



Developing a Healthy Meals Strategic Plan

What is a Healthy Meals Strategic Plan?

An internal document that outlines your commitment, goals, standards, and current/future activities related to the provision of healthy meals within your meal program.

Why is it important?

In many low-income communities in Minneapolis, processed, convenience foods are cheap and widely available. Healthy options, like fresh produce, whole grains, and lean proteins are more expensive and harder to find. Limited access to healthy foods contributes to poor nutrition and diet-related health problems like obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. More and more residents are relying on meal programs to meet their basic food needs. If meal programs aren't providing healthy options, it may be difficult or impossible for guests to purchase or find nutritious foods on their own. Meal programs can play an important role in improving individual and community health by increasing the amount of healthy meals regularly served to guests.

How can a Healthy Meals Strategic Plan benefit your meal program?

A healthy meal strategic plan can ensure that your organization is thoughtfully addressing guests' needs related to healthy meal options. By documenting your commitment and approach to serving healthy meals, your organization will be better positioned to meet these needs. A strategic plan can help you:

- Clarify your commitment to serving healthy foods and create a common understanding among board members, staff, volunteers, and guests.
- Guide decision-making related to food purchases, menu planning, volunteer/staff training, and guest interactions.
- Institutionalize successful activities and help ensure that future staff can carry on good work.

Are other types of organizations developing similar strategic plans?

Many different types of organizations – from food shelves and food banks, to government institutions, worksites, and schools – are developing some form of a healthy food strategic plan or policy.

What should be included in a Healthy Meals Strategic Plan?

- Commitment: What is your commitment to serving healthy foods? Why is it important to you?
- Goals: What do you want to achieve in the short- and long-term?
- Nutrition standards: How do you define healthy? What foods do you allow/not allow/limit?
- Current and future activities: What are you already doing to increase healthy meals? What future activities would you like to engage in to reach your goals?

What is the process for developing a Healthy Meals Strategic Plan?

- **Step 1: Gather Input**
Gather input from stakeholders who will be affected by the plan: guests, volunteers, staff, board members, etc. Explain the plan and gather opinions on commitment, goals, standards, and activities.
- **Step 2: Develop Plan**
Draw on stakeholder feedback to create a draft plan that includes content in each of the suggested sections (commitment, goals, nutrition standards, current/future activities).
- **Step 3: Obtain Approval**
Go through the proper channels to have your organization's leadership, staff, and board of directors provide additional feedback; finalize the plan based on this information.
- **Step 4: Create Buy-In**
Once your strategic plan is approved, share it with your stakeholders to generate excitement and understanding. Describe how it will be implemented and be sure to explain the positive outcomes and challenges you anticipate. Listen to any additional feedback stakeholders may want to share.
- **Step 5: Implement and Monitor**
Involve stakeholders in determining how to develop and implement specific activities or strategies that will help you reach your healthy meals goals.
- **Step 6: Assess and Review**
Continually evaluate what is working and what needs to be improved. Make time annually to review your strategic plan and gather additional stakeholder feedback on the implementation process and outcomes.

Assistance available from the Minneapolis Health Department

- Individual consultations with MHD staff
- Assistance with stakeholder meeting facilitation, feedback gathering
- Help with drafting strategic plan content
- Healthy Meals strategic plan tools, templates, and written resources

