



## Rochester, NY

▲ Community Example from Chapter 2 of "Lessons for Leaders:"  
*Lessons in Communication*

### Community Background

In 2008, the Greater Rochester Health Foundation (GRHF) supported a collaborative strategic planning process to fight the obesity epidemic in Rochester. Led by the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency, the priority-setting process involved dozens of diverse partners and created the Healthi Kids Initiative (HKI). The process established a change agenda with five consistent strategies that had the greatest promise to advance healthier eating and physical activity in children. These strategies included school food, safe play areas, healthy food in pre-school settings, in-school physical activity and breastfeeding policies.

### Community Action

Proactive, sustained and strategic communication was integral to HKI's planning efforts and its ultimate success in improving policy. In addition to the basic planning process, GRHF also funded a communications professional to help the partnership establish a unified and consistent identity. The initial communications products, which are still recognizable today, included a logo, website and formatting for newsletters and listservs. The HKI staff also used Facebook and Twitter extensively to promote best practices, partner events, photos and other content to their followers. To advance healthy policy change, HKI partners opted to subscribe to CapWiz, an online advocacy and engagement tool. The platform could mimic their established HKI branding for policy alerts, and it facilitated successful campaigns for zoning changes, school recess policy and other healthy eating and active living priorities. HKI also disseminated requests for advocates to thank policy makers who supported healthy policy changes.

HKI grew to appreciate the importance of equity in improving school food in Rochester's lunchrooms. Students complained about the poor quality, taste and freshness of the food. In fact, one elementary school teacher helped students produce a video called "Lunch is Gross," which launched a successful campaign to improve school food across the city. But healthy foods, per se, did not motivate parents to address the school board. Rather, they felt their children had substandard food when compared to neighboring suburban schools. Equity, not health, was the central theme in motivating parents and policy makers to invest in Rochester's lunchrooms.

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Knowing how critical two-way communication was between partners, HKI staff laid the groundwork for constructive feedback and the flow of information. At every partner meeting, one-on-one encounter and small group meeting, facilitators and group leaders valued and practiced confidentiality and transparency. Partners could share their perspectives by email or phone if they felt uncomfortable during a meeting or other public forum. These techniques built trust and mutual respect between partners and HKI staff, and among their diverse partners. HKI designed its Policy Team to include representation from diverse organizations, whose staff members would continually hear residents' perspectives related to healthy food access and safe opportunities for physical activity. Periodic partner surveys were another tool to gauge the members' opinions about leadership, strategic direction and communication.