



Community Health Toolkit: Sample Speech

The following imaginary speech was developed to demonstrate how the framing research might be incorporated into a routine opportunity to engage local civic leaders in a conversation about the importance of changing school policies to improve the food environment. Please note that facts, references, and names included in this speech are for sample purposes only, not for citation.

Outline:

- Introduce value
- Use a supportive example
- Introduce the simplifying model
- Include data, using social math
- Include “can-do” solutions, examples of success
- Call for specific policy change
- Remind people of level one value again

Good afternoon, and thank you so much for inviting me to speak with you. I want to talk with you about something that we’ve all been reading and thinking about a lot lately. In fact, if we can get ahead of this problem, it would probably be the number one thing we could do together to improve the future health of our children, saving both money and lives in the long run. The problem I want to talk about is childhood obesity, and specifically how it affects the children of my neighborhood, Northside. **[Begins with a value of prevention.]**

There’s an exciting new body of public health research that suggests that our health in adulthood is largely determined by the communities that we live in as children, and the decisions we make about these communities. It’s time we looked around our communities and asked ourselves how well we are doing to get them in shape to support child health. Do we support physical activity by offering lots of opportunities for indoor and outdoor recreation? Walking and biking paths? Parks and open spaces? Do our schools offer lots of opportunity for physical activity – daily physical education classes and recess times? What about our school lunch program – does it offer healthy food to our children? Are vending machines dispensing sugar snacks and pop, or fruit and milk? Does every child’s

family live near a grocery store with a fresh produce section and have access to a local farmer's market in the summertime? **[Helps the audience understand the importance of addressing the health of children, and offers many concrete examples to make the health environments surround children more vivid.]**

All of these things make up the food and fitness environment of our city. When children do not have access to a healthy environment, their health is undermined as is their quality of life. When we improve the food and fitness environment, the health of the children who live there improves as well.

[Introduces the Food and Fitness simplifying model]

We know that for some of our kids, their neighborhood food and fitness environment is not as supportive of good health as the environments of other neighborhoods. In a recent food and fitness assessment we conducted, children in our Northside neighborhood were less likely to live close to full-service grocery stores and summer farmer's markets. 80% of the grocery stores, and 70% of the neighborhood farmer's markets are located in the south side of town. The city also spent less last year on parks and recreation budgets for our neighborhood. The city spent \$5 per child each year in the Southwest area of the city, but only \$2 per child in our part of the city – and \$2 per kid is not enough to keep the park buildings open and the playground equipment maintained. This lack of access to healthy food and adequate physical activity leads to higher rates of obesity, setting the stage for future health problems. In fact, another recent study conducted by our Health Department found higher rates of obesity and poor health among Northside children. That shouldn't come as a surprise to us or our leaders – it's a predictable consequence of our lopsided investments. **[Includes a value of Fairness (between neighborhoods, not types of children.) Uses social math to clarify large numbers, and a causal sequence to explain the connection between nutrition, physical activity, obesity and health problems later.]**

But I want to tell you a story about a group of folks who decided to do something different. Here on the Northside, the Healthy Neighborhood Coalition decided that the food and fitness environment of our neighborhoods was not acceptable. We wanted our children and families to eat healthy food, but there was only one full-service grocery store for over 50,000 residents. Smaller food and convenience stores in the area primarily carried unhealthy snack foods rather than healthy staples such as fruits, vegetables, eggs and milk. **[Ingenuity and solutions are possible.]**

We wanted our children to learn to make healthy food choices, but North high school sold the equivalent of 10 gallons of soda at school each year per student. We wanted our children to be physically active, but neighborhood playground equipment and park buildings were among the oldest and poorest maintained in the city. Some of the playgrounds were last updated when our children's parents were young – over 25 years ago. **[More social math to make the data vivid and connected to our larger frame].**

We looked around and decided to take action. First of all, we convened a series of community meetings, to figure out the top priorities for the residents. We included representatives from the city health department, the parks department, and the high school. We opened a small office at the Baker Community Health Center, and hired some graduate students from the University to do a comprehensive neighborhood food and fitness environment survey. We met with several area foundations, and started writing grants. **[Shows collaboration among players, with a role for government.]**

And look what we've accomplished in just three short years. Our first big success was gaining a special city tax incentive for an Alby grocery store to locate in the neighborhood. Conveniently located, this full-service grocery has doubled the availability of fresh produce and other healthy foods to our residents. The store is so successful that a second store is planned next year.

Next, we organized neighborhood residents to "adopt a playground." We got a grant from the Smith Family Foundation to build two new play structures for children, one at McMann park and one at Seebly park, and we have weekly neighborhood patrols that keep the new play areas free of garbage and make sure the equipment is clean and maintained. We were also successful in lobbying the parks department to increase the hours of the indoor recreation center and swimming pool.

Finally, we secured funding from the Dental Health Foundation to experiment with healthy food and beverage vending at North High School. The students themselves selected the healthier products that they wanted to see, and have a say in how the profits are used. Last year, North High School vended 100 bottles of water per student, and completely eliminated pop sales in the school. They used the funds to expand after school sports and fitness activities.

In fact, these initiatives have been so successful that other neighborhoods throughout the city are considering starting coalitions of their own. In this way, all of the children in our city will have better environments to support their

health. [Showing solutions and reinforcing the importance of food and fitness environments]

Of course, we have a way to go. Our next project is to expand the city's neighborhood farmer's market program into the Northside. We will be starting a youth gardening project at a local church, and helping the youth sell their produce at the market. We need your help with these efforts and others so that we do not lose the ground we have gained.

Initially, people were skeptical that we could be successful. And to be honest, it has taken some time to get people to think about how the environments surrounding our children shape their health. Sometimes people forget the importance of the environments around us and their impact on children's behavior and choices. But once we were able to set realistic priorities for the most important changes we could make, the enthusiasm for this effort has been overwhelming. And every success leads to more ideas and energy for the next project.

We are confident that all of these efforts to improve the food and fitness environment of the Northside will assure that the next time we assess our neighborhood, our children will no longer be living in the worst environment in the city. The next time the Health Department does a survey, our kids won't be the fattest and least healthy in the city. We are creating an environment for them to eat, play and go to school that supports their health, decreases obesity, and prevents future health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. Together, we can create this healthier, better future for all of our children. **[Closes with a reminder of the key frame components - prevention, children and food and fitness environment]**