**City of Seattle**

**Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) Summary Sheet**

**Cover Sheet and Questions**

**Department/Office:** Office of Sustainability and Environment

**Name of policy, program, etc. analyzed:** Fresh Bucks e-benefits implementation

**Names and titles of key staff that led this RET process:**

Robyn Kumar, Fresh Bucks Program Manager, OSE

Tiffany Anderson, Fresh Bucks Program & Contracts Specialist, OSE

Narita Ghumman, Fresh Bucks Outreach & Engagement Specialist, OSE

**Dates of RET process:** 8/2020-12/2020

**1. Describe the project, program, policy or budgetary decision that you assessed using the Racial Equity Toolkit.**

This RET will assess the racial equity impacts of a transition of the Fresh Bucks benefit from a paper voucher to an electronic benefit. Fresh Bucks is a healthy food program that helps Seattle residents afford healthy food. Through Fresh Bucks Vouchers, Seattle residents with incomes at or below 80% AMI can apply to receive $40/month in benefits redeemable for fresh fruits and vegetables at nearly 40 participating supermarkets, small grocers, and farmers markets. Historically, this benefit has come in the form of paper vouchers delivered by mail to enrolled households. In 2020 Fresh Bucks is beginning to make the transition to an electronic benefit, where participants’ benefits will be loaded on a plastic card or app.

**2. List the racial equity outcome(s) that you set in Step 1 of the RET process.**

Eliminate racial disparities in access to healthy foods for low-income Hispanic, Black/African American, American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN), Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities and immigrants and refugees, particularly those with language barriers.

**3. Which stakeholders (groups and/or key individuals) did you engage in this RET? In what ways did you engage them?**

Key Fresh Bucks staff met periodically to plan community engagement sessions, discuss findings, and draft an e-benefits user testing process. The community engagement comprised key stakeholder groups that will be responsible for implementing e-benefits via a series of virtual meetings and one-on-one conversations to gather their ideas and feedback on user testing and implementation planning:

1. Community-based organization (CBO) partners that help their customers (primarily RSJ priority populations) enroll in Fresh Bucks and will recruit customers to test the e-benefit in retail settings;
2. Neighborhood Grocers who provide culturally relevant food and who will host user testing and fully implement e-benefits at their stores;
3. Safeway leadership, who will lead e-benefits implementation at all Safeway stores and help coordinate user testing; and
4. Farmers market administrators, who will help customers and vendors use e-benefits.

This RET will not be fully complete until mid-2021, when the user testing will take place. User testing will gather feedback on how customers, CBOs, vendors, market operators, Safeway cashiers, and neighborhood grocers experience processing transactions using the app and card and help us better understand the information, training, and communication needs of each group. As part of the user testing process, we are recruiting customers to follow a typical customer journey at selected Safeways, farmers market vendors, a Latino neighborhood grocery store, and a Somali neighborhood grocery store. We are working with CBO partners to recruit customer participants and with farmers market organizations to recruit farmers market vendors who have a variety of levels of English proficiency and technology literacy. We will debrief the shopping experiences with both the customers and retailers and use the findings to shape communications material to help all our users successfully transition to e-benefits.

**4. Please describe up to five key benefits and/or burdens for people of color of this policy, program, project, or other decision, which the RET process helped you to identify or confirm.**

Benefits:

* E-benefits will reduce the stigma of shopping using Fresh Bucks.
* E-benefits will help small POC-owned neighborhood grocers receive reimbursement more quickly.
* The e-benefits system will help retailers and OSE staff better understand shopping behavior and benefit utilization, enabling better RSJ outcome analysis and program improvements.

Burdens:

* Customers and vendors with limited English proficiency may experience challenges learning to use the e-benefit.
* Learning how to process E-benefits will be challenging for some small grocers and farmers market vendors with limited technology literacy.
* Multiple types of benefits create confusion for customers to use at farmers markets.
* No matter the benefit format, sometimes customers must explain to retailers how to process their benefits.

**5. Please describe up to five key actions – things that you will do differently or begin to do now – of this policy, program, project, or other decision, which will increase opportunity and/or minimize harm for people of color.**

1. Provide training material for retailers that includes a step-by-step guide with screenshots and other visuals.
2. Provide extra training time for retailers who have limited English proficiency and/or technological literacy and fully train all staff at small grocery stores.
3. Eliminate multiple systems for processing the e-benefit at farmers markets by onboarding close to 100% of vendors for go-live launch (as opposed to gradual onboarding over several weeks or seasons).
4. Create user testing environments that are as close to real-life scenarios as possible (for example, customers visit a Safeway cashier that has not been trained).

**6. How will leadership ensure implementation of the actions described in question 4?**

The actions above have already been formalized in the user testing and communications plans for e-benefits implementation. The communication materials will be reviewed again by partners and revised based on their feedback and findings from the user test.

**7. How have/will you report back to your stakeholders? (This includes the people who were directly engaged in this RET process, those who will be affected by decisions made, and other departments or divisions impacted by the RET findings and the actions described in question 4.)**

OSE staff have continued to meet with all stakeholders engaged in the RET to refine the user testing and e-benefits implementation plans. Both groups will continue to revise and shape the user testing process, communications materials, and program implementation plan via ongoing work with OSE staff. Sharing the RET findings and working them into user testing has been and will continue to be a part of that collaboration. Ultimately, we will use the results of user testing findings to make adjustments to communications materials and inform the development of vendor training materials. The findings of the user testing process will be debriefed with key stakeholder groups (farmers market organizations and vendors, CBOs) in planning meetings to show how the user testing findings are integrated into finalized communications materials.

**8. What additional racial equity issues did this RET reveal? Consider how these unresolved issues present opportunities for structural transformation (i.e. working across departments, and with other institutions and sectors to achieve racial equity).**

E-benefits will allow the Fresh Bucks team to expand the retail network to additional retailers. Our community engagement with small neighborhood grocers revealed that not all grocers have the same capacity to learn new technology. This is an important learning to center in planning for retail expansion by building in capacity assessment tools and supports and allowing time for a flexible onboarding process that gives retailers the time needed to learn the benefits system. Additionally, the RET community engagement reinforced that high staff turnover at stores and in farmers market booths can create burdens for customers who then must explain Fresh Bucks and how it works. While e-benefits streamline the transaction process from what it is now, we anticipate that user testing will reveal new challenges. We will need to understand these challenges and work with our partners to create meaningful solutions that further eliminate barriers to using Fresh Bucks at all retailers.