

Validation of a Collaboration Readiness Assessment Tool for Use by Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Education (SNAP-Ed) Agencies and Partners

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To evaluate content and face validity of a collaboration readiness assessment tool developed to facilitate collaborative efforts to implement policy, systems, and environment changes in *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Education* (SNAP-Ed).

Methods: Evaluation of the validity of the tool involved 2 steps. Step 1 was conducted with 4 subject matter experts to evaluate content validity. Step 2 used an iterative cognitive testing process with 4 rounds and 16 SNAP-Ed staff and community partners to evaluate face validity.

Results: Subject matter experts found that survey items appropriately matched the content area indicated and adequately covered collective efficacy, change efficacy, and readiness. Cognitive testing with SNAP-Ed staff and partners informed modifications and resulted in adequate face validity.

Conclusions and Implications: The ability to measure collaboration readiness will allow agencies and community partners that implement SNAP-Ed to target areas that facilitate collaboration efforts needed for policy, systems, and environment change and collective efficacy. Further cognitive testing of the tool with other populations is needed to ensure its applicability and usefulness. Evaluation of the reliability of the tool with a broad range of SNAP-Ed programs and community agencies is also recommended.

Key Words: assessment, collaboration, readiness, validation, SNAP-Ed (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2017;■■:■■–■■.)

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INTRODUCTION

The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 expanded *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Education* (SNAP-Ed) from a nutrition education program to an obesity prevention program. This legislation explicitly identified obesity prevention as a major emphasis and required comprehensive community and public health approaches for low-income

populations.¹ With these changes, the SNAP-Ed program adopted Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) change strategies to allow for closer collaboration with community partners. This transition shifted SNAP-Ed from a direct education program to a community collaboration program and required SNAP-Ed programs to develop additional skills and tools. To address readiness to implement PSE changes, readiness resources were included in

the SNAP-Ed evaluation framework.² The framework contains a flowchart to guide the process of initiating activities with outside agencies. The flow chart follows a step-by-step approach with readiness resources to guide practitioners and planners.²

Although resources were provided in the framework, barriers to PSE implementation were present. One main item identified in a study conducted with SNAP-Ed and *Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program* staff was a way to assess readiness of both SNAP-Ed agencies and community partners to collaborate to implement PSE changes.³ Collaboration for this study was defined as participants willingly working together in planning and decision making.⁴ Defining attributes of collaboration include trust and respect in collaborators, knowledge and expertise valued over role and/or title, joint venture, team working, share expertise, and participation in planning and decision making.⁵ Collaboration readiness (CR) refers to the willingness to work in collaboration to

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achieve common goals. Although organizational and community models of readiness for change exist in the literature, different components of readiness were measured.⁶ A comprehensive literature review of these readiness assessments found 4 domains to assess when planning and tailoring intervention strategies to communities: (1) climate that facilitates changes, (2) attitudes and current efforts, (3) commitment, and (4) capacity to implement change.⁷

Seeing where groups are willing to change, have capacity to make changes, and how to assist in joint efforts, will help make PSE changes.

To address the defining attributes of collaboration and provide a way to assess CR, the concepts of collective efficacy were used. Collective efficacy is social cohesion and willingness to act together for the common good.⁸ Collective efficacy for change refers to group members' shared belief in their collective capacity to organize and implement change.⁹ Components of collective efficacy include cohesion between similar groups, ability to work with diverse groups, leveraging resources, and ability and willingness to participate in policy and community change.¹⁰

Organizational readiness assessments focusing on collective and change efficacy of a single organization have been developed.^{9,11} Foster-Fisherman et al⁶ developed a community readiness assessment based on collective efficacy. However, a tool has not been developed to measure readiness levels of multiple organizations intending to collaborate. Because of a lack of available tools, a SNAP-Ed CR tool specific to SNAP-Ed programming was needed to identify current activity (ie, connections with other programs, sharing of resources, participation in policy and/or community change) and current activities in 6 environmental settings, including a separate section that evaluated development of activities that would lead to increased collaboration.

To assess CR among SNAP-Ed agencies and potential collaborating community partners, the researchers developed a CR assessment tool. The tool examined 5 areas of CR based on collective efficacy^{8,9}: (1) connections with similar programs, (2) connections with other diverse groups, (3) leveraging resources between groups, (4) group empowerment, and (5) engagement in political action and/or community change. Each of these 5 areas included 5 response category statements (yet to consider, considering, developing, acting on, and established), reflecting a progression in readiness using concepts of the transtheoretical model.¹² For example, in the area *Share resources with other groups*, the anchoring statement for the yet to consider level was *Not familiar with or not considering other groups' resources* (See [Supplementary Data](#)). The statement reflects the transtheoretical model precontemplation stage in that subjects are uninformed and not ready to take action in the foreseeable future.¹² These statements were similar to anchoring statements used to assess community readiness in the Children's Healthy Living readiness survey.¹³

The CR tools consisted of 3 sections: (1) an introduction on how to use the tool, (2) the assessment survey, and (3) examples of activities to increase collaboration (based on the level of readiness) and links to resources for example activities. The CR tools used respondents' self-assessed statements to obtain a CR level for each of the 5 readiness areas. Statements were mapped to a table providing examples of how to increase CR based on the group's readiness level. The purpose of this study was to evaluate content and face validity of the CR assessment tool developed to facilitate collaborative efforts to implement PSE changes in SNAP-Ed.

METHODS

Evaluation of validity of the CR assessment involved 2 steps. The researchers conducted step 1 with 4 subject matter experts (SMEs) to evaluate the tool's content validity.¹⁴ Step 2 used an iterative cognitive testing process with 16 SNAP-Ed staff and

community stakeholders to evaluate the tool's face validity.¹⁴ The interviewer had prior survey and interviewing experience, received oversight from researchers with qualitative expertise, and followed a modified script used in a previous face validation study.¹⁵ The same interviewer conducted both steps.

The collaboration readiness tool is useful for evaluating progress or assisting with planning efforts.

Step 1

The first step involved consultation with SMEs. To evaluate content validity, it is recommended that ≥ 2 SMEs evaluate each item.¹⁶ The tool was evaluated by 4 doctoral-level SMEs with expertise in change efficacy, readiness, collective efficacy, community collaboration, and cognitive testing. The SMEs had an average of >10 years' experience in readiness tool and survey development. In addition, SMEs had >5 years' experience in SNAP-Ed program evaluation. Before the interviews, the tools were sent to the SMEs. During interviews, the SMEs were asked to review anchoring statements for relevance to readiness, determine whether the 5 areas focused on collective efficacy variables, indicate whether each survey item appropriately matched the content area indicated, and indicate whether any areas pertinent to collaboration and readiness were not covered in the 5 areas. Once the interviews were completed, suggested changes were made to the tool.¹⁴

Initially, 2 CR tools were developed. One was intended for SNAP-Ed program staff and the other was for community agencies. Both tools examined the same 5 CR areas and contained 5 response statements. The difference between the tools was in the wording of the response statements. The CR tool for SNAP-Ed program staff was tailored to program activities whereas the tool for community agencies was more general. For example, in the readiness area *Share*

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