

Grow Your Business with Equity

Strategies to Advance Equity in Grocery Stores and Food Co-ops

Grocery stores and food co-ops can improve health outcomes, increase employment opportunities, spur economic development, and create access to opportunity for residents of low-income communities and communities of color. Integrating equity into your economic plan will help grow your grocery store or food co-op. Below are some strategies to increase store profits by building a sustainable community of opportunity where everyone can participate and prosper.

- **Engage residents and community groups in the grocery store or co-op planning process** – Involve diverse community members in store planning from idea to implementation. Residents and stakeholders can provide crucial insight into issues such as location, hiring, and product mix. The following Community Engagement Resource Guides are helpful for thinking about how to engage your community:
 - [Community Engagement Resource Guide: What It Is](#)
 - [Community Engagement Resource Guide: Why Use It](#)
 - [Community Engagement Resource Guide: Checklist](#)
- **Choose a location that maximizes equity benefits** – To ensure a broad customer base, select a site in a low-income neighborhood, or a community of color, to maximize benefits for these residents. If possible, select a site that is close to a public transportation stop to meet the needs of transit-limited customers. In addition to improved food access, siting your store in a low-income community will facilitate local hiring, workforce development, and, if done well, a commitment from the community to support the store.
- **Employ members of the community** – Consider partnering with a community organization to assist with identifying and training employees. Grocery store jobs are often an opportunity to employ workers who have previously been excluded and overlooked. Target your hiring to un- or under-employed residents of the local community, and especially people re-entering society from prison or jail. Provide employees with living wage jobs with benefits and opportunities for advancement.
- **Make the store a community asset** – Make the grocery store or co-op an inviting, appealing asset to the community. In addition to offering healthy food, the physical appearance of the store can help revitalize a neighborhood. If possible, serve your community by providing broader services such as a health center, educational opportunities, and community programming.
- **Accept government nutrition program benefits** – Accept SNAP and WIC benefits, which provide direct, effective support for low-income families to purchase food. Accepting these benefits increases your customers' purchasing power.
- **Provide transportation to increase purchase size** – Consider providing free or low-cost transportation to customers in exchange for minimum purchase sizes. Grocery shuttle services

can effectively reduce costs related to the more frequent, smaller per-trip purchases of consumers – and these programs can usually pay for themselves.

- **Respond to consumer demand and cultural preferences** – Offer products that reflect the preferences of your local consumer base. Understanding the details about customers' product preferences – not just whether customers like apples, but what type of apples they like and how they like the apples to be packaged – will help develop a dedicated customer base. Successful retailers conduct focus groups with residents, solicit input on products at community meetings, and order new products upon customer request.
- **Cultivate relationships with local suppliers** – Develop relationships with local suppliers to better meet the specific preferences of diverse customers. Buying products from local entrepreneurs also contributes to local economic development by supporting small businesses.
- **Support shoppers transitioning to healthier diets** – As possible, offer cooking demonstrations, healthy food incentives, and nutrition consultation to provide customers with multiple entry points to improve their diets. Siting a community health clinic at your store can also attract passersby to become grocery store customers. Building demand for healthy food can both improve community health and increase store revenue.

Check out PolicyLink's Grocery Store Tool in the [Equitable Development Toolkit](#) – It's available online [here](#).