



The Healthy Choice Evaluation (2019-2020)

COVID-19 was a barrier to the implementation and evaluation of The Healthy Choice.

The Healthy Choice is a new, evidence-based, whole food-focused nutrition ranking system. The levels include green: choose often, yellow: choose sometimes, and red: choose rarely. The goal of The Healthy Choice is to monitor and improve the proportion of nutritious food taken in by Foodlink, distributed to network partners, and ultimately, selected by pantry clients.

Foodlink's evaluation plan was segmented into 3 levels:

- Food Bank Level**
 - Order data analysis at 4 time points
- Pantry Level**
 - Pre/post training surveys & 6 month follow up
 - Pantry observational assessment pre/post implementation & 6 month follow up
- Client Level**
 - 1 hour focus group with recruited clients

Pantry Strategies to Achieve this Goal Include:

- Encourage increased ordering and donations of green- and yellow-ranked items
- Provide hands-on training to pantry staff and volunteers to increase the knowledge, capacity, and willingness to follow The Healthy Choice and create a healthier pantry environment
- Create internal and client-facing messaging, including signage on shelves that help clients navigate food choices organized by ranking

Pantry Level Training

Foodlink recruited seven pantries to participate in The Healthy Choice training and, prior to the pandemic, had completed six of those trainings. Of those six, two pantries also received hands-on implementation and technical assistance, including receiving and setting up their new materials, before being impacted by COVID-19.

Foodlink staff and the pantries could not complete the trainings or implementation as planned, due to necessary safety measures, as well as food bank and pantry operations changing dramatically.

Evaluation Impact at Foodlink
[I feel] "more equipped to take on this type of in-depth evaluation in the future – especially knowing the staff capacity, time, and relationships necessary to build an evaluation plan with integrity."

Pantry Training Survey Results

- Majority agreed training was effective, and that they'd use what they learned
- Reduction in perceived barriers of offering more healthy foods to clients from pre- to post-training
- Increases in willingness to offer and encourage more healthy choices from pre- to post-training
- Increase in self efficacy and capacity for implementation, including ease of and support to offer more healthy choices to clients

- Attendees 100% agreed:**
- It is important to understand the nutrition quality of the foods offered clients
 - Food pantries have a responsibility to make it easier for clients to make healthy choices
 - It is important for clients to be able to make healthy choices



Rooted in Evidence

In 2019, Foodlink was selected as a Rooted in Evidence grantee. Established by the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition, this grant program funds eligible food banks working to support innovative and dynamic programming to improve the health and dietary quality of emergency food recipients. Grantees were awarded \$20,000 and received technical assistance and evaluation support.