

Sample Evaluation Plan for AmeriCorps Food for All Program

Introduction: The AmeriCorps Food for All program has a full-time internal evaluation team that will lead the development and execution of a comprehensive AmeriCorps Program Evaluation. Our Evaluation Associate will complete both aspects of the evaluation, under the direction of the Associate Director of Program Development & Evaluation. Based on the Corporation for National and Community Service regulations, because Food for All is applying for less than \$500,000 annually in CNCS funds, it may elect to complete a process or impact evaluation using an internal evaluator.

Background: To guide ongoing evaluation efforts, AmeriCorps Food for All uses a logic model (see Appendix A) which outlines the resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes necessary for success of the program. Logic models are recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ensure a common understanding of program strategy and provide a framework for evaluating programs. The program's outputs are primarily monitored through an online database, customized for Food for All's information needs. The database allows local program staff and tour facilitators to input information including courses and tours held, number of participants and graduates reached, and volunteer and staff activities. This database allows local program staff to indicate the involvement of AmeriCorps members in course and tour coordination and execution. Therefore, Food for All is able to run accurate and detailed reports on the courses, tours, and other education activities coordinated by AmeriCorps members, including the number of participants reached and program graduation rates.

Food for All also measures short and intermediate-term outcomes, which correspond to changes in participant's skills, attitudes, self-efficacy, and behavior with regard to nutrition, food budgeting, and cooking. Data on short- and intermediate-term outcomes are collected through participant surveys administered at the end of the 6-week cooking course or one-hour grocery store tour (tour surveys focus on participants' intention to change behavior post-tour). Survey questions are designed and tested by third party research partners, including State University and the Betty Crocker Center for Nutrition, to assess the general outcomes defined in the Food for All logic model, the outcomes outlined for each specific curriculum, and participant satisfaction. Participant surveys are administered locally on paper surveys, which are mailed to Food for All for data processing and analysis.

Purpose: The evaluation will focus on the impact of the AmeriCorps program on reducing food insecurity among its low-income participants, and will serve as a tool to drive continued program improvement. The purpose of this evaluation plan is to ensure that the Food for All program meets the evaluation requirements of the Corporation for National and Community Service, ensuring that our AmeriCorps program is accomplishing proposed output and outcome measurements.

Audiences and Decisions: Interim results of this evaluation will be shared with the Corporation for National and Community Service at the end of each grant year. Final results of the evaluation will be shared at the end of the three-year grant period. Results will also be shared

with program management staff and funders to assist with continuous improvement efforts, and with the Food for All Advisory Board for review and future planning.

Questions The evaluation will address the following key questions:

Program Success

- Does the program result in an improvement in household food security (National Performance Measure H12) for program graduates?
- Are improvements in food security maintained three to six months post-course?
- Does the program result in an improvement in key food resource management behaviors shown to improve food security, including planning meals ahead of time, comparing prices, and shopping with a list?
- Are improvements in food resource management behaviors maintained three to six months post-course?
- Do grocery store tours result in an improvement in key food resource management behaviors shown to improve food security, including planning meals ahead of time, comparing prices, and shopping with a list?

AmeriCorps Member Contribution

- How many participants are reached through courses or tours coordinated by AmeriCorps members (National Performance Measure H11)?
- How many new volunteers are leveraged by AmeriCorps members, improving the program's sustainability?
- Do graduates of AmeriCorps member-coordinated courses show the same improvements in household food security and food resource management behaviors as other graduates?

Methods:

Participant Pre- and Post-Course Survey:

All adult participants in Food for All courses complete a participant survey that evaluates their behavior, attitudes, self-efficacy pre- and post-course. In October 2013, Food for All will release a new *Food for All for Adults* participant survey that has been tested for validity and reliability through an extensive research process in partnership with the Betty Crocker Center for Nutrition. This revised survey will ask participants "How often do you worry that your food will run out before you get money to buy more?" both pre- and post-course, which is one of the indicators of food insecurity according to the USDA Economic Research Service. Additionally, our *Food for All for Families* survey asks adult participants "How often do run out of food before you get money to buy more?" which is another indicator of food insecurity used by the Economic Research Service. Food for All will analyze data from all participants in *Food for All for Adults* and *Food for All for Families* courses to determine whether participants improve their food security status as a result of the course. Analysis will focus on courses administered by programs that host AmeriCorps members.

Adult participant surveys also ask about key food resource management behaviors shown to improve food security, including planning meals ahead of time, comparing prices, and shopping

with a list. Food for All will analyze data from all participants in *Food for All for Adults* and *Food for All for Families* courses to determine whether participants improve their food resource management behaviors as a result of the course. Analysis will focus on courses administered by programs that host AmeriCorps members.

Food for All Long-Term Follow-up Study:

Food for All is planning an evaluation that will begin in Fall 2013 to measure and document the long-term impact of Food for All on its participants. This evaluation will be led by an external evaluator, and will include a comprehensive measure of food security based on definitions provided by the USDA Economic Research, with the goal of determining whether gains in food security status are achieved and/or maintained three to six months post-course. The study will also assess whether the key food resource management practices taught in Food for All courses are maintained three to six months post-course, and will confirm their correlation with measures of food security in this population. This follow-up study will use a sample of participants from AmeriCorps member-coordinated courses. Because of the large number of participants reached by Food for All annually (over 23,000 in 2012), a sampling structure will allow Food for All to collect detailed information about the long-term impact of the program without expending more staff time and resources than necessary. For example, for a total population of 23,000, less than 400 participants would need to be surveyed to report results with a 95% confidence level and a confidence interval of 5. Additionally, since many participants have limited access to technology, unpredictable work schedules, and frequent changes of address, it would be impossible to survey every graduate 3- to 6-months after the course and an extremely arduous process to impose on local partners.

The follow-up study will assess the link between outcomes measured immediately post-course on the participant survey and the maintenance of those outcomes three to six months post-course. If these intermediate- and long-term outcomes are shown to be strongly correlated, Food for All will not continue to measure outcomes three or six months post-course. If they are not shown to be correlated, Food for All will pilot a three month post-course email survey to determine if the response rate and respondent demographics make a web-based survey feasible.

Data Analysis:

Food for All will use its existing online database to determine how many participants were reached in courses coordinated by AmeriCorps members and how many new volunteers were leveraged by AmeriCorps members during the grant period. Output and outcome data will be analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, which Food for All recently implemented as part of its commitment to maintaining high quality data and analytics.

Limitations: Food for All chooses to measure food security using one survey item to reduce participant burden and allow for collection of robust data on other key outcomes, including food budgeting, nutrition, and food preparation behaviors, attitudes, and self-efficacy as well as participant satisfaction. The follow-up study will validate the use of this single measure as an accurate assessment of food security status immediately and three to six months post-course.

Additionally, due to the time- and resource-intensive nature of conducting a follow-up study of food security status, Food for All will use the results from the already-planned follow-up study to assess long-term food security impact and will not conduct ongoing follow-up surveys, unless the results of the evaluation suggest ongoing follow-up is needed.

Timeline & Logistics:

Evaluation Element	Timeline	Conducted By:
Course and Tour Data Collection	Ongoing throughout grant period	Local program staff; input into Food for All database
Participant Survey Data Collection	Ongoing throughout grant period	Local program staff
Participant Survey Data Analysis & Reporting	End of each grant year	Food for All Evaluation Associate
Long-Term Follow-up Study	Fall 2013 to Summer 2015	External Evaluator with support from Food for All Evaluation staff