

Madison Healthy Retail Access Program (HRAP) Evaluation 2021

Purpose:

The purpose of this evaluation is to (1) Understand what specific components of the Healthy Retail Access Program (HRAP) are most effective and why, (2) Understand how to improve the Program to maximize the City's return on investment, and (3) Develop staff evaluation capacity and evaluation tools to easily and consistently gauge the success of HRAP investments in the future.

Background & Need:

The City of Madison's Healthy Retail Access Program was created in 2014 by a workgroup of the Madison Food Policy Council with funding from the Capital Budget. The original intent of the Program was to "fund incentives to increase food access in underserved neighborhoods, with a focus on retail" by providing grants of up to \$30,000 to small- and medium-sized, independent grocery retailers for

- **Pre-development funds:** Funds to support costs such as site selection, architectural fees, construction permits, and engaging with the community.
- **Training for small and medium sized retailers:** Funds for consulting on merchandising and marketing.
- **Funding for physical and equipment improvements:** These improvements should enhance the ability of small and medium sized retailers to gain customers and/or offer high quality produce and other healthy foods, such as expanding cooler space.

While the program was well-received, the application process required significant support from City staff members to vet funding requests, align them with program goals, and help applicants secure cost estimates and other supporting documents. As a result, each grant required a significant investment of staff time relative to the grant size. This resulted in a funding surplus due limited staff capacity to administer the Program and disburse the funds, despite the demonstrated need and interest in the program.

In response to these challenges, the HRAP Program workgroup secured funding from the American Heart Association for an external evaluation of the Program by The Food Trust, a national leader in improving food access through collaboration with neighborhoods, schools, grocers, farmers and policymakers. The resulting report made the following recommendations: (1) Consider relocating the program to a City/County Agency or a non-profit organization, (2) Explore distribution strategies [to better serve participating stores], and (3) Develop an evaluation plan to track short-, medium- and long-term outcomes.

Beginning in 2018, a team of City and County staff members began implementing these recommendations. The City subsequently moved the Program to the Department of Planning, Community and Economic Development and funded a feasibility study for a terminal market to address storage and last mile distribution issues. These and other programmatic changes, including a substantial increase in average grant size, led to increased demand for the program and resulted in larger HRAP projects. In fact, the Program is poised to disburse all of its 2021 funds before the end of the second quarter. While a staff team also began collecting preliminary food access data from past HRAP grant

recipients, limited capacity combined with challenges associated with the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted evaluation efforts at the project and program scales leaving unanswered questions about its impact.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the HRAP Program is making a substantial difference for the community markets that have received funding support and the residents that they serve. However, without strategic evaluation, it is difficult to determine how and how well the Program is advancing the City's equity objectives by promoting Black, Indigenous and People of Color-owned small business development and improving the accessibility of healthy and culturally relevant food in Madison's low food access neighborhoods. A Program evaluation would help answer these questions, providing actionable information for Program improvement and promotion and resulting in a case study that could inform the development of similar programs in other communities.

The Healthy Retail Access Program is due for another evaluation to help Program administrators, champions, and beneficiaries understand what specific components of the Program are most effective and how the Program can be improved to maximize the City's return on investment. Finally, as staff capacity remains a barrier to program evaluation, the Program would benefit from the development of simple evaluation tools that the staff team can use to capture program impact on an ongoing basis without having to develop or adapt indicators from other sources.

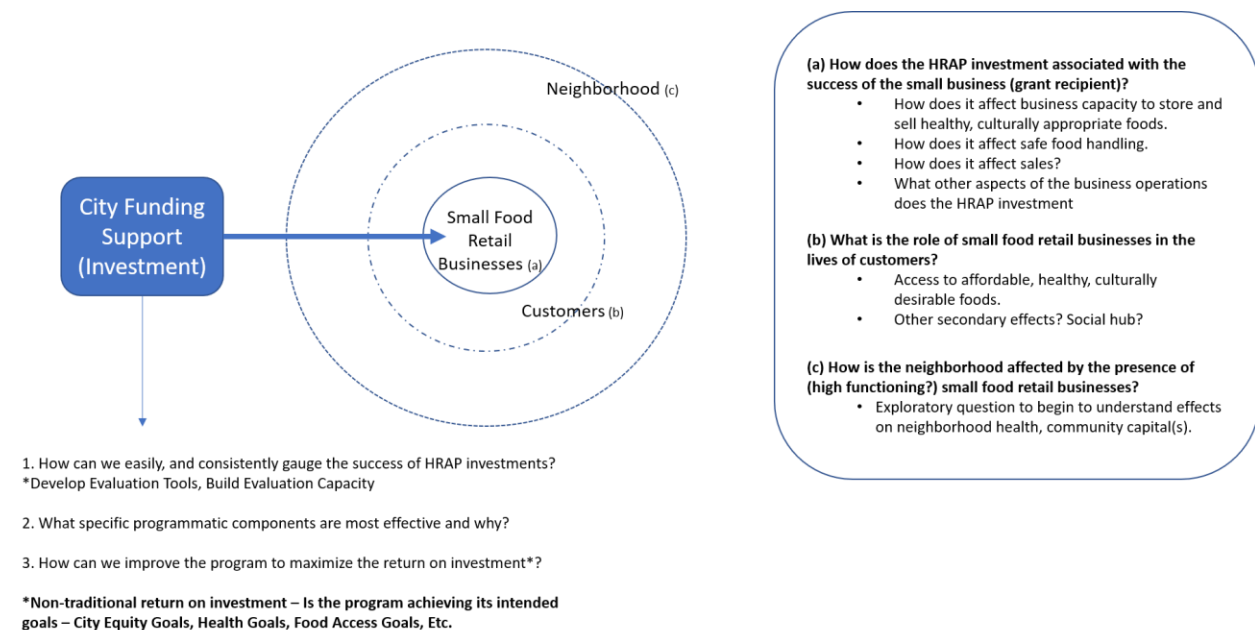
Scope:

The evaluation will focus on how the Healthy Retail Access Program affected two food retail establishments, their customers, and the surrounding neighborhoods/community. These retailers include Lunas Grocery and Madison Oriental Market. The evaluation will be conducted in summer and early fall 2021.

Evaluation Questions:

Program evaluations typically fall into distinct categories, those that focus on learning about effective program processes, and those that focus on outcomes and impacts. The proposed HRAP evaluation focuses on understanding both process and impact, and how the two are correlated. The purpose of this design is to provide the HRAP program with recommendations for program improvement, inform the design of standard evaluation tools that can be used by HRAP to monitor effectiveness over time, and to document the intentional and unintentional impacts of the program—not just on grant recipients, but on their customers and the neighborhoods where they operate. As such, this evaluation will help improve the HRAP program, and contribute to the research base about effective interventions to promote healthy economies, health equity, vibrant food systems, and other save the world stuff.

The graphic below illustrates the overall evaluation design and highlights key research questions.



Outcome Evaluation:

The outcome evaluation aims to understand the intended and unintended effects of the HRAP program with four specific impacts in mind:

- City Equity Goals
 - In what ways does HRAP result in city equity goals?
 - Nurturing BIPOC-owned small business development
 - Promoting access to healthy, affordable, culturally relevant food
- Healthy Food Access (and access to culturally appropriate foods)
 - Access to affordable, healthy, culturally desirable foods.
 - Secondary effects, e.g. the function of stores as social hubs
- Retailer Success (including outcomes related to sourcing/distribution strategies)
 - How does HRAP funding contribute to the success of participating businesses?
 - How does it affect business capacity to store and sell healthy, culturally appropriate foods?
 - How does it affect safe food handling?
 - How does it affect sales?
 - What other aspects of business operations does the HRAP investment influence?
- Vibrant Neighborhoods
 - How is the neighborhood affected by the presence of small food retailers?
 - Do community food retailers serve other nontraditional functions, such as community gathering spaces?

In-person or online community conversations, focus groups, intersect walks, other potential strategies TBD.										
Retrospective Data Analysis, including analysis of sales data, snap sales, inventory, etc.										
City Staff and Partner Interviews										
Data Analysis (merged analysis of all data)										
Qual and Participatory Data										
Quant, Sales, Survey data										
Preliminary findings / ground-truthing with retail partners and key stakeholders (to check for any gaps, necessary supplemental data collection)										
Draft final report, other publications, and deliverables including presentations.										

Deliverables:

1. Preliminary Findings to City of Madison (September 2021)
2. Full Impact Report to City of Madison (Upon Project Completion)
3. Report will highlight the effects of the HRAP program on business, customers, and neighborhoods. It will identify important aspects of the program that are most effective, and it will make recommendations for program improvement.
4. HRAP Survey Tool / Evaluation Plan (Upon Project Completion)
5. Through this evaluation, we will build a few standardized data collection tools or processes that the city could adapt for ongoing evaluation of the HRAP program.
6. Multiple Research Article Possibilities
7. Other published and presented materials aimed at informing research and practice.

HRAP Evaluation Project Budget Summary

Item	Description	Total Cost	Amount of dollars requested	Amount of In-kind support
<i>Personnel</i>				
Graduate student hourly employee	400 hours of graduate student salary (+2.6% fringe costs) to support data collection, analysis, report writing, and support developing evaluation tools	\$8,200.00	\$ 8,200.00	
Extension evaluation specialist	5% of FTE salary 12-months			\$ 3,901.50
Extension project manager	2.5% of FTE salary for 12-months			\$ 2,135.00
			TOTAL IN-KIND:	\$ 6,036.50
			TOTAL REQUEST:	
			\$ 8,200.00	