

# FOOD

## S Y S T E M S



**American Planning Association**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

*Cover image: Boise, Idaho farmers' market.*

# PLAN4Health

An American Planning Association Project

## What is Plan4Health?

Plan4Health is a national movement connecting communities across the country to link planning and public health. Plan4Health is anchored by American Planning Association Chapters and American Public Health Association Affiliates with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Launched in September 2014, Plan4Health supports creative partnerships to build sustainable, cross-sector coalitions in 35 communities. Coalitions work with communities to increase access to healthy food or increase opportunities for active living where residents live, learn, work, and play.

At the national level, the American Planning Association and the American Public Health Association partner with the American Heart Association, the National WIC Association, the Society for Public Health Education, and the Directors of Health Promotion and Education. These organizations pursue a shared CDC platform to prevent chronic disease, help Americans live healthier lives, and support communities to make healthy living easier where people live, learn, work, and play.

Plan4Health reconnects planning and public health, fields that grew out of the same movement to create healthy communities. By reinvigorating the links between public health and the built environment, Plan4Health combats chronic disease by increasing access to nutritious foods and increasing opportunities for physical activity. Plan4Health aims to improve health outcomes through improvements to the built environment by building collaboration, community capacity, and civic engagement. The project will potentially impact more than three million people across the country through policy, systems, and environmental change strategies.

## What is a Food System?

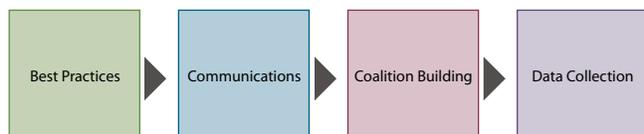
A healthy, sustainable food system emphasizes, strengthens, and makes visible the interdependent relationships between individual sectors (from production to waste disposal) and characteristics (health-promoting, sustainable, resilient, diverse, fair, economically balanced, and transparent) of the system.

## What are food systems in the context of Plan4Health?

Plan4Health coalitions approach food systems by identifying the many inputs and outputs that impact a community's access to healthy food. Do schools serve nutritious lunches to their students? Do neighborhoods have access to corner stores, grocery stores, farmers markets, and gardens that supply a range of food at affordable prices? Plan4Health coalitions have worked in many different ways to improve the policies, governing systems, and environments that impact these aspects of food systems in their efforts to make healthy communities where people live, learn, work, and play.

## How Can This Toolkit Be Used?

This toolkit offers a snapshot of reports, webinars, toolkits, community examples, videos, podcasts, and more about active living in Plan4Health. It can be read cover to cover or looked at in pieces, as each page can be a stand-alone document to inform and educate about active living strategies. Additional information about the Plan4Health coalitions, including [mini-webinars](#), [videos](#), and [podcasts](#), is available on the [Plan4Health Peer Learning Network](#).



A community garden in Chatham County, Georgia



## Grow

### Best practices

**Community gardens:** Community gardens build resilient and healthy communities. Combating food deserts through expanded garden space not only increases the availability of fresh produce, but engages all residents interested in growing food and learning more about the process. Many programs focus on gardens, whether in parks, schools, or other publicly accessible spaces.

- In Summit County, Ohio, the Plan4Health coalition expanded the use of garden space throughout the community, placing an emphasis on farm fresh produce. They developed a [Community Garden Toolkit](#) based on their work. Additionally, the coalition launched client choice food pantries in three sites, partnering with five corner stores to implement a farm to community model, and leveraging food assistance programs through mini farmers markets.

**Home gardens:** In many communities, people do not have access to a community garden due to limited mobility or lack of geographic proximity. Home gardens can provide a great alternative to community gardens, but often require creative approaches to address space and capacity needs.

- In Kenton County, Kentucky, the coalition developed summer community garden projects, which included working with a local garden designer to create three custom designs for home gardeners. The coalition built garden boxes and provided vouchers for dirt and plants from local nurseries, focusing on low-income neighborhoods that are not served by a healthy corner store. They distributed [flyers](#) in both English and Spanish, successfully engaging 63 residents.

### From our partners



[Dig, Eat, and Be Healthy: A Guide to Growing Food on Public Property](#)



[American Community Garden Association](#)



[Cultivating Community: A Guide to Starting A Community Garden](#)

### From the field



Learn more about Boise, Idaho in the Vista Food Assessment video.



A display case with fresh produce, a result of the Kenton County healthy corner stores initiative.

## Distribute

### Best practices

**Healthy corner stores:** Targeting corner store retailers is one approach to increasing healthy food options in underserved neighborhoods. Small stores often carry prepackaged processed foods and are sometimes the only source of food in a neighborhood, making them a key player in increasing healthy food options in a community.

- In Kenton County, Kentucky, the Plan4Health coalition pursued a healthy corner stores approach with an eye toward authentically engaging corner store owners. The coalition worked directly with store owners and operators to increase inventory options and drive customers to these options. This included [an application](#) that solicited community impact and feedback.

**Mobile markets:** Mobile markets can address food deserts by bringing healthy food options to neighborhoods in need. Especially in areas where more permanent infrastructure changes are not possible or partnerships with local corner and grocery stores are not fruitful, mobile markets offer a chance for low-income, food-insecure communities to access healthy food.

- In Chatham County, Georgia, the Plan4Health coalition launched the community's first mobile market, which brings fresh produce to target communities across the city. Because of the coalition's efforts, the city passed [a mobile market policy](#) in February 2016 which allowed the markets to operate with longer hours and in more locations across the city.

### From our partners



[Voices for Healthy Kids Healthy Foods Financing – Corner Stores Toolkit](#)



[Current Practices in Healthy Food Retail: Small Stores](#)



[Model Health Checkout Aisle Ordinance](#)

### From the field



Watch Emi Randall discuss the Plan4Health work in Kenton County, Kentucky.



A farm in Kane County, Illinois.

## Connect

### Best Practices

**Food hubs:** A food hub strengthens the connection between food growers and buyers, and between residents and fresh, local food. As with all community work, it is important to authentically engage with the community, including farmers, businesses, and community members.

- In Kane County, Illinois, the Plan4Health coalition supported phase two of a food hub feasibility study – and developed [a food hub feasibility toolkit](#) – to identify mechanisms for improving access to fresh foods. The coalition worked closely with farmers, buyers, and community members to identify and vet possible models and sites for a food hub. The coalition intentionally incorporated a health equity lens, ensuring that potential strategies identified for implementation also supported vulnerable communities and advanced access to healthy food for all residents.

**Food banks:** Food banks provide sustenance to low-income community members who may be unable to obtain food from other sources. They are a vital player in many communities, but sometimes face limited resources and capacity issues.

- In Linn County, Iowa, the Plan4Health coalition developed an [interactive food assistance map](#) to help residents find the location of nearby food pantries. The map also helped highlight gaps in the food assistance system and identify areas of greatest need. This information resulted in a coordinated mobile pantry system that brings food of high nutritional content to the areas without access to food pantries.

### From our partners



[Healthy Food Bank Hub](#)



[Growing Food Connections Food System Reader](#)



[The Economics of Local Food Systems Toolkit](#)

### From the field



Watch Matt Tansley discuss the process for increasing access to nutritious food in Kane County.



## Greater Boston Association of Convenience Stores

*The Greater Boston Association of Convenience Stores logo was developed by local youth.*

# Innovation in Food Systems: A Convenience Store Association in Boston

### What?

The Metro Boston Plan4Health coalition pioneered food systems work by approaching healthy corner stores in an innovative way. In seeking to improve access to healthy food, the coalition initially focused on strengthening distribution networks to support healthy food retail initiatives and work with grocery stores to offer and promote healthy foods. However, it became clear that distribution was not the only barrier facing corner stores—other business-related challenges and competing priorities also hindered stores' ability to carry healthy food options. Instead of letting this prevent the work from continuing, the coalition flexed and developed the Greater Boston Association of Convenience Stores.

### How?

The coalition responded to the need on the part of corner store owners to address issues beyond distribution. The Greater Boston Association of Convenience Stores allows corner store owners to have a space for conversing, community building, accessing professional development opportunities and technical assistance, and discussing options for joint purchasing of fruits and vegetables. Framed as an economic development opportunity, the association recognizes the financial barriers to providing healthy food options and contributes to the sustainability of healthy food access by offering a flexible structure that will expand as association membership increases.

The coalition partnered with local consultants who own corner stores in order to determine the framework for the business association. The development process included substantial community outreach to understand the needs of store owners, including informational sessions for corner store owners, postcard campaigns, and targeted outreach to municipal economic development and planning departments, chambers of commerce, and other nongovernmental organizations that work to support businesses.

The coalition was able to engage partners to assist with disseminating information about the association and leverage technical assistance resources across the network.

The coalition also involved local youth in the project through the development of the Greater Boston Association of Convenience Stores' logo, in addition to the design of another program logo.

### From the field



Watch an introduction to the Greater Boston Association of Convenience Stores



Interview with Barry Keppard



[Healthy On The Go! Implementation Guide](#)



Kenton County's "one healthy buck" —wooden nickels that are redeemable for healthy snacks

## Communications

### Tips from the field

- The Kenton County Plan4Health coalition's [healthy corner stores initiative](#) empowered store owners to implement creative marketing tactics. One example is posting recipe cards and nutrition information throughout a store, making it easier for shoppers to identify healthy food options.
- In Kingston, New York, the Plan4Health coalition launched a new [website](#) during the project as a platform for engaging with the community, sharing successes via a blog and social media outlets, and informing the community about local health-related events.

### Engaging the community

 [Summit County Gardening Workshop Training](#)

### From our partners

 [CDC Gateway to Health Communication and Social Marketing Audience Profiles](#)

 [Making Memorable Messages – Plan4Health Communications Webinar](#)

 [Media 101: Interviews – Plan4Health Communications Webinar](#)



Summit County, Ohio, gave away free seeds and resources during an expo to build community.

## Coalition Building

### Tips from the field

- In Kane County, Illinois, the Plan4Health coalition engaged 177 community members in a county leaders' summit to discuss integrated planning efforts. The summit participants included high-level elected officials.
- In Chatham County, Georgia, the Plan4Health coalition approached coalition building with a comprehensive strategy that resulted in authentic engagement; the coalition currently has over 100 members.

### Engaging the community

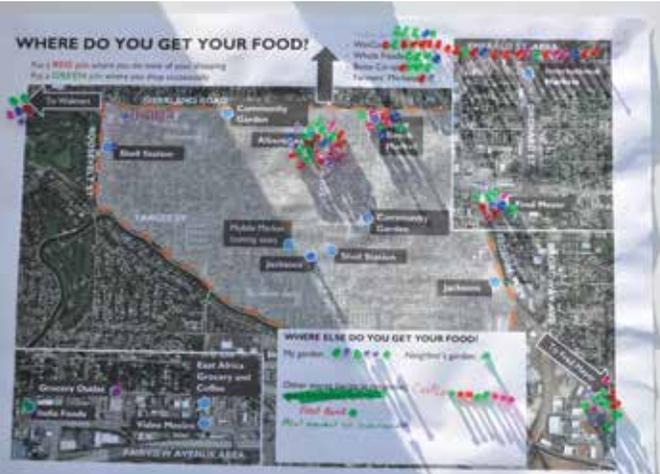
 [Live Well Kingston Operational Guidelines](#)

### From our partners

 [Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide](#)

 [Collaboration Assessment Tool](#)

 [Community Partnerships Part I: Innovative Partnerships to Improve Health](#)



The Boise, Idaho, coalition collected information about where people get their food during a farmers market event.

## Data Collection

### Tips from the field

- In Austin, Texas, the Plan4Health coalition conducted [focus groups to help inform their food systems work](#), which lead to the development of a food plan that is tailored to community needs around community gardens, healthy food access, and food waste recovery.
- In Boise, Idaho, the Plan4Health coalition worked closely with Boise State University's School of Nursing to conduct a door-to-door survey that helped assess neighborhood residents' level of food access. Data from the survey are included in the [Neighborhood Food Assessment Toolkit](#).

### Engaging with the planning and community health center



[Growing Food Connections](#)

### From our partners



[Active Living Research – Tools and Resources](#)



[U.S. Department of Transportation—Transportation and Health Tool](#)



[Community Commons](#)

The **PLAN4HEALTH** community  
*envisions* the full integration of  
**PLANNING** and **PUBLIC HEALTH**  
 where we *live, learn, work,* and *play.*

## Plan4Health Cohort I Coalitions



1 Austin, TX	10 Kane County, IL
2 Bensenville, IL	11 Kenton County, KY
3 Boise, ID	12 Kingston, NY
4 Chatham County, GA	13 Linn County, IA
5 Columbus, IN	14 Metro Boston, MA
6 Columbus, OH	15 Nashua, NH
7 Dane County, WI	16 St. Louis
8 Eastern CT	17 Summit County, OH
9 Indianapolis	18 Trenton, NJ

## Plan4Health Cohort I Coalitions

- 1** *Austin, Texas:* Austin's Plan4Health Pilot program, launched by the city, sought to increase physical activity and improve the local sustainable food system. Through collaborative efforts, the initiative implemented a community-wide program to encourage the use of active transportation (bike, walk, transit) and to increase access to healthy eating through neighborhood engagement and outreach.
- 2** *Bensenville, Illinois:* The [B-Well Bensenville](#) Project has worked to address physical inactivity, with a focus on the needs of low-income and Hispanic residents—the city's most vulnerable populations. Efforts have included short-term solutions like raising awareness about new physical activity opportunities within the community and longer-term policy and environmental changes to increase physical activity levels in the community.
- 3** *Boise, Idaho:* Boise's Idaho Plan4Health Coalition is committed to improving Vista neighborhood residents' access to healthy food options as well as revitalizing the community. The Idaho Plan4Health Coalition used a mix of data collection approaches to build a truer picture of the neighborhood than might typically be possible. The results of this neighborhood food assessment incorporated data from key informant interviews, a neighborhood survey, demographic analysis, and observations from on the ground within the neighborhood. Using data and resident feedback, a strategic action plan was created to promote healthy lifestyles through healthy eating.
- 4** *Chatham County, Georgia:* [Healthy Savannah, Inc.](#), a coalition of 100 members, has been working to make Chatham County a healthier place to live. The coalition's goals include increasing access to nutritious food, creating distribution and retail implementation plans, and changing policies that are barriers to access to healthy food and active transportation.
- 5** *Columbus, Indiana:* Columbus is building upon existing health efforts and partnerships. The coalition work is led by [Healthy Communities](#) and the [City of Columbus-Bartholomew County Planning Department](#). The initiative has focused on increasing daily physical activity by bridging the gap between policy adoption and implementation as it relates to the built environment. The built environment includes the physical communities where we live and work (e.g., homes, buildings, streets, open spaces, and infrastructure) and has a direct influence on a person's level of physical activity.
- 6** *Columbus, Ohio:* Increasing opportunities for physical activity in Columbus is the goal of the Columbus Public Health's Chronic Disease Prevention Advisory Board. Throughout this project and beyond, strategies to increase and promote physical activity were implemented. They include increasing the number of elementary and middle schools implementing Safe Routes to School Travel Plan recommendations, increasing the number of employers in Columbus who encourage active commuting, incorporating a health impact assessment into the Connect Columbus multimodal transportation plan, and developing a strategic plan for Central Ohio Greenways that includes recommendations to improve trail access and provide trail based programming for residents.

**7** *Dane County, Wisconsin:* The Dane County Capital Region Healthy Communities initiative aims to increase physical activity and access to nutritious food. The coalition has worked to incorporate health into planning to eliminate food deserts and help neighborhoods become more walking and biking friendly. The Active Living Index was developed and helped to measure and map walkability and access to biking and walking at the census block group level. The coalition applied the tool to three target communities in the area to gain a better understanding of their needs and to empower decision makers, planning and public health professionals, and residents. Additionally, the coalition has been working to increase the capacity of local communities in South Madison to provide healthy food to designated food deserts.

**8** *Eastern Highlands, Connecticut:* Small and rural planning and zoning commissions often have limited capacity. In response, the [Eastern Highlands Health District Community Health Action Response Team](#) coalition developed a toolkit aimed at assisting planning and zoning commissions with understanding how planning can impact long-term public health. This toolkit is designed to support the Eastern Highlands Health District region towns, as well as any other small, rural towns, in their efforts to enhance the quality of life in their communities through the prevention of illness, promotion of wellness, and protection of the human environment.

**9** *Indianapolis:* [Health by Design](#), a coalition dedicated to promoting spaces that encourage healthy living, developed and started to implement a strategy aimed at making Indianapolis in Marion County, Indiana, safer and more accessible for pedestrians. To do this, the coalition launched *WalkWays: Moving Indy Forward*, an initiative to make Indianapolis more walkable and to get more people walking. The coalition wants Indianapolis to be safer, more accessible, and inviting for people to walk or roll, for those who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices, so that every resident and visitor can be safe and comfortable in the public rights-of-way. WalkWays created a comprehensive pedestrian program for Marion County and developed a pedestrian master plan that will help promote community walkability and walking.

**10** *Kane County, Illinois:* [The Kane County Planning Cooperative](#) was created as the central core of the 2040 Plan's implementation strategy and to focus on the Plan's overarching theme, Healthy People, Healthy Living, and Healthy Communities. Through Plan4Health, the cooperative expanded and built partnerships beyond geographic borders to address inactivity and unhealthy diets by integrating health, transportation, and land-use planning efforts. Strategies include advancing leadership, conducting food feasibility studies, implementing the Fit Kids plan, and assisting local governments with walkability studies in specific at-risk neighborhoods.

**11** *Kenton County, Kentucky:* The Kenton County Plan4Health Coalition is working to provide access to nutritious food across the county. The Kenton County PLAN4Health Coalition is currently pursuing four initiatives: (1) a county-wide assessment of food deserts—underserved neighborhoods with little or no access to healthy food due to mobility, availability, affordability, or a combination of the three; (2) a healthy corner store program aimed at providing healthier food options with urban corner stores; (3) a countywide outreach campaign to educate members of the public about healthy food options; and (4) forming a food policy working group in Kenton County to pursue future work related to food access.

**12** *Kingston, New York:* [Live Well Kingston](#) is a city-endorsed coalition of organizations, businesses, and individuals that work together to improve the environment, culture, and opportunities for residents to lead healthier lives. The coalition aims to encourage active living in and out of the workplace through expansion of complete streets policies, trails, and other recreation building capacities. Simultaneously, the coalition seeks to improve access to healthy food through the city's newly adopted Eat Well Kingston program.

**13** *Linn County, Iowa:* Planning Healthy Iowa Communities, led by the Active Living Coalition and the Food Systems Council will address inactivity and unhealthy diets, especially among low-income Linn County residents. Two objectives will include encouraging physical activity to combat sedentary lifestyles and incorporating food with high nutritional content at food pantries.

**14** *Metro Boston:* The Inner Core Community Health Coalition in Massachusetts integrates seven existing municipal coalitions to address unhealthy diets within Boston's Inner Core region by increasing access to healthy food. These existing coalitions are part of a statewide movement to create healthier communities and include members of [Mass in Motion](#) and [Shape Up Somerville](#). These groups focus on creating healthier communities through healthy eating and active living initiatives. Through Plan4Health, the coalition has focused on improving healthy retail by establishing a membership business association for convenience stores known as the [Greater Boston Association of Corner Stores](#).

**15** *Nashua, New Hampshire:* The Plan4Health Nashua project is bringing the city to the forefront as a leader in New Hampshire in advancing complete streets at the municipal level. The coalition developed an informational video to help demonstrate that people's ability to make healthy choices is improved when health is integrated into comprehensive planning processes. The goal of the Plan4Health Nashua project is to advance street planning and design that support safer and easier ways to get around for pedestrians and bicyclists. The project is supported by the Greater Nashua Public Health Advisory Council, and was selected as a priority project for implementation in Nashua's 2015 *Community Health Improvement Plan*. Plan4Health Nashua is a collaboration between planning and public health professionals, including the Nashua Regional Planning Commission, the City of Nashua, New Hampshire Public Health Association, and Healthy Eating Active Living.

**16** *St. Louis:* The [Healthy Eating Active Living \(HEAL\) partnership](#) aims to reduce obesity in St. Louis by five percent by 2018. This project presents a vision for safe access to physical activity for pedestrians throughout the city. Engaging the community through pop-up demonstrations, the partnership is addressing walkability and highlighting ways to build better streets with traffic-calming solutions. As part of the Plan4Health St. Louis project, the HEAL partnership is working with local experts to create a variety of tools that can be used in temporary demonstrations for traffic calming. These tools will be used for [pop-up demonstrations](#) in the focus areas of the Ville and Greater Ville, JeffVanderLou, Dutchtown, and Carondelet. The pop-up demonstrations offer possible solutions and provide fun and safe social spaces to St. Louis residents while also encouraging healthy, active living. [Visit Plan4Health: Trailnet](#) to learn more.

**17** *Summit County, Ohio:* Summit County believes higher levels of community health are possible through urban design. To achieve this, Plan4Health Summit County will incorporate complete streets policies into existing transportation plans, expand use of garden space throughout the community by placing an emphasis on bringing farm fresh produce to the community, and introduce client choice pantries to the existing pantry system.

**18** *Trenton, New Jersey:* The key objective of the Trenton Healthy Communities Initiative was to create a Health and Food Systems Master Plan Element to improve environmental conditions in the city, increase opportunities for city residents to engage in physical activity, and improve residents' access to healthy and affordable food choices.