

Needs Assessment Research Plan

Need for the Program

The program is a course that helps to teach financial literacy to low-income families, as well as healthy cooking options to improve poor diet choices. This program will teach individuals receiving SNAP benefits, how to stretch their benefits to get the most nutritional foods for their families along with how to tell if produce and meat are of good quality to buy. The program will target residents within the city limits of Chattanooga, including downtown Chattanooga, Red Bank, East Ridge, and East Brainerd. Most agencies that also target low income families are mainly located in downtown Chattanooga. *Gourmet on a Budget* will benefit from being in close proximity to these agencies and food pantries so that clients do not have to travel far for services.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the economic and social needs that contribute to food insecurity for individuals residing in Red Bank, East Ridge, East Brainerd, and Downtown Chattanooga. To view the IRB application and supplemental documents, please see appendix A.

Research Question

The research question that the team aims to answer is, “What are the economic and social needs that contribute to food insecurity for residents living in Red Bank, East Ridge, East Brainerd, and Downtown Chattanooga?”

Research Hypothesis/es

For the null hypothesis (H_0), “There are no specific social or economic needs that contribute to food insecurity that could be alleviated by cooking and financial literacy classes in

Chattanooga.” The alternate hypothesis (H_1) is that “Cooking and financial literacy classes would alleviate identified economic and social needs that contribute to food insecurity in Chattanooga.”

Research Variables

The main independent variable that the research team will focus on would be the cooking and financial literacy classes. The dependent variable that will be measured is the economic and social needs of low-income individuals. Some of the controlled variables include level of income, age (18-65), level of education, gender, race, and ethnicity. Lastly, the extraneous variables are going to be the health diagnoses, homelessness/residence status, as well as employment status.

Methodology

The research study will utilize a qualitative approach as this will elicit much more in-depth data through capturing the individual experiences and needs of participants. It will enable a deeper understanding of the factors pertaining to food insecurity and provide a valuable foundation for the *Gourmet on a Budget* program.

Population and Sampling

The direct recipients of the *Gourmet on a Budget* program will include low-income households with minimal access to financial means and nutritious food options, college students aged 18-35 with an emphasis on non-traditional students who struggle with food insecurity and/or financial means for nutritious foods and lastly single-parent households who struggle with food and financial security.

The research team will be sampling from local census data. The program will be looking at individuals and families meeting the criteria of a yearly salary at and below \$35,000. It will also be looking at those individuals that have identified they have dependents and individuals

who receive any type of assistance from local agencies or federal/state agencies receiving food assistance. A flyer for the program will be created and distributed to local agencies and social media to help recruit participants. By utilizing a flyer, the research team is able to maintain client confidentiality based on other social services a person may also be receiving.

Data Collection

The needs assessment plan is to gather data from already existing sources as well as customized research completed by the research team. For current data, the research team will use census data and annual reports from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These will provide information regarding low-income individuals living in the target location. For the customized research, the primary sources of information will be generated from community focus groups as well as individual interviews with community leaders.

For the research team to be able to access the population, local leaders such as religious leaders, community partners and social service agencies will be asked to share the research study with people that qualify for the study. As for already existing data sources, such as SNAP annual reports, US Census data, or other social service agency annual reports, the information is part of the public domain and does not require permission for access.

The research group will conduct interviews with participants to better understand the vulnerability of food insecurity and what kind of financial literacy classes would be appropriate for the population. Before the interview, the interviewer will state the purpose of the interview to the participant(s) so that they will be aware of the types of questions asked. To see the informed consent contact, please see appendix B. The interviewer will ask a series of questions listed in the interview guide and record the interview. If there is something the participant(s) share that is relevant to the further study, the interviewer will write down notes on the guide with the

participants unique identification number so that answers will not be mixed up. The interview will be recorded and then deleted when the recordings are transcribed. All notes, transcriptions, and answers will be documented in a password-protected device or office. To view the interview guide that the research team will utilize, please see appendix C.

Analysis Plan

This study will incorporate an inductive, qualitative methodology and will conduct in-depth interviews with research participants who have experienced food insecurity. The analysis will utilize a grounded theory, constant comparison approach.

All interviewees will undergo an interview (up to 60 minutes) consisting of open-ended questions designed to help the researcher understand the economic and social factors that contribute to food insecurity. The interview will be recorded on an audio recorder and memo notes will be taken throughout the data collection process. Once the interviews have been conducted, data will be transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a grounded theory approach. This inductive qualitative method begins with observations and looks for patterns, themes, or common categories throughout transcribed data.

The researchers will utilize open coding to represent specific patterns and themes. Axial coding will be utilized to interconnect and link the categories of codes. This will enable us to recognize emerging themes. Selective coding will be the final step in our data analysis process as this will enable us to choose one category to be the main category and systemically relate it to other categories.

One of the main results that the program hopes to achieve is to see that the economic needs of the population are: higher minimum wage, lower rent, lower cost of living, and lower cost of fresh, nutritious food. Another hope to see the social needs of the population are more

free/low cost activities for children, more affordable childcare, parks, family activities and preventative healthcare.

Ethical Considerations

The research team will take into consideration the ethical implications that are associated with the target population. Since the sample will be low-income individuals or families or people who are food insecure, the research team will maintain respect and dignity when interacting with research participants.

One of the ways that the research team will help to protect human subjects in the identification of the sample will be through voluntary participation. Only the research team will know the participants' identifying information. During the data collection process, participants' names will not be recorded, instead, each person will be given a unique identification number that will correspond to their responses. In the analysis of the collected data, the research team will delete all audio or video recordings of the interview after it has been successfully transcribed. Afterwards, all handwritten notes and transcriptions will be securely filed on a password-protected device or office.

Program Proposal

Program Goals and Objectives

The goals of *Gourmet on a Budget* consist of several phases. After two months of attending the program, it is the hope that participants will be able to have a better understanding of what to cook to maintain their budget and allow them to get creative with ingredients and meal planning. After one year, it is the idea that clients will be able to cook their own healthy meals at least four nights per week and maintain their budget. Five to ten years after beginning the program clients are both expected to have successfully built savings and continue cooking