



Boston Collaborative for Food & Fitness

Roxbury Community Assessments – Compiled Data

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Survey Development and Data Collection

Final Report by P.K. Newby

In the spring and summer of 2008, several members of the Boston Collaborative for Food & Fitness (BCFF) participated in the development of a survey designed to assess food and fitness behaviors among Bostonians living in five neighborhoods of interest: Dorchester, East Boston, Jamaica Plain, Mattapan, and Roxbury. Together with a team of graduate students at the Tufts School of Nutrition Science and Policy, the group developed an initial draft of a survey based on BCFF interests. To the extent possible, content areas (e.g., neighborhood safety) and questions used on the survey were based upon extant questionnaires identified in a literature review conducted by the Tufts students. After this draft was developed, it was reviewed and modified by members of the Food and Fitness committees of the BCFF and the final survey was compiled with the assistance of Kirstin Newby (Scientific consultant). The final survey, entitled “What do You Think About Food and Physical Activity in Your Neighborhood?” comprised 16 pages and 64 questions in three key areas: (1) Demographics (e.g., income, age, sex); (2) Food (food intakes, preferences, and expenditures; shopping behaviors and preferences; factors influencing food purchases; and interest in growing food); and (3) Fitness (neighborhood physical activity practices; neighborhood fitness facility use and non-use; neighborhood walking and biking; and commuting practices). The first page of the survey assured individuals that participation was anonymous and confidential and they could choose not to answer any questions. The survey was written in English and was also translated to Spanish and Haitian Creole. As well, the survey was posted online for use directly in the community organization offices.

Between July and November 2008, six community organizations working with the BCFF administered the survey to convenience samples in their (five) neighborhoods. Specifically, youths working in each organization received brief training in data collection and approached people in their neighborhoods about taking the survey. Each of the community organizations had different approaches to data collection and surveyed different population groups. For example, many of the survey participants in Mattapan were individuals at a farmers’ market, which was the focus of some of the community development work in that neighborhood. (No further information about where other individuals in Mattapan were sampled is available.) In East Boston, individuals were sampled at the following organizations and places: East Boston YMCA, Harborside Community Center, Orient Heights Community Center, Curtis Guild School, East Boston High School, Eagle Hill Community Area, Maverick Landing, Paris St. Community Center, and Jeffries Point. In Roxbury, data were collected in various spots around the neighborhood where people tended to congregate, including the park, T stop, Brigham Circle, and the Tobin. No data were provided from the organizations in Jamaica Plain and Dorchester about where individuals were surveyed in these neighborhoods despite repeated attempts to ascertain this information. The vast majority of surveys were completed by individual respondents (i.e., data are self-reported). In less than 5%, surveys were administered by the youth (i.e., the survey was read to the respondent and completed by the youth). No individuals completed the survey directly online.

Following data collection, staff at the BCFF entered survey data into Survey Monkey, a commonly used web-based database (where the online survey resided). In total, 665 individuals participated in the survey, as follows: Dorchester (n=222); East Boston (n=84); Jamaica Plain (n=100); Mattapan (n=102); and Roxbury (n=108). Because this survey was focused on collecting information from individuals living in the five neighborhoods of interest, 39 individuals were excluded from the analysis because they either did not provide information about where they lived or they lived in areas outside the neighborhoods of interest (e.g., Newton). After these exclusions, 616 individuals were included in the analysis; sample size for each question varied, since not all individuals answered each question.

Survey data were analyzed for all participants and also stratified by neighborhood. eight tables were created (appended), and a power point presentation of the findings for the entire group was presented at a quarterly meeting of the BCFF on December 16, 2008. Using the original power point template, findings from the individual five neighborhoods were then presented at the community meetings that occurred in January and February 2009.

Major Findings

All of the findings appear in Tables 1 through 8 (*Appendix 1*) and there is far too much data to discuss every finding in detail; readers are encouraged to consult the tables for the full set of results. Many of the key results (for the total dataset) are also presented graphically in slides from a powerpoint presentation given at a BCFF meeting in December 2008 (*Appendix 2*). Note that neighborhood specific results appear in the tables but not the slides; these data were presented in separate slides at the BCFF community meetings for each neighborhood that were created by BCFF directly. The goal of this section is to highlight major findings from the survey, both as a whole and by neighborhood. Throughout the section, some notes to help guide the interpretations of findings are provided.

Survey Participants

Table 1 provides information about who participated in the survey, both as a whole and in each neighborhood. Aside from income, it can be seen that neighborhoods differed significantly ($P<0.05$) by age, sex, race/ethnicity, language spoken, marital status, and employment. ($P<0.05$ means that differences are “statistically significant,” reflecting real differences across neighborhoods.) Very few respondents in any of the neighborhoods were >65 years old, and only 11% were aged 50-65 years (ranging from 7% in Jamaica Plain and 16% in Mattapan). More than half of all individuals sampled were <35 years, although proportions differed across neighborhoods: 42% of individuals in Roxbury were aged 15-25 years, compared to 14% in East Boston, where 31% were aged 25-35 years. East Boston also had the largest proportion of adults aged 36-50 years (42%).

Overall, the majority of individuals sampled were female (67%), ranging from 50% in Roxbury to 76% in East Boston. As expected, race/ethnicity differed across neighborhoods, with the largest proportion of Hispanics living in East Boston (60%) and Jamaica Plain (52%) and the

largest proportion of African Americans living in Mattapan (65%) and Dorchester (50%). The majority of participants spoke English as their primary language (68%), although 19% spoke Spanish as their primary language; 50% of East Bostonians spoke Spanish as their primary language. Eight percent of individuals in Roxbury spoke Cape Verdean as their primary language, while 28% of individuals in Mattapan spoke Haitian Creole. Marital status of participants differed by neighborhood, ranging from 33% single in East Boston to 63% single in Roxbury.

Forty-one percent of individuals worked full-time (ranging from 36% in Dorchester to 44% in Jamaica Plain), with an additional 32% working part-time or self-employed (ranging from 29% in East Boston to 38% in Roxbury). An appreciable percentage of individuals (12% total) were either retired, homemakers, or unable to work. Differences in income across neighborhoods were not significant.

(See Appendix A, Table 1, PK Newby Final Report)

Roxbury Survey Data Summarized

Who participated

- 42% aged 15-25 years, 22% aged 26-35 years
- 50% female
- 47% African American / 32% Spanish
- 82% English speaking
- 63% single
- 79% full/part/self-employed

Food intakes and behaviors

- 63% reported that higher food prices have affected grocery purchases, with 8% eating/serving fewer vegetables and 17% eating/serving smaller meals
- 27% consumed fruit and vegetables (25%) in the home every day – the highest proportion by far across all neighborhoods
- 57% ate meals away from home in the past week
- 13% grow their own food – the smallest proportion across neighborhoods – mainly in their own yard (71%)
- 36% would like to grow their own food – the smallest proportion across neighborhoods – mainly in their own yard (70%)

(Note on interpretation: Individuals surveyed in Roxbury were the youngest, which is likely related to the small proportion growing their own food and wishing to grow their own food.)

Food shopping behaviors and preferences

- Supermarket is the main place food is purchased (86%), followed by a big box store (27%) and bodega (25%), and car is the main way accessed (66%), followed by walking (20%)
- 10% mainly shop at a farmers' market
- The majority of people shop at their favorite place to buy food (77%)

Food purchasing preferences and behaviors

- The majority of individuals stated that taste, price, health, and convenience have some or great impact on their food purchases
- 52% stated that “organic” had some or great impact
- 54% stated that “local” had some or great impact

Physical activity and commuting behaviors

- 80% reporting walking regularly, followed by 26% who run
- 10% reported no regular physical activity

Neighborhood physical activity behaviors and characteristics

- 70% like walking/biking in their neighborhood
- 65% reporting using walking spaces/paths, followed by public parks/playgrounds (35%)

- The majority of respondents reported favorable characteristics affecting walking and biking, although fewer said streets were litter free (33%) or had bike paths in their neighborhood (48%)

(See Appendix B, Survey Data Powerpoint Presentation; Appendix C, Community Profile from MGA Consultants; and Appendix D, Bikeability Assessment, Mass Bike)

Overall findings across neighborhoods

- Income, weekly grocery expenditures, and some of the places where people currently grew food or wanted to grow food (e.g., own yard, another yard, and pots/window boxes) did not differ across neighborhoods.
- The majority of individuals eat away from home, and, in general, people do not consume enough fruit and vegetables at home.
- Higher food prices did always affect vegetable consumption; more people reported that they decreased their meat consumption due to higher food prices.
- The majority of individuals surveyed presently shop at their favorite place to buy food, which was most frequently stated as a supermarket. Individuals in Roxbury and Mattapan were most likely not to shop at their favorite place to buy food, mainly due to transportation time (Mattapan) and difficulty accessing (38%) and cost (30%) in Roxbury. However, the numbers of respondents to these questions are very low, since the majority of individuals surveyed did shop at their favorite place.
- 16% of individuals in all neighborhoods reported a farmers' market as their favorite place to buy food (n=100, 16%) – this number is likely spuriously high since 33% of these individuals reside in Mattapan, where we know that individuals were surveyed at a farmers market. It is more likely that this number fluctuates around 10%, as reflected in the other neighborhoods.
- Convenience, organic, local, brand, and coupons showed no differences across neighborhoods in impacting food purchasing, while the impacts of taste, price, and health on food purchasing did differ across neighborhoods.
- A high proportion of individuals reporting walking or biking in their neighborhoods
- Where individuals were physically active did not differ across neighborhoods, although there were significant differences comparing the proportion who did not get regular physical activity.
- No major differences seemed to emerge across neighborhoods with regards to neighborhood physical activity, as the majority of individuals enjoyed walking in their own neighborhoods. Many respondents “agreed” with many of the statements about their neighborhood, with the main area of disagreement surrounding litter on the streets and the presence of bike paths.
- Because of the small numbers of individuals who were not physically active in their neighborhoods, these findings are not discussed.

ROXBURY COMMUNITY MEETING

SUMMARY OF AREAS OF INTEREST AND CONCERN

(Note: Meeting was held in Mission Hill and majority of participants were from that neighborhood)

FOOD SYSTEMS

GARDENING

More community gardens
More help and training, garden supplies, to grow our own
Growing your own food
Grow more of our own food (neighborhood garden)
Grow some of their own vegetables
Everyone started growing their own food

FARMERS MARKETS

More farmers markets
Farmers market – stop and shop
More farmers markets
More farmers markets * (starred)
Institute different type of CSA, pay over time *2

LOCAL FOOD

People will eat food that's close by
More locally grown food

RESTAURANTS

Less fast food restaurants
Restaurants that provide healthy options
More fruits and vegetables in pizzerias

TRANSPORTATION

More transportation

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Community-based transportation and delivery *1 (starred)

LOCAL STORES

More community stores that sell what's grown locally
More local healthy food stores ie Whole Foods, Harvest
Online ordering, virtual screening / shopping
Grocery stores got better quality
Instead of ice cream trucks / fruit trucks
Fruit trucks

SCHOOLS

Improved school lunches and breakfasts * (starred)
Healthier school lunches
Cooking classes in school with healthy lessons
Better school lunches
Healthy foods in schools
More eatable lunches
More school lunches (healthier)
Better school lunches
Putting more fruit into schools; healthier snacks * (starred, check mark at start)
No more junk food vending machines / in school
Improving school lunches and breakfast
No vending machines in school – more water
Food in school not healthy need to get healthier
No vending machines in school – only water and healthy snacks
Write in school contracts no mini school stores

Better food choices for the youth *3

Healthier vending machine products
Healthy snacks that is appealing (chewy bar)
Advertised more healthier choices * (starred)
Healthy snacks

EDUCATION

Reading labels – educating people on what is healthy for them * (starred)
Teaching about healthy food
More family counselors

GENERAL

Less greasy food
Different oils
Substitute certain ingredients
Less processed food
Smaller portions * (starred)
“Reality check” * (starred and circled)
Fresh vegetable and fruit
Healthy but tastes good
No more white bread
More access to (fresh) foods * (starred)

Quality, healthy and affordable food everywhere (local)
Equitable
More equality

Better marketing of training classes * (starred)
Packaging biodegradable
Cooking more at home
Community trips to apple picking or something else

SAFETY

*Being safe in your community
Safe communities
Being safe in your community

BUILT ENVIRONMENT / ACTIVE LIVING ***ENVIRONMENT***

Less pollution

BIKING

More bike paths
More bike paths, safety
More safe places for bike riding
Start riding bikes
Bike lanes in every road
More bike paths/LANES

WALKING

Walking paths – street lights
People taking more walks
Walking groups

IMPACT ON COMMUNITY

More people being involved
More people to make these things happen
Getting more people to be involved in the community
Safety

PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

More safe parks
Clean parks
Safer parks
Safer parks * (starred)
Safe parks, safer playgrounds
More parks, safer, better looking, cleaner
More green – walking spaces w/o dog poop
A space for walking dogs (better enforcement for picking up poop)

SCHOOLS

More organized school sports
School signs
More crossing guards at schools
More school police
Putting gym as an every day class
Every school has a full gymnasium
Better funded school sports programs
More organized school sports
(There is a)lack of gym classes and recess

INFRASTRUCTURE

More trash cans, and more street lights
Change pot holes in streets
Ladder issue (*crosswalks?*), public transportation
Better sidewalks
More trash cans
More street lights

TRANSPORTATION

Expand T access to fitness centers
More use of public transportation
Shuttle bus
Less traffic

ACTIVITIES

Organized activities
Earlier-in-life habits of exercise
Activities for children
More sports (city funded)
More fitness activities
More indoor games year round

RECREATION FACILITIES

More safe places to hang out – ex. Community centers
More affordable memberships
More indoor community spaces with organized activities * (starred)
Free gym memberships
Cheaper gym memberships * (starred)
Indoor recreational facilities
More gym equipment (treadmills, pool)
Affordable local gyms
Public access for uni. (*university?*) gyms
Childcare at fitness areas

MISCELLANEOUS

Become (more like) an Amish town

No dog poop

Appendix A: Sample characteristics among 616 survey respondents, stratified by neighborhood

*Appendix B: Focus Group and Interview Data, MGA Consultants
Powerpoint Presentation*

Appendix C: Community Profile, MGA Consultants

Appendix D: Bikeability Assessment Information Sheet, Mass Bike

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