaviors in 52% of students. Similarly, 67% of adults increased their knowledge of health-related behaviors after participating in programming related to heart health and diabetes.

Finding: Program participants had increased knowledge and interest in career and college opportunities.

One program had an overarching goal to build capacity to help youth to become community health leaders and agents of change, and use a pipeline of programming to prepare young people to navigate professional and post-secondary opportunities.

EVIDENCE

- The pipeline was on a very positive course, with two-thirds of youth who participated in field trips and apprenticeships, expressing interest in the final phase of career development.
- After experiencing the final pipeline experience, virtually all of the youth (97%) were interested in going to college. There was a statistically significant improvement in beliefs about the ability of a specific university to help them reach career goals.

EFFECTIVENESS IN SYSTEM-LEVEL CHANGE

With an eye toward increasing community capacity to promote and support healthy behaviors, the efforts most frequently addressed local food access, clinical screening, and environmental assessments. Grantees demonstrated some gains in creating in community change and many made significant strides toward systems change. However, the outcomes reported often did not meet or were unclear about their targeted performance threshold.

At the outset of the grants, 7 of 13 projects had established indicators to measure change in outcomes at the community or systems levels.

- Alpena Area Senior Citizens Council, Inc.
- Munson Healthcare Foundations
- National Kidney Foundation of Michigan
- Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association (MEMSPA)
- Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan
- Fair Food Network
- Public Health, Delta & Menominee Counties

Finding: To address systems and community change, grantees typically focused on local food access, clinical screening, and environmental assessments.

With an eye toward increasing community capacity to promote and support healthy behaviors, the efforts most frequently addressed local food access, clinical screening, and environmental assessments. Grantees demonstrated some gains in creating in community change and many made significant strides toward systems change. However, the outcomes reported often did not meet or were unclear about their targeted performance threshold.

EVIDENCE

Among the seven grants, five were concerned with local food access, three with environmental assessments, two with clinical screening, and one with provider capacity.

Finding: Redemption programming helped to make local food accessible at a community level.

Programs with voucher redemptions experienced good success, possibly due to the fact that they relied on well-established programs, or on an existing coupon platform. Of the 13 grantees, four grants identified and reported on key indicators of healthy food access at a community or system level.

EVIDENCE

- Two grantees did not report success, although one of these had set a very high bar for success, and the other did not fully implement efforts. For example, one project planned that 100% of Community-Supported Agriculture incentives would be redeemed, but in actuality, about two-thirds (64%) were redeemed.
- The other two projects had dramatic success in increasing access at community or system levels. One example was the amount of SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks spent on fruit and vegetables in six targeted geographies, which increased 358%, exceeding the 15% target. The Double Up Food Bucks programming exceeded all of its system outcome benchmarks related to redemption and purchasing.

Finding: Attempts to increase clinical screening were met with mixed success.

The two endeavors related to clinical screening were nascent, had some success during the grant period, and are intended to continue with their forward movement post-grant.

EVIDENCE

- One very ambitious clinical screening effort met its performance target. With a target to increase by 20% the number of children ages 3 to 11 who were screened for BMI, among six participating health systems, the target was exceeded, with a 25% increase in number of screenings.
- The other effort, in its pilot phase of translation to practice, had more modest results. With an aim to have 10 clinical practices actively screen for food security, six were confirmed as actively using the assessment tool.

Finding: Assessments were aimed at environments with children, and showed positive gains.

Environmental assessments are an important feature of determining whether or not a culture or a setting has made notable shifts, or has increased capacity to support behavioral changes. Validated tools can best position an organization to gauge their climate or change in capacity. Three projects aimed for specific thresholds of change to improve school or early child care environments.

EVIDENCE

Of the three projects, one met its performance target, another was unclear, and the third did not report on the analysis planned; yet all environmental assessments showed improvements over time.

- To better support healthy lifestyles, 18 elementary and middle school incorporated social and emotional health into their school improvement plans (SIPs) as part of their project activities, and they also completed the Healthy School Action Tools Assessment for Social and Emotional Health. Of these 18 schools, the range of improvement in HSAT scores from pre- to post-implementation was -7.5 to +59.5 points with the average increase being 26.2 points. Nearly all (16 of the 18 schools) exceeded the target to improve scores by 4 points.



LESSONS

The Health Fund's interests (goals) are to make investments aligned with its mission and goals; show strong potential for measurable impact, sustainability, and replication; and demonstrate collaboration as well as capacity to address unmet needs. Its objectives are lofty; it seeks projects that can address policy, empowerment, systems change, and root causes of health disparities.

The 2017 Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles cohort collectively made great strides toward addressing the intended goals of the Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles cluster.

The activities of the grantees were **successful**, and yielded positive results. In their execution, they rarely strayed from their original plans. They faced implementation challenges, but ultimately demonstrated a vast array of process accomplishments. For example, seven grantee projects collectively engaged at least 38,000 individuals in Michigan. With these impressive process accomplishments, they reveal that the Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles investments provide opportunities to enhance healthy lifestyles, grow knowledge, and access healthy food.

The cohort excelled at **collaboration**. Their collective efforts revealed the critical role of partnerships in executing projects focused on nutrition and healthy lifestyles; partnerships are indispensable to projects and operational success. Strong partnerships offer value through expertise, resources, and access to target audiences. It is clear that grant funding can help grantees strengthen and build relationships. Potential grantees without strong existing partnerships may benefit from a planning grant or adequate planning time built in to the beginning of the grant period before implementation begins.

The cohort **effectively impacted individual** participants' knowledge, skills, and behavior, in the areas of dietary behavior; physical activity; digital screen time; self-efficacy around healthy eating; and knowledge and interest in food- or health-related careers, and college opportunities.

It is important to note that projects were not of a sufficient duration and not designed to assess long-term changes in health outcomes. Nonetheless, the targeted **behavioral changes in diet and activity** that were accomplished in this cohort have well-established clinical relationships to health outcomes. Therefore, these activities and their results are consistent with the intended goals of Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles to enhance health outcomes by making healthy living more accessible, through systems, community, and individual change.

Systems change is a complex process that takes time to achieve, and further change is expected to occur as a longer-term impact of efforts. Aiming to increase community capacity to promote and support healthy behaviors, grantees demonstrated some gains in creating in community change, and

many made significant strides toward systems change. However, the reported outcomes often did not meet or were unclear about their targeted performance thresholds.

To better understand the longer-term impacts of grants on **systems change**, it would be illuminating to follow up with grantees a few years after their grant project. However, there will be limitations in attributing systems change to grant funded projects. Efforts to fundamentally change structures, organizations, and norms will be influenced by many efforts and contextual factors.

Grantees identified and pursued several means to **sustainability** to good effect. Potential future grantees would benefit from technical assistance to illuminate ways to sustain their work, and messages reinforcing the essential need to plan early for sustainability.

While **sustainability** is a consistent interest in philanthropy, what is defined as sustained and the resources it takes to sustain may vary across projects. For example, a data-systems project may be sustained in a straightforward manner (e.g., requiring funds to maintain a built system), while a human service program is likely to be more complex (e.g., potentially involving curricula, trainers, materials, staffing, incentives, or intersection with other supports, all occurring in a natural environment). Also, it is not realistic for all initiatives to be equally sustainable. Consideration must be given to identifying the right threshold or expectation for different types of programming, e.g., whether the model is based on evidence, promising practice, or is emergent. There is a clear need for investment in grants of all kinds—planning, pilots, research, and implementation grants, as well as replication and scaled effort grants—each of which fills a different niche in leveraging innovation and evidence to reach the ultimate goal of healthier lives.

The Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grant stream is intended to have impacts in the policy arena. There were at least five projects the Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles evaluation had deemed at the outset as having high potential to inform public policy. At the conclusion, several stood out for their potential to, for example, influence state academic standards; inform state and federal food policy, in particular the USDA Farm Bill; and inform legislators by providing district level data on self-sufficiency standards that serve as a benchmark for understanding need and justifying supports.

The Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grant stream is intended to have impacts in **empowerment** and engagement, and to address root causes of health disparities. These topics have been addressed in prior reports, but it bears repeating that the benefits from the Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyles grant awards will accrue almost entirely to disproportionately barriered groups, as the work largely impacted vulnerable children.

Root causes are by their very nature difficult to resolve. What this cohort has demonstrated is its effectiveness in improving individual behaviors and knowledge, and developing environmental or cultural support for healthy lifestyle, e.g., greater access to healthy food. In this narrow sense, the work

was on a proper trajectory to addressing root causes of nutrition deficits that contribute to health disparities. This influence may not be fully realized, however, unless there is a critical mass of environments or people affected, which is beyond the power of any one cohort. Broader impacts and a more demonstrable effect on root causes could be improved by providing longer-term support of projects that can establish a strong correlation between their interventions and the conditions they seek to address, and by supporting the expansion of promising program models.

The Health Fund has an interest in helping individual grantees improve capacity to **measure outcomes** and to improve future programming. Future grantees would benefit from evaluation technical assistance at multiple stages of the project, from pre-implementation planning, to analysis and reporting. Even for those who may hire third parties, opportunities for **evaluation capacity-building** helps grantees contribute meaningfully to their own evaluation and be a better end user of data and communicator of findings.

Potential grantees that provide direct services and education to individuals would benefit from an increasing emphasis on **measuring medium-term outcomes**, such as behavior change or changes in food insecurity status. In a one to two-year grant cycle, it is not reasonable to expect grantees to move the needle on longer term health indicators. Potential future grantees may grapple with how to set **benchmarks** and identify impacts at systems and community levels. Use of validated tools for environmental assessment will help organization to gauge noteworthy cultural shifts or change in capacity to support behavioral changes.

