

Ms. Lisa McGee

HBCU Wellness Project

HBCU Wellness Food Accessibility Community Mapping Project.

10/1/2024

I am thrilled to introduce you to the HBCU Wellness Food Accessibility Project, an initiative that holds immense significance for our communities in Tennessee. Your involvement as Student Health Ambassadors is not just a participation in a project but a commitment to making a tangible difference in the lives of many. Allow me to share why we are undertaking this project, what it entails, and how we will accomplish our goals.

Why We Are Doing This Project

In our rural counties of Lauderdale and Bedford, many residents face significant challenges in accessing healthy, affordable food options. This lack of accessibility contributes to alarming rates of hypertension and other cardiovascular diseases, disproportionately affecting underserved communities. These health disparities are not just statistics; they represent real people—families and individuals whose quality of life is diminished due to factors that we have the power to influence.

Our mission is to address these critical public health issues by gaining a comprehensive understanding of the current food landscape. By identifying gaps in food accessibility and the barriers residents face, we aim to inform data-driven interventions and policies that promote better health outcomes. This project is a step toward equity, ensuring that all community members have the opportunity to lead healthier lives.

What the Project Entails

The HBCU Wellness Food Accessibility Project is a multifaceted initiative that combines data collection, community engagement, and analytical reporting to create a detailed picture of food accessibility in our target areas.

1. Data Collection and Mapping

You will utilize tools like **Mappler** to identify and map out food resources, including grocery stores, convenience stores, farmers' markets, food pantries, and fast-food establishments. This involves:

- **Gathering Data Points:** Collect detailed information on each food provider, such as the types of food available, services offered (like accepting SNAP/WIC), operating hours, and accessibility features.
- **Using Online Resources:** Supplement your findings with data from platforms like **Yelp**, **Google Maps**, and **Google Street View** to ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness.
- **Field Visits:** When possible, conduct site visits to verify information and gain firsthand insights.

2. Community Engagement

Understanding the community's perspective is crucial for this project. For this, you will:

- **Develop and Administer Surveys:** Create questionnaires to assess residents' views on food accessibility, their awareness of hypertension's link to diet, and perceived barriers to accessing healthy foods.
- **Conduct Listening Sessions:** Facilitate discussions with community members in collaboration with local health departments to gather qualitative data and foster trust.

3. Data Visualization and Reporting

Your collected data will be transformed into meaningful insights through:

- **Creating Online Maps:** Visualize food resources and overlay health indicators like hypertension rates to identify spatial patterns and areas in need.
- **Developing Infographics:** Summarize key findings in an accessible format to communicate effectively with stakeholders.
- **Preparing Final Reports and Presentations:** Compile your research into comprehensive documents and presentations that will inform policymakers, health practitioners, and the community.

How We Will Achieve Our Goals

1. Training and Support

You will not be alone throughout this journey. We provide:

- **Workshops and Tutorials:** Training sessions on using Mappler and other data tools, ethical data collection practices, and community engagement strategies.
- **Guidance from Project Leads:** Dr. Im will offer expertise in data mapping and technical support, while I will assist with project coordination and student support.

2. Collaboration and Teamwork

Success hinges on our ability to work together:

- **Regular Meetings:** Attend bi-weekly meetings to share progress, discuss challenges, and ensure alignment with project objectives.
- **Team Coordination:** Collaborate with peers to divide tasks, share data, and build a comprehensive understanding of the food landscape.

3. Ethical Conduct and Professionalism

We uphold the highest ethical standards:

- **Accuracy in Data Collection:** Ensure all data is reliable and validated through multiple sources.
- **Respect and Confidentiality:** Maintain the privacy of community members and approach all engagements with cultural sensitivity.
- **Bias Avoidance:** Strive for objectivity in assessing and presenting information.

4. Adherence to the Project Timeline

We have a clear roadmap:

- **October:** Project kickoff, training, and the beginning of data collection.
- **November:** Continuation of data collection, preliminary analysis, and community listening sessions.
- **December:** Completion of data analysis, visualization, and preparation of final reports and presentations. All deliverables are due by December 31st.
- **January:** Distribution of stipends as a token of appreciation for your hard work and dedication.

This project is more than an academic exercise; it is an opportunity to effect real change. By participating, you are contributing to a vital cause—improving public health and promoting wellness in underserved communities. You will gain valuable skills in data collection, analysis, community engagement, and advocacy.

I encourage you to approach this project with curiosity, professionalism, and a collaborative spirit. Your efforts will not only enrich your personal and professional development but will also leave a lasting positive impact on the communities we serve.

Thank you for your commitment to making a difference. I am confident that together, we will achieve our goals and pave the way for healthier futures in Tennessee.
