

Title

Oregon's Shared Meals Collaborative Project—*“Eat Together. Cook Together. Talk Together. Make mealtime a shared time.”*

People & Organizations Involved

The Nutrition Council of Oregon (NCO) is a group of nutrition professionals from around the state representing public health, academia, nutrition and food programs, and non-profit organizations. Member organizations presently include: Oregon Public Health Division, DHS State Unit on Aging, DHS Children, Adults & Families Youth Services Programs, Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board, OHSU School of Medicine Dietetic & Nutrition Education Program, Oregon Public Health Institute, Oregon Dairy Council, OR Dept of Education Child Nutrition Program, Oregon Food Bank, OSU Extension Service, and Region X Head Start.

Background & Introduction

Close to the time that an NCO steering committee was formed to address shared meals, Oregon was awarded an ASTPHND grant for a collaborative learning pilot project. The project became 2-pronged—1) to strengthen NCO's working relationship and 2) develop a family meal initiative. An initial task of the committee was a thorough review of current literature. Shared or family meals provide numerous benefits (physical, social and emotional) across the lifespan. Specific benefits for the different population groups were also identified: early childhood-breastfeeding and feeding behaviors; child care-modeling healthy habits; school aged-learning outcomes; adolescents-prevention of risky behavior; adults-weight management; seniors-socialization and improved health. Barriers (e.g. time, lack of food preparation skills, food insecurity) to shared meals were also identified from the literature.

The steering committee took the lead in moving the work forward, however due in part to the ASTPHND grant, all the NCO members took part in the decision-making as a learning collaborative. Because NCO members represented the lifecourse perspective and various cultural and ethnic/racial groups, the term “family meals” was determined to be less inclusive. It was decided that the USDA/FNS Core Nutrition Messages will serve as the foundation of our work with some minor modifications in order to meet the needs of all NCO members and partners. The umbrella message was developed. (Also of note—2013 is the 20 year anniversary of an Oregon social marketing family meals campaign.)

Project goals

Overall the project aims to grow awareness about shared meals among Oregonians. Other specific goals include:

- Integrate a lifecourse perspective into the project
- Find consistent messages that go across projects and programs
- Learn how to get more investment and involvement from partners
- Be relevant to partner agencies and ensure that everyone benefits
- Achieve consensus among the group to endorse the project as we move forward

Methods

NCO is coordinating the use of the consistent umbrella message “*Cook together. Eat Together. Talk together. Make meal time a shared time.*” and help support shared meals projects that are undertaken by individual agencies. The launch for the project will peak in September 2013.

The various networks and organizations participating in the initiative have the ability to implement the umbrella message within their target populations and with their available resources.

An online survey was sent to NCO members and partners in Feb, 2013 to inventory what shared meals activities are currently being done, future plans and desired outcomes, resources and support needed. A second assessment (anonymous) to be administered later 2013 will identify what the respondent has heard about NCO (this is related to an NCO branding project). Additional potential partners will be contacted to enlist their involvement in the shared meals project, using a brief summary that highlights activities already happening (provided by the initial assessment) and raises the profile of NCO.

Results

All NCO members have been involved in the project at different times and support the umbrella message. Results from the first survey and accompanying report are currently in process. Additional potential partners have been identified. Evaluation may include shared meal questions on population-based surveillance tools.

Summary/Discussion

This project has used a collaborative process and as such has taken more time to move forward. The benefit however is that there is support and involvement of every NCO member for this project with an outcome of strengthening the NCO working relationship. Another challenge is the overlay of different projects, i.e. development of the NCO mission statement and branding process which are integral to the shared meals project.