



THE **CHARLIE CART** PROJECT

Impact Evaluation

Executive Summary

Overview

Beginning in Spring 2021, The Charlie Cart Project (CCP) worked with researchers from Georgia's Augusta University and University of North Carolina at Greensboro to study how community partnerships and other mechanisms impact program sustainability. This study was made possible through the generous support of the Vitamix Foundation.



“EMBEDDEDNESS”

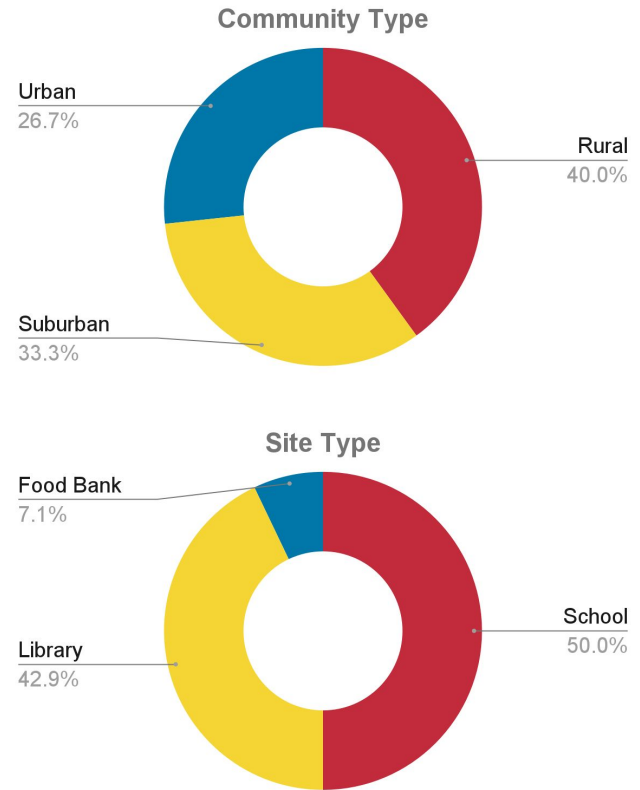
A combination of long form interviews together with a digital pre-survey was used to produce an inductive, qualitative study. This study was generously funded by the Vitamix Foundation.

Through the study, a theme emerged around program sustainability and “success” that researchers came to call “**embeddedness.**”

Program embeddedness encompasses both stakeholder buy-in and access to resources to sustain the program long-term. In other words, researchers observed the ways in which Primary Users worked to ensure CCP programs supported educational and learning objectives, whether they could be delivered on a consistent basis, and the opportunities and challenges to sustain these programs into the future.

Interview Participants

Researchers recruited “Primary Users”— individuals who lead cooking classes with the Charlie Cart—from CCP’s national network of educators, as well as partners to several “Host Institutions”—the organization where the cart resides, and the primary user is employed. In total, 21 individuals were interviewed, representing 15 Host Institutions.

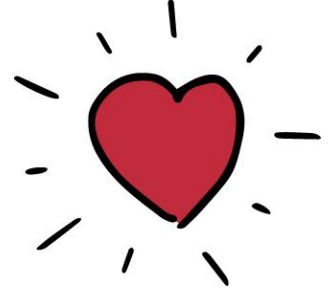




The POP Framework

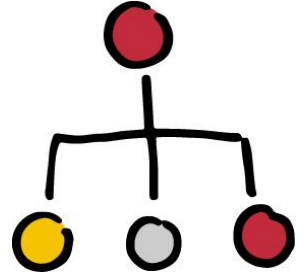
Researchers observed a common set of strategies across Interview Participants used to achieve organizational and community embeddedness of their food education program—***Passion, Organization, and Partnership***, or what the researchers have termed the **POP Framework**.

Passion



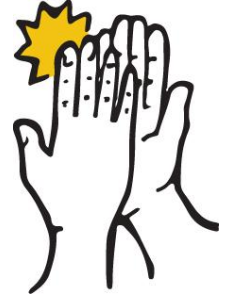
Interview Participants conveyed a sense of passion about the Charlie Cart, articulating a purpose for their CCP lessons, and taking initiative to overcome challenges. Those passionate educators leveraged their enthusiasm to engage Class Participants, colleagues, and community members, leading to greater program embeddedness.

Organization



Interview Participants described an organized approach to cooking lessons and building out programs in general, including logistics, funding and budgeting, program promotion, as well as set up, clean up and lesson execution. Organization allows Primary Users to thoughtfully prepare, anticipate audience needs, and create program enhancements.

Partnerships



To varying degrees, Interview Participants develop or engage in partnerships. Partnership is defined as a collaboration, formal or informal, between the Host Institution and one or more external entities, which could be either individuals or organizations. Partnerships allow for reaching new audiences, and leveraging resources.

Key Findings

CCP lessons helped achieve learning objectives, including:

- Changes in Attitudes and Behaviors around Food
- Building Community
- Building Life Skills
- Building Cooking Skills
- Building Confidence
- Cooking Classes make the day more exciting and effective
- Cooking classes positively impact school attendance



Building Confidence

“You even have kids who struggle in the classroom to follow directions, but you put them in there, and you're talking to them about how you make this recipe and they want it to turn out right. They actually do pay attention and they are learning, learning a skill that in the classroom they struggle with, like learning directions, where in class, that's a harder thing for them.”

Building Community

“I love personally having a sense of belonging and love how my kids have a sense of community and belonging. Food brings everybody together, so for them to experience the whole process of cooking and the rewarding feeling afterwards—the families experience it, the teachers experience it, and everybody just gets so excited. I know it is because of the Charlie Cart, because I know we wouldn't be doing it if it weren't for the Charlie Cart, but it is the whole food aspect that creates a sense of belonging and everything.”

Building Life Skills

“I think that it opens up so many doors for them. A lot of our students are sometimes at home alone, and what a great opportunity and experience to help them know how to cook something on their own to feed their siblings. I think that's just wonderful for us to provide that opportunity of learning.”

Building Cooking Skills

“I just talked to a parent yesterday, and she was like my kid came home and said, “Mom, let me show you how to peel a carrot.” She was like, “Please do!”... So they have this [sense of], “Oh, I made that, that wasn't impossible.” It's like unlocking these mysterious things for them.”

Changes in Attitudes and Behaviors around Food

“One thing I really love is, most of the time, whatever we're cooking, you have the kids who are like, “I'm not going to eat that, I don't eat that.” By the end, they're like, “It was so delicious!” They want to take the recipe home and make it with their families.”

Cooking classes make the school day more exciting and effective

“I think [Charlie Cart lessons are] memorable for the students, for the teachers, and that's making all the concepts that we want them to have a grasp on so much easier, because people connect with their heart, they connect with food.”

Challenges

Interviews revealed common challenges in sustaining programs, including:

- Building organization-wide buy-in often falls on the Primary User
- Capacity is sometimes overlooked as a critical component
- Partnerships are neither well defined, nor leveraged to their full capacity
- Long-term sustainability is impacted by a myriad of variables, including changes in funding, personnel, and larger structural constraints such as those imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic

Given these challenges, Primary Users could benefit from a suite of resources informed by the findings in this study, to foster effective, long term food education programs that are deeply embedded in the organization, community, and local culture.

Conclusions

CCP provides a helpful, easy to use tool to launch or expand hands-on cooking programs in a variety of settings. Interview Participants expressed a wide range of benefits to their work, Institution, program participants and community; instigated, promoted and supported by the arrival and use of the Charlie Cart at the Host Institution.



Conclusions Cont'd

The research points to a common set of characteristics and “readiness criteria” required for an effective, long term program, which will be further detailed in a set of tools developed in association with this study.

Overall this qualitative study spotlights myriad positive outcomes associated with using the Charlie Cart for hands-on cooking classes and indicates a rich opportunity for further, quantitative outcome measurement.

Thank You!



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