

## Policy & Environmental Change

A policy and environmental change approach to obesity prevention takes all influences on obesity (individual, physical, economic, social and policy) into consideration when planning an intervention. It also specifically focuses on the changeable aspects of an environment versus the changeable aspects of an individual. Environment-based interventions don't tell people how to eat; they make it easier for people to eat healthy.

An environmental approach is especially useful when it comes to physical activity and nutrition. Individuals will almost always make the easy choice or the choice that feels best. The easy choices are often convenience foods high in fat and sugar (which taste and feel good, and are often less expensive), and physical inactivity, because for most of us that feels good as well. An environment-based intervention shifts the options to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

Comparison of Approaches to Obesity Prevention		
	Individual Approach	Environmental Approach
Focus	Changing the individual	Changing the community environment
Who/What Changes?	Individual behavior	Structural, social, economic, or policy structures
Who is Responsible?	Individuals working with health professionals	Community leaders, policy makers, and health professionals working with community members
Who is Affected?	People already interested in changing	Everyone in the community
Tools	Individual education	Community development

Environmental interventions include changes to the economic, social, physical and organizational environments. The nature of environmental interventions means they are implemented and evaluated over a longer period of time than more individually-oriented interventions. Because policy change and environmental interventions are bound into systems change they are sustainable over time. Policy change affects laws, regulations and rules, both formal and informal.

Examples of policy change are:

- organizational rules that provide time off during work hours for physical activity;
- making low-fat choices available in cafeterias;
- reduced pricing for healthful choices in vending machines; and
- policies and incentives promoting physical activity during the workday.

Sample Policy and Environmental Change Strategies:

Capacity building—Trainings/Conferences for involved partners

- Covering costs of a partner to attend the Missouri Trail Summit

Infrastructure improvements, sidewalks, trails, Farmer's Market, community gardens, etc...

- Covering material costs for Trail Development
- Installing bike racks near schools, worksites and other public areas

Social marketing campaign

- Work with MU Journalism School to develop County-level communication plan

Promote local food production and entrepreneurship

- Demonstrations to support the purchase and use of fresh local produce
- Develop workshop to encourage local food production targeting both youth and/or adults

Identify safe walking/biking routes in community

- Creating and publishing walking/biking maps to detail safe routes to school and/or worksites

Developing any of the following to increase access to healthy, affordable, locally-produced food:

- Farm to school
- School gardens
- After-school gardens
- School farm stand/market

Matching dollars for grants

- Matching dollars needed for VISTA position(s)
- Matching dollars needed for trail development grants

These are just some sample expenditures to support policy and environmental change strategies at the community level. Since the initiative focus on policy and environmental change is the new approach for obesity prevention, there is not a final handbook written on 'best practices.' For our initiative, we feel if the strategies and expenditures can be justified and will lead to policy and environmental changes, then go for it!