

# Bringing Incentives TO Corner Stores

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A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE



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# Introduction to Nutrition Incentives

Nutrition incentives (NI) and Produce Prescription (PPR) Projects aim to close the nutrition gap among low-income families by increasing purchasing power and access to fruits and vegetables.

NI and PPR projects, which have grown in recent years due to grants made available through the USDA Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), are a vital component of food access initiatives nationwide, helping families stretch their food dollars and motivating retailers to stock and sell more fresh produce. For more background about NI and PPR projects and GusNIP, please visit the [Nutrition Incentive Hub](#) website. Additional information about the history and breadth of NI projects nationally can be found in the [Power of Produce](#) report.

Across the U.S., there are dozens of organizations implementing NI projects in a variety of retail settings, including supermarkets, corner stores, and farmers markets. Projects generally fall into two main types: Nutrition incentives and produce prescriptions (detailed below). In fact, NI and PPR projects are active in nearly all 50 states. This list is a sampling of [organizations implementing NI and PPR projects](#). Implementing agencies range from local and national nonprofits to county health departments to food banks.

- 1. Nutrition incentives:** As the name implies, this type of project provides a certain value of coupons or discounts to shoppers using SNAP benefits, earned at the point of purchase. Project models vary, but one common example is a “double up” model, whereby shoppers earn coupons in a one-to-one match for each SNAP dollar spent. Other models have set ratios, such as spend \$5, earn \$2, or provide a discount for eligible produce items. The model chosen is determined by each project administrator and is typically influenced by the amount of funding available to support the project.
- 2. Produce prescriptions:** This type of project relies on partnerships with healthcare professionals who distribute fruit and vegetable “prescriptions” to eligible patients experiencing food insecurity and/or dealing with a diet-related chronic illness, such as type 2 diabetes. The “prescriptions” or vouchers are then redeemed off-site at stores that have agreed to accept them.





“Retail operators face the same challenges as customers do — fresh produce is highly perishable and often unfamiliar or difficult to prepare. We are selective in what we carry to minimize spoilage, often breaking even on certain items to keep them affordable and moving. The genius of the Food Bucks voucher program is that it was designed to not only increase produce purchasing power for SNAP users, but also as an economic development tool to support stores like mine in keeping fresh produce on the shelves and readily available to SNAP users in their neighborhood. Building customer demand for fresh produce can be challenging, and the Food Bucks program has been invaluable in helping us attract a wider customer base.”

— Store owner in Pennsylvania

# Nutrition Incentives in Corner Stores

While NI projects are implemented in a wide range of outlets, from farmers markets to large chain supermarkets, this guide will focus on the unique opportunities and challenges in working with smaller brick-and-mortar retailers. For the purposes of this guide, the term “corner store” will be used to refer to these sites, which include mom and pop stores, bodegas, superettes, and convenience stores.

## Why Corner Stores Are Ripe for Nutrition Incentive Projects

Many Americans today rely on the USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), and other assistance programs to feed their families. However, areas with lower household incomes and higher rates of SNAP and WIC eligibility tend to have fewer full-size supermarkets. As a result, residents rely on corner stores to purchase household items and groceries either exclusively or in between larger grocery trips. Corner stores are found in communities across the country, and in both urban and rural areas.

Some opportunities for partnering with corner stores include:

- **High SNAP sales volumes**
  - » Corner stores serve many SNAP recipients, making them ideal locations for nutrition incentives where people are already spending their benefits.
- **Ability to reach a population that a traditional retail setting might not**
  - » In addition to serving shoppers using SNAP, corner stores also reach a disproportionately high number of people who struggle with diet-related diseases, such as hypertension and diabetes.<sup>1</sup> By partnering with healthcare providers, corner stores can also become important redemption sites for produce prescriptions,

“Our software is not set up to automatically recognize a SNAP tender, so we set up a trigger button for cashiers to press during eligible transactions. An ideal model would avoid human error or manual workarounds, but the button helps us use the system that we have.”

— Store owner in Pennsylvania





**Learn more about POS system requirements from this guide created by NGA Foundation**

thereby giving patients a local source of free or low-cost fruits and vegetables to help them manage these diseases.

- **Potential to increase profits for small businesses**

- » NI and PPR projects help bolster sales of highly perishable fruits and vegetables, which generates additional revenue and reduces food waste and spoilage. By incentivizing SNAP purchases in the store, owners are more likely to consistently and reliably stock fruits and vegetables, which have higher profit margins than snack foods like candy, chips, and sugary beverages. Small, independently owned businesses such as these are integral to local economies, keeping dollars in the community.

- **Store owner and staff engagement**

- » Corner stores are usually independently owned and operated, so decision-making begins and ends at the store. As a result, training managers, cashiers, and other staff on incentive transactions is easier than it may be at chain supermarkets. Similarly, due to their small size, corner store staff tend to know their shoppers well and can encourage them to take advantage of the program.

There are also unique challenges to implementing NI projects in corner stores, including:

- **Limited point-of-sale (POS) systems and related technology**

- » One of the greatest challenges in working with corner stores is that technology is limited and quite variable from store to store. Most stores operate with simple

lockbox cash registers rather than sophisticated POS technology found in most chain supermarkets. In the absence of POS systems, project administrators, store managers, and shoppers must make more effort to ensure the program is operating as intended.

- » Modern POS systems can make incentive projects easier by automating and tracking the distribution (and sometimes redemption) of incentives based on a shopper's spending. POS technology relies on the compatibility of various physical and digital components: the hardware (the physical scanning equipment, monitor, etc.); the software (the program that processes each transaction); and the data management company. For more information about how POS systems work, as well as how to acquire and maintain them, see these [animated videos from NGA Foundation](#). Well-designed POS systems can assist project administrators with evaluation, and they also relieve the burden on the store owner by automating the incentive process.

- **Limited inventory of qualifying items**

- » Corner stores tend to stock large quantities of shelf stable, high-calorie snacks and fewer fresh fruits and vegetables. The procurement and sale of fresh produce can be challenging for small stores due to large case sizes at wholesale outlets, order minimums set by delivery companies, and the relatively short shelf life of such

products, increasing the chances of spoilage and profit loss. Because the goal of NI and PPR projects is to increase the availability and consumption of fresh produce, project administrators must identify and partner with storers that defy this norm or are willing to expand their produce inventory. Fortunately, NI and PPR projects enable retailers to sell fresh produce faster than they otherwise would, which can motivate them to continue stocking larger volumes and more variety.

- **Store capacity to learn incentive systems**
  - » Corner store owners are incredibly busy. Unlike larger chain supermarkets, they usually do not have dedicated staff to handle the various aspects of running a business, such as purchasing, stocking, negotiating contracts with suppliers, accounting, etc. When introducing NI projects into their stores, they must learn and adopt new skills and processes in addition to all of their other duties. Owners

may have to learn how to use a new POS system or modify their current checkout process using a traditional cash register. They will also likely need to complete paper or electronic spreadsheets to track the value of incentives distributed, the value redeemed, the dates of the transactions, and more. This information is required for reimbursement and evaluation purposes, but it adds more work to the owner's plate. Partnering with store owners who have the interest and capacity to learn new systems and integrate them into their operations is necessary for your project's success.

Despite the obstacles you might encounter implementing NI and PPR projects in corner stores, they are key retail settings where food dollars are spent and an integral part of the food landscape in many communities. This guide will provide practical solutions to address the challenges listed above so that you can launch and grow a successful project.

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- 1 Treuhaft, S., & Karpyn, A. (2010). The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters. PolicyLink and The Food Trust. <https://thefoodtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/grocerygap.original.pdf>
  - 2 Romano, V., Lee, J., Royal, E., Metzko, K., Ruth, W., & Hartsook, T. (2017). Identifying Corners Stores as the Future of Healthy Food Access in African American Communities. *Journal of Health Disparities Research and Practice*, 10(1), 12. Available at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/jhdrp/vol10/iss1/12>



# Choosing a Site

Your choice of corner store partner will determine what type of incentive model you use, how quickly the project can launch, and how much training and technological investment will be required. When selecting corner stores for a new incentive project, there are some important considerations to keep in mind.

## 1. Owner engagement and interest

This is arguably the most important consideration when selecting a site for NI and PPR projects. A committed business owner who lacks POS technology will ultimately be a better fit than a hesitant business owner with the latest technology. A committed owner is invested in the health of the community they serve and understands the mutual benefits for both their bottom line and their shoppers' health.

## 2. Volume and variety of fresh produce

For shoppers to be able to redeem incentives for fresh fruits and vegetables, corner stores must carry a moderate selection of produce

items (e.g., at least 8 varieties), and they must be of good quality. When determining whether a corner store is a good fit, take a look at the produce section and note the freshness, variety, prices, and volume. It's also useful to ask the store owner or manager how frequently they restock their produce — at least twice a week is a good indicator that the produce moves quickly and is fresh. Stores with greater variety of produce have a history of increased redemption in NI projects. If a store only stocks onions and potatoes, for example, consumers may prefer to go elsewhere to redeem their coupons so that they can purchase a wider variety of foods that their families want and need.



### 3. Location and shopper base

- **For produce prescriptions:** When seeking redemption sites for produce prescriptions, it's crucial to consider where the participating patients live and shop. One option is to select stores in close proximity to the healthcare institutions (e.g., hospitals or federally qualified health centers) that are distributing the prescriptions. If the healthcare partner serves patients outside of their immediate neighborhood, an ideal store would be located within a reasonable walk, transit ride, or drive for patients, depending on the prevalent mode of transportation and type of setting (urban or rural). Surveying the patients who are receiving the prescription and asking where they already shop is an efficient and effective way to decide which stores to partner with for redemption.
- **For nutrition incentives:** When seeking redemption sites for nutrition incentives, like paper coupons or automatic discounts, the store must first and foremost be a [SNAP Authorized Vendor with the Food and Nutrition Service \(FNS\)](#). Likewise, it's a good idea to ask the owner about the volume of monthly SNAP sales to ensure that the store is well utilized by and accessible to shoppers using SNAP.

### 4. POS technology

The way in which the corner store handles sales transactions will play a defining role in determining if and how to implement NIs. The capabilities of the store's checkout technology — whether it be a modern POS system with advanced features, a basic cash register, or something in between — should be taken into account and weighed against your project's budget and staffing capacity. More detailed information about POS system consideration can be found below in the section titled [‘Determining Which Nutrition Incentive Model to Use’](#).

### 5. Enrollment in a healthy corner store initiative

Healthy corner store initiatives (HCSIs) help small food retailers stock, display, and sell healthier foods and beverages

Healthy corner store initiatives help small food retailers stock, display and sell healthier foods and beverages.

through a combination of technical assistance, infrastructure improvements (e.g., shelving, refrigeration, POS systems), shopper education, and connections with complementary projects (e.g., NIs). They are typically administered by a local nonprofit or health department, and the best way to find out if there is an active HCSI in your area is to do an internet search. Participation in an HCSI demonstrates an owner's commitment to selling healthy foods and may be a good indicator of interest in a NI or PPR project, though certainly not a requirement. Furthermore, these stores often have already made environmental changes, such as stocking more fruits and vegetables, that lend themselves to a successful NI project. If you would like to partner with a store not enrolled in an HCSI, this is a great opportunity to connect store owners with such efforts; however, there are still many places that do not have an established HCSI.



## Tools

The [Corner Store/Small Grocery Intake Guide](#) is a template created by the Nutrition Incentive Hub and is designed to help practitioners collect relevant information to assess a store's eligibility, interest, and capacity to implement NI projects and inform preliminary project design. Practitioners are encouraged to customize this to fit their individual projects. Some stores may not wish to provide all of this information up front, so it may take multiple meetings to build a relationship and get all the information you're hoping for.

The Intake Guide is a starting point for you to collect information about prospective stores. Not only will it help you select the best retail sites, it will also shape your incentives model and ultimately be invaluable for reporting. Remember that the guide can be customized to fit your project's needs.

## How to Pitch the Project

Before recruiting a store, it is important to practice your elevator pitch, which should clearly explain the project, how the model works, and the benefits to the store. It may be helpful to develop a short, informal script to guide the conversation. Often, it takes multiple visits to the store and conversations to build a relationship and trust. It can be helpful to break your pitch into multiple pieces, so as not to overwhelm or confuse an owner who may not be familiar with NI projects. Start with the basics but be prepared to offer more information if you are asked. Additionally, it is recommended that you create a handout summarizing the details of the model so that the store owner can review it on their own time and consider whether it's a good fit for their business. When working with corner stores, the owner is sometimes hard to reach in-person; they are out purchasing inventory, picking up children from school, or meeting with their accountant. Therefore, you may be pitching the project to the store manager or another employee, who will have to relay the information back to the owner. By leaving a handout with all the pertinent information, you are ensuring that the information is conveyed accurately. Be mindful of the owner and staff's native languages so that written documents are accessible. Leave out the jargon and acronyms and make the language simple and informal.

Benefits to the store include:

- Attracting new customers, especially for PPR redemption sites where patients are directed to the store to redeem produce prescriptions
- Increased produce and other sales
- Shoppers will be motivated to spend SNAP benefits at the store to earn coupons or discounts on fruits and vegetables, will purchase more produce, and will have more food dollars to spend overall
- Positive image in the community for offering this opportunity to shoppers

# Determining Which Nutrition Incentive Model to Use

This section will cover how to determine what type of incentive model to use with the stores you work with.

Several different factors are used to determine which project model to use, including the available technology, store owner capacity to learn a new system, and project reporting requirements. One of the major factors in determining the project model is the technology that's in use at the store. The availability and type of existing POS system will help determine what type of project model is possible unless there are funds available to purchase a specific type of system for that store. The POS system is used to categorize inventory,

check out shoppers, and run reports. There are many different types of POS systems available, and some have more advanced capabilities than others. Many corner stores don't have a POS system at all and rely on a manual cash register to conduct transactions. A store does not need to use a POS system to implement a NI or PPR project, and this section will review some of the different ways that projects can be implemented.



*The type of NI model that is used generally depends on the POS system that a store has in place, or the lack thereof. Depending on the type of POS system and its capabilities, the following models may be appropriate in a corner store:*

MODEL	DETAILS	POS SYSTEM REQUIRED?
<p><b>Immediate Discount Model</b></p>	<p>This model provides shoppers with an immediate discount at checkout. Cashiers may need to identify eligible shoppers and push a pre-programmed button to apply the discount.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>With POS:</b> The system is set up to recognize which products are eligible for a discount, as well as any other qualifying factors for the shopper to be eligible for the discount.</li> <li>• <b>Without POS:</b> Cashiers manually identify eligible items and provide the discount using a pre-programmed button on the cash register.</li> </ul> <p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often one of the easiest ways to set up a nutrition incentive program in an older or outdated POS system.</li> <li>• Can be implemented at stores that do not have a POS system at all, since it only requires a button in the cash register that applies a discount on the purchase.</li> <li>• Redemption rates are 100% with this model because all eligible purchases receive the discount.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can lead to decreased program usage due to cashier error in not recognizing eligible customers or inventory in stores with older or no POS system. If a cashier misses these trigger points, a customer will not earn or redeem the incentive unless they notify the cashier of their eligibility.</li> <li>• Customers may not realize they are receiving a discount unless there is sufficient marketing for the program or a way to show the customer the discount has been applied on their receipt.</li> </ul>	<p>No</p>
<p><b>Register-Printed Coupon Redemption Model</b></p>	<p>This model provides shoppers with a printed receipt when they complete a transaction at the store. The receipt acts as a coupon that shoppers can redeem on a future purchase. The POS system is set up to recognize which products are eligible for a discount, as well as any other qualifying factors for the shopper to be eligible for the discount.</p>	<p>Yes</p>

MODEL	DETAILS	POS SYSTEM REQUIRED?
	<p>In some cases, cashiers may need to identify eligible shoppers and push a pre-programmed button to generate the coupons. This model also requires the ability to print receipts and scan barcodes in order to redeem coupons.</p> <p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides customers with their incentive automatically when they are checking out, which can lead to increased incentive issuance because there is little or no cashier involvement to issue the coupon.</li> <li>• Encourages customers to come back to the store for a future purchase, which can lead to increased overall sales for the store if the customers purchase other products along with their eligible inventory.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often harder to set up and require more advanced POS system capabilities because the system must be able to print a receipt with the amount of incentive earned.</li> <li>• Requires customers to keep the coupon and bring it back to the store for a future purchase, which may lead to reduced incentive redemption if the customer loses the coupon or forgets to use it when they check out.</li> <li>• Customers might not notice the coupon amount applied to their purchase, which can lead to missed opportunities for program usage. To reduce this possibility, it is recommended that cashiers point out both the earned and redeemed amount of incentive to the customer even if the process is automated.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Pre-Printed Paper Coupon Model</b></p>	<p>This model is similar to the receipt-printed coupon model above, but utilizes pre-printed coupons (created and provided by the grantee). Grantees provide coupons to the store, and cashiers must identify eligible items to earn and redeem the incentives, provide the correct value in coupons, and track redemptions by stapling redeemed coupons to the transaction receipt. This model may also require stores to assign a “department” to qualifying items for tracking purposes, which can be done with a basic cash register.</p> <p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not require a POS system, which can make it accessible to stores that only have a regular cash register.</li> <li>• Can be passed out at external sites and can be used without needing to purchase any items.</li> </ul>	<p>No</p>

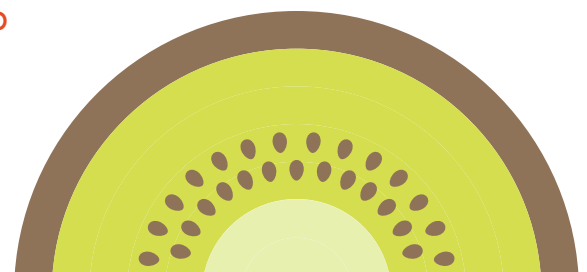
MODEL	DETAILS	POS SYSTEM REQUIRED?
	<p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally requires more tracking on the part of the store owner because the tracking of the incentive is not automatically done by the store POS system. Tracking the incentive by stapling a receipt to the coupon and/or keeping a paper log with the total amount of incentives can be time-consuming and requires the owner of the store to keep this information in a secure location.</li> <li>• There is also more possibility of human error due to the amount of tracking required.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Loyalty Rewards-Based Discount Model</b></p>	<p>This model uses the loyalty rewards tracking capabilities of the POS system in order to store and redeem coupons on the POS system itself. Shoppers are usually asked to sign up for this type of discount ahead of time and create an account linked to an identifying factor, such as their phone number. When a shopper completes a purchase, they are asked for their identifying factor and then the amount of money they are eligible to receive as a discount is recorded and stored under their account. The shopper is then able to come to the firm and redeem their discount on future purchases by providing the identifying factor at checkout. This type of model generally requires a POS system with more advanced capabilities to track and store the amounts shoppers earn and redeem digitally.</p>	<p>Yes</p>

“Ever since we switched our POS system to one that is able to automatically apply the discount, we have seen a large increase in the amount of Food Bucks redeemed each month. We used to redeem about \$50 each month and now redeem over \$600 each month.”

— Store owner in California

“I preferred to set up a system that printed a coupon out for customers to bring back for a future purchase because I felt this would encourage customers to shop at the store more than an instant discount model.”

— Store owner in California



MODEL	DETAILS	POS SYSTEM REQUIRED?
	<p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often one of the best ways to ensure increased incentive issuance and redemption, because the process is completely automated by the store POS system and the possibility of human error is reduced.</li> <li>• Customers are not required to keep a coupon that may be lost, and if the customer has a physical card that is lost they can usually still access their incentive using their identifying information.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally requires a POS system with more advanced capabilities to track and store the amounts shoppers earn and redeem digitally. Often, corner stores have limited resources to invest in more costly POS systems.</li> <li>• Customers may be hesitant to provide their unique identifying information in order to sign up for the program.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>App-Based Discount</b></p>	<p>This model uses a phone- or tablet-based app as both the discount mechanism and tracking tool. Shoppers download the app to their phone, which is then presented to the cashier when they check out in order to track the eligible products that are purchased by the shopper. The amount of money the shopper earned is stored on the app and can then be redeemed by the shopper during their next visit to the firm. This model requires a POS system or a mobile device that can read and scan apps, as well as an app that is compatible with the system.</p> <p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows customers to store and track incentives on an app, which can be easier to use than a paper coupon and harder to lose.</li> <li>• May increase redemption rates of incentives because the amount earned is not lost if the coupon or paper receipt is lost.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires customers to have a smart phone or tablet.</li> <li>• Requires customers to download an app and sign up for the program, which may limit participation.</li> <li>• Requires stores that have an advanced POS system capable of interacting with the app.</li> </ul>	<p>Yes</p>



“In our experience, this program works best when it rewards customers for any SNAP-eligible purchase with Food Bucks vouchers they can use to improve their diet by also purchasing fresh produce. This incentivizes residents with SNAP benefits to purchase food in their neighborhood and to add fresh produce to their diet at no extra cost.”

— Store owner in Pennsylvania

## Overview of Ways Customers Can Earn and Redeem Nutrition Incentives

The following section describes the ways customers can earn and redeem GusNIP nutrition incentives in corner stores. In some cases, stores may start with one model and move to another, depending on the amount of funding available for a program or shifting requirements of the program funder. In cases where a store is asked to shift from one model to another, it is recommended to provide the store with as much advance notice as possible about the program shift. It is also recommended to provide customers with clear information (e.g., through electronic marketing materials or printed handouts) about the products they can purchase to earn the incentive and the products they are able to spend the incentive on.

MODEL	DETAILS
<p><b>Earn on SNAP-Eligible Items, Spend on Only Fresh Produce</b></p>	<p>This model allows customers to earn incentives on any SNAP-eligible item in the store and spend their incentive only on fresh produce.</p> <p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows for a large amount of incentive to be earned because customers can earn the incentive on any SNAP-eligible item in the store.</li> <li>• Can also incentivize more fresh produce purchases because customers are required to spend their incentive on only fresh produce and cannot spend it on other SNAP-eligible items.</li> <li>• This model is also useful for encouraging shoppers who may not be used to purchasing fruits and vegetables.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers may not fully utilize the amount of incentive that they earned because the selection of fresh produce at a store may be more limited than the overall selection of SNAP-eligible items.</li> <li>• May not incentivize the overall increase of fresh produce available in a store as much as other models that require fresh produce to both earn and redeem an incentive.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Earn on Any Produce, Spend on Any Produce</b></p>	<p>This model allows customers to earn incentives on any fresh produce in the store and spend their incentive only on fresh produce.</p> <p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can incentivize more overall purchases of fresh produce by customers and encourage them to prioritize fresh produce over other SNAP-eligible items because the incentive is only earned and redeemed on fresh produce.</li> </ul>

MODEL	DETAILS
	<p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can incentivize more overall purchases of fresh produce by customers and encourage them to prioritize fresh produce over other SNAP-eligible items because the incentive is only earned and redeemed on fresh produce.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The total amount of incentive that is earned and redeemed may be lower than a model that allows greater flexibility on the product that both generates the incentive and what it can be spent on.</li> <li>• May also only reach customers who are already inclined to purchase fruits and vegetables.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Earn on Local Produce, Spend on Any Produce</b></p>	<p>This model allows customers to earn incentives on only local produce and spend their incentive on any fresh produce in the store.</p> <p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can encourage customers to prioritize purchasing local produce because it is the only type of produce that will allow them to earn the incentive, creating a boost for regional farmers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May cause confusion for customers because there is a difference in the produce that allows them to earn the incentive and what they are allowed to spend it on (e.g., local apples vs. non-local apples).</li> <li>• Thorough labeling is required in order to identify which products qualify for redemption and which do not. Labeling may also need to be moved or changed frequently based on the seasonality of local produce.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Earn on Local Produce, Spend on Only Local Produce</b></p>	<p>This model allows customers to earn incentives on only local produce and spend their incentive on only local produce.</p> <p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates the most amount of incentive for local produce overall, because the program centers on only local produce, creating an even larger boost for regional farmers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May lead to reduced overall usage of the program because the items that customers can earn and spend their incentive on is the most limited out of all the models.</li> </ul>

PPR can be redeemed at corner stores both with and without POS systems. In both cases, paper coupons are provided to shoppers by a healthcare provider and brought to the store to be redeemed for eligible produce items.

- **Using a POS system:** The POS system scans the coupon, identifies eligible items, and applies the discount.
- **Without a POS system:** The shopper provides the coupon to the cashier, who manually identifies eligible produce items and applies the discount. The cashier then attaches the redeemed coupon to the transaction receipt. This model is more time and labor intensive for the store staff but allows shoppers to redeem their coupons even if the corner store does not have a POS system.

There is emerging card-based technology that is being used by supermarkets to redeem produce prescriptions using a type of debit card; however, as of 2022 this technology is not yet available in corner stores and may be slowly integrated over time as more advanced POS technology becomes accessible to small stores.

Produce prescriptions can be redeemed at corner stores both with and without POS systems.

all, and while this will limit the project models available to you, these often still serve as crucial food access points and can implement incentives effectively with a simplified model. For stores that use a POS system, the list of information you should collect from store owners is detailed in the [Corner Store Intake Guide](#), and includes:

- Name and model of the POS system hardware being used by the firm
- Name of the POS system software being run by the POS computer hardware
- Name of the POS service provider that manages the software and reporting functions of the system

Once you have this information, you can begin to research the different capabilities that the POS system supports. Because corner stores use such a wide variety of POS systems, there is not currently a one-size-fits-all solution to building out the necessary features to support a NI project. Many of these features will be determined by the age and cost of the POS system, as well as the POS service provider, and what functions they are able to build into the software. Contacting the POS service providers and in some cases requesting a quote for the cost of building out the system, is one way to determine the type of NI project model you will be implementing.

For more details on the variety of technology solutions for NI projects, see the [National Grocers Association Foundation's Solutions and Methodologies page](#).



# Data Collection and Reporting

Collecting data from the stores you work with is an essential part of any NI or PPR project and is necessary to complete reporting requirements. This section will cover how to set up data collection systems with your stores.

## Setting Store Owner Expectations

One of the most important parts of creating and implementing a data collection system is setting clear expectations for the store owner before beginning the project. The store owner should be aware of the following information:

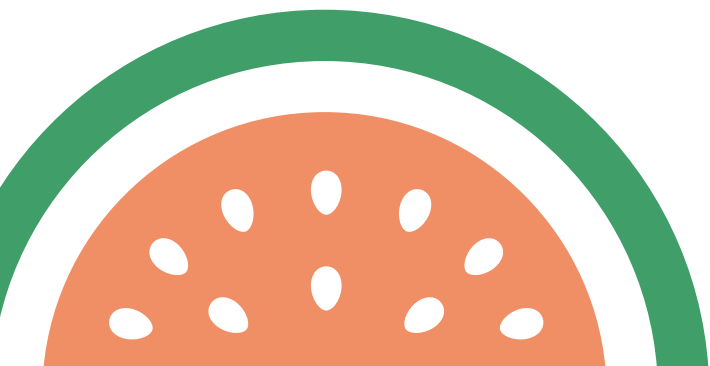
- The specific data points or reports they will need to provide to meet project reporting requirements
- The process for running reports or pulling the data
- The frequency with which data will need to be reported to the grantee (in most cases, this will be monthly)
- The process for sharing the data with the grantee
- Who the data will be shared with and how it will be used

By informing the store owner of expectations prior to beginning the project, you will be helping to ensure that you will have necessary data to complete reporting requirements, while at the same time preparing the store owner for what they should expect when the project begins.

## What Kind of Data Is Needed?

It is important to understand what kind of data is needed to complete project reporting requirements. Many NI or PPR projects, including GusNIP, require substantial reporting to funders to ensure that funds are being spent and tracked correctly. For the store owner, it is particularly important to keep track of sales data about the amount of incentives they have issued and redeemed in order to receive reimbursement. While the reporting requirements for each project can vary, the following are commonly collected data points:

- Total dollar amount of SNAP sales (monthly)
- Number of SNAP transactions (monthly)
- Total dollar amount of incentives distributed (monthly)
- Total dollar amount of incentives redeemed (monthly)
- Number of incentive transactions completed
- Total number of incentive-eligible SNAP sales at the store
- Total number of unique shoppers



- Varieties of products sold
- Prices of products sold

The number of data points that are collected and the degree of detail needed varies across different NI projects and is generally determined by the technological capabilities of the store POS system and the particular grant requirements.

## How Is the Data Obtained?

In general, data is obtained by store owners in one of the following ways:

- By running a report on the POS system that collects the necessary data points
- Through manual records and receipts kept by the store owner

POS systems make data collection, reporting, and sharing much easier. In many cases, store owners can run a POS report that compiles the specified data points and is then either printed or exported into a usable format such as an Excel spreadsheet. In some cases, the store owner must request these reports from the POS service provider they use, which may take longer. It is also possible that project staff can learn how to run and access reports from the store POS system with the permission of the store owner. If the store does not have a POS system or has a very limited system, keeping manual records and compiling these records for reporting can be a more time-consuming process. With a manual reporting system, the store owner is responsible for keeping track of eligible transactions and in some cases may also be required to keep receipts to show the transactions that were completed. These records or receipts may be compiled into a usable form, such as an Excel spreadsheet, or submitted directly to the grantee.

## How Often Is Data Collected?

The specific reporting requirements will vary across different NI projects and will usually dictate how often data needs to be collected from the store owners. Timing for data collection usually falls into the following categories: monthly reports, quarterly reports, and yearly reports.

Store owners should be made aware of how often data will need to be collected and should agree to these requirements prior to implementing the project.

## How Will the Data be Provided by the Store Owner?

The way the store owner provides data is another crucial piece of the data collection system. Depending on the technology, available at the store and the owner's preferences, data can be provided in the following ways:

- Compiled into a spreadsheet and sent through email
- Entered into an online form
- Printed and provided in-person
- Hand-written form provided in-person

Checking with the store owner to make sure they are comfortable with the way data will be submitted is very important. If a store owner is unable to provide data in one of the ways that relies on technology such as a POS system, it may be necessary to take additional action by creating the online form the store owner will be using or printing paper forms they can use and submit as needed.

## What Will the Data Be Used For?

Store owners may also have questions about how the data they are providing will be used, especially pertaining to sensitive information such as sales or SNAP data. The following reasons are usually an explanation for why the data is required and what it will be used for:

- To complete project reporting requirements and be eligible to continue receiving incentives
- To verify that incentives are only earned and redeemed on eligible items
- To show which products are the best sellers or which shopper demographics are using the project most frequently
- To provide documentation for reimbursement of incentives

If a store owner is uncomfortable collecting or reporting certain data points, it is important to explain why these data points are important and how they will be used. In some cases, it is possible to create alternative solutions if a store owner is unable to or uncomfortable collecting certain data points that are required for project reporting. For example, a store owner can be allowed to submit data points that they are comfortable with while not being required to submit other data points they are uncomfortable with, as long as it is not crucial to the reporting requirements of the grant. Another manner in which you can work with a hesitant store owner would be to create a system that randomizes the data or submits it in a way that allows the store owner to remain anonymous.

## How Does the Store Owner Receive Reimbursement?

The ways in which store owners are reimbursed may vary depending on the particular project. In general, store owners will report the total amount of incentives that they have both issued and redeemed in a defined reporting period and will be reimbursed for the amount of incentives redeemed. A store owner may receive reimbursement on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, or yearly basis depending on a previously agreed upon timeline. Store owners may be reimbursed through a check, direct deposit, or cash depending on the capacity of the funding organization and the preferences of the store owner. It is important to clearly define how long it will take a store owner to be reimbursed and the manner in which they will receive reimbursement prior to launching the NI or PPR project.



# Preparing to Launch

Once you have partnered with a corner store and determined what type of incentive model you will be using, the next step is to begin training the store owner and staff on how to successfully implement the project.

## Building Store Owner Capacity and Staff Training

Building store owner capacity to begin distributing and accepting nutrition incentives is mainly achieved through direct, one-on-one training with the store owner. Once the store owner has been trained, they can usually conduct training sessions with their staff to convey the information they learned. In some cases, however, store owners may want their managers and staff to be trained directly by external partners. This section will cover direct training ideas that can be used with either store owners or staff.

Training sessions on how to accept and redeem nutrition incentives should be scheduled ahead of time with the store owners or staff to make sure there is enough time to cover all of the training topics and address questions. Generally, one- to two-hour training sessions are recommended for this process. After training sessions have been completed with store owners and staff, it is often a good idea to schedule additional time in the following days to help the store owner and staff troubleshoot any problems that may arise with live customer transactions. It is also recommended to create [tracking forms and checklists for the cashier or store owner](#) to reference once project staff are no longer present in the store. The following are training topics and ideas you can use when beginning the process of accepting nutrition incentives in stores.

### Overview of the NI or PPR project and how it works

- Discuss what type of incentive project you are implementing in the store.
- How does distribution of incentives work?
- How does redemption of incentives work?
- What will the expectation for store owners and staff be?

### Store inventory assessment

- Identify which products in the store are eligible for the NI project.
- Are these products identifiable to shoppers? If possible, utilize marketing materials to highlight the products that will be eligible to purchase with the incentives.
- If using a POS-based incentive, how will these products be categorized and identifiable in the system?
- Does the firm have enough eligible inventory for the project? If not, what are some products that the store could add? Where can they source these products?

### Promoting the project

- Discuss how the project will be promoted so that shoppers are aware that it exists and are able to determine if they are eligible to participate.
- What kind of in-store marketing materials can be used to promote the project?
- How can the store owner and staff talk to shoppers about the project?

- Are there any community-based organizations around the store that can help promote the project to residents?

### Project reporting and store reimbursement

- Discuss what the project reporting requirements are and what the store owner is expected to contribute.
- What kind of data collection is necessary to meet project requirements? Will reports need to be generated monthly or quarterly?
- How often will the store owner be reimbursed for incentives they have provided? What is the process for receiving reimbursements?



“I always remind our staff of the importance of Food Bucks to community residents, and the importance to our overall sales volume. Another key element in training is highlighting the staff role in encouraging shoppers not to leave anything on the table with their Food Bucks since no change is given. We train our staff so they can assist customers in maximizing the Food Bucks that they are using.”

— Store manager in Pennsylvania

## Testing the Model

Once store owner training has been completed and you or the store owner has trained their staff on how to implement the project, the store is almost ready to begin distributing and accepting nutrition incentives! The following are recommendations to be used directly before beginning the implementation of the project:

1. **Make sure that the store owner and staff are comfortable and confident in how to distribute and redeem nutrition incentives.**
  - If necessary, conduct another round of training sessions with store owners and staff to ensure they are comfortable before beginning the project.
2. **Conduct a trial run before launching the project. Walk through the steps involved in the process by actually completing a few transactions using the nutrition incentives.**
  - Pretend that you are a shopper using the NI or PPR project for the first time. What does the process look like? Is it easy or difficult for shoppers to earn and redeem incentives?
  - Make sure that the eligible products are being correctly discounted by the POS system or cashier.
3. **Run a sample report to make sure you are capturing the necessary information for project reporting.**
  - If using a POS based system, run a sample report using the POS system software to generate information about eligible product redemption.
  - Are the correct products being captured in the report? Is the correct discount being applied? Does the report provide you with the necessary information to complete project reporting requirements? If not, adjust the POS software so that it captures the necessary information.

# Supporting Stores in Selling Healthy Food

Corner stores face challenges when stocking the fresh fruits and vegetables necessary for participating in nutrition incentive projects. Unlike large supermarkets, corner stores generally pay higher wholesale prices because they purchase smaller amounts of products, which translate into higher retail prices for shoppers.

Learning where to shop for small quantities of fruits and vegetables as a store owner can significantly impact affordability and profitability for the store. Corner store owners with little experience stocking, storing, merchandising, and selling perishable foods like fruits and vegetables may need additional training to ensure longer shelf life and increased sales. That's where project administrators can play a vital role. By providing one-on-one training to store owners about procurement, storage, and marketing of fresh produce, you can elevate their skill set and set them up for success. Training store owners builds their confidence and skills to be able to sustain healthier inventories and continue participating in the project. The time invested in these conversations with store owners or managers strengthens the relationship with project staff, which is another key element in a project's longevity and success.

There are numerous guides that have been created by healthy corner store programs that provide recommendations and ideas to store owners about how to shift their inventory towards healthier items and how to market those products to shoppers. One such tool is the [Sell Healthy! Guide](#) created by The Food Trust. The *Sell Healthy! Guide* defines "healthy food," which may vary significantly from program to program. In the context of NI projects, the most relevant healthy items are fruits and

vegetables, as those are the only eligible items for the redemption of incentives. The rest of the guide centers on selecting and maintaining healthy products, creating attractive displays and innovative pricing and promotional strategies, and improving store appearance.

NI projects can support a store's participation in healthy corner store programs and are well suited for stores that are already familiar with stocking and selling fruits and vegetables. If a store is newer to selling produce, connecting them with a local HCSI might be an appropriate first step before implementing NI projects.



# In-Store Nutrition Education

Providing in-store nutrition lessons and taste tests complements and enhances NI and PPR projects. Lessons can increase shoppers' knowledge of and familiarity with healthy foods sold in the store. Nutrition education may also deepen engagement and buy-in with store owners.

Many nutrition curricula have been developed, including The Food Trust's Heart Smarts curriculum, designed specifically for the corner store environment. The [Heart Smarts toolkit](#) aims to guide practitioners through all aspects of the Heart Smarts program, from the curriculum itself to layering on other health and social services

and evaluation. Additionally, partnering with local agencies can support nutrition education efforts. Examples of nutrition education approaches that can be utilized to support behavior change in NI and PPR projects include: store tours, cooking demonstrations and taste testing, recipes and cookbooks, and more.



# Connecting with Others Implementing NI in Corner Stores

## Incentives in Corner Stores Community of Practice

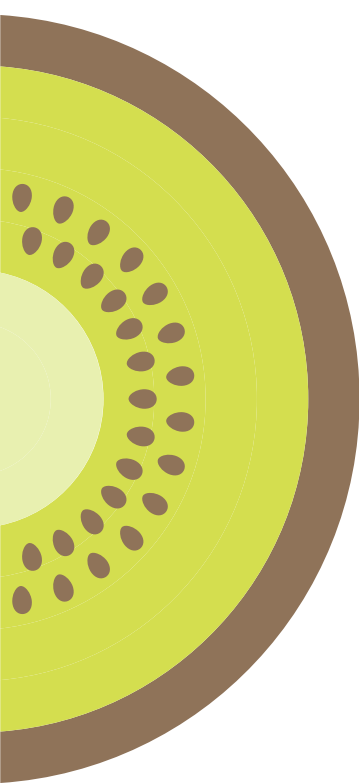
Join the Nutrition Incentive Hub's Incentives in Corner Stores Community of Practice (CooP) for bi-monthly calls. The CooP aims to bring together practitioners who are administering nutrition incentives in small stores and create opportunities for cross-pollination and learning from one another's experiences. Email [jvila@thefoodtrust.org](mailto:jvila@thefoodtrust.org) to be added to the email list and calendar invites.

## Incentives in Corner Stores Online Discussion Group

The Nutrition Incentive Hub hosts online discussion groups for nutrition incentive practitioners and their partners, including a dedicated forum for Incentives in Corner Stores. To join the discussion, click "Join Our Community" to create a Nutrition Incentive Hub account, and then navigate to the Discussion Forums under "Portal" on the left-hand side of the page and select "Community of Practice – Incentives in Corner Stores."

## Technical Assistance

If your organization would like to request personalized technical assistance to support the development or expansion of your NI project, please contact the Nutrition Incentive Hub at [TA@nutritionincentivehub.org](mailto:TA@nutritionincentivehub.org).



# About

## The Nutrition Incentive Hub

The Nutrition Incentive Hub is a coalition of partners, created by the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Information Center (GusNIP NTAE Center), that supports nutrition incentive projects, including SNAP incentives, and produce prescription projects. The GusNIP NTAE Center is led by Center for Nutrition & Health Impact. In partnership with Fair Food Network, they assembled the Nutrition Incentive Hub, a coalition of evaluators, researchers, practitioners, and grocery and farmers market experts from across the country dedicated to strengthening and uniting the best thinking in the field to increase access to affordable, healthy food to those who need it most. The Nutrition Incentive Program Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Information Center (NTAE) is supported by Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program grant no. 2023-70414-40461/project accession no. 1031111 from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or U.S. Government determination or policy.



## The Food Trust

Founded in 1992, The Food Trust works with neighborhoods, institutions, retailers, farmers, and policymakers across the country to ensure delicious, nutritious food for all. Backed by three decades of research and evaluation, our holistic, community-centered approach to nutrition security weaves together three core programming elements — access, affordability and education — as well as a focus on advocating for public policy solutions.



# Appendix

Below is a consolidated list of resources mentioned throughout this document in the order in which they appear.

[Nutrition Incentive Hub](#) website

[Power of Produce](#) report

List of [organizations implementing NI projects](#)

[Animated videos from NGA Foundation](#)

How to become a [SNAP Authorized Vendor with the Food and Nutrition Service](#)

[Corner Store/Small Grocery Intake Guide](#)

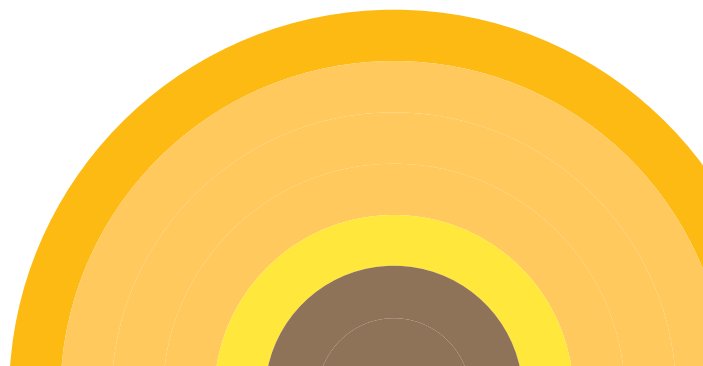
[National Grocers Association Foundation's Solutions and Methodologies page](#)

[Sample store tracking sheet and checklist](#)

[\*Sell Healthy! Guide\*](#)

[Heart Smarts toolkit](#)

[Nutrition Incentives Retailer POS Requirements](#)



# List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation/Acronym	Full Name/Description
CNHI	Center for Nutrition & Health Impact
FFN	Fair Food Network
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Food & Agriculture
GusNIP	Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (formerly the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Program)
HCSI	Healthy corner store initiative
NGAF	National Grocers Association Foundation
NGAF TA Center	National Grocers Association Foundation Technical Assistance Center
NI	Nutrition incentive (includes SNAP incentives)
NTAE	Nutrition Incentive Program Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation and Information Center. GSCN serves as the NTAE for GusNIP. Also known as the NTAE Center or GusNIP NTAE Center.
POS system	Point-of-sale system (the hardware and software that handles sales transactions)
PPR	Produce prescription (USDA NIFA program code)
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps
TA	Technical assistance
TFT	The Food Trust
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WIC	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children