



CENTER FOR
Science IN THE
Public Interest

Taste-test Protocol

How to Conduct Test-tastes on State or Local
Government Property

Center for Science in the Public Interest
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Taste-Test Materials

Tables and chairs	- 6 x 2 ½ feet is ideal for food/beverage sample preparation. Another table with chairs is needed for participants.
Gloves	- For preparing and serving food samples
Knife	- To cut food samples into smaller portions
Cutting Board	- For cutting food samples into smaller portions
Small cups	- 3 oz. white paper cups are ideal
Forks/Spoons	- Depending on types of food sampled
Food and/or beverage samples	- Healthier food and beverage samples to be evaluated
Water	- Have available for participants during taste-testing
Paper towels	- For clean up
Garbage can	- With liner to dispose of used cups and other trash
Data sheets	- <i>Taste-tests Evaluation Form</i>
2 Clip boards	- To hold the questionnaires and data sheets
Pens	- For participants to record responses

Rationale

Education alone is often not enough to result in lasting dietary behavior changes—it must be paired with changes in the food environment. Many state and local government properties have vending machines, cafeterias, concessions stands, and feeding programs, which can affect the diets of employees, visitors, and program participants. Unfortunately, the foods and beverages available through those venues are often high in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars, and contain few fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Consuming unhealthy foods contributes to diet-related health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

Offering healthier options on government property helps to create a supportive environment that cultivates a culture of health and helps employees, visitors, and program participants to eat well. Ensuring access to healthier options sends the message that health is important to your state/locality and that you support the health of your employees, visitors, and program participants. It models healthy behavior and helps governments to reinforce the messages of their obesity and chronic disease prevention programs.

By conducting taste-tests, you can identify acceptable products and meals, which can help your vendor know which products and meals to sell/serve and help to ensure that the healthier items will be purchased/eaten.

Personnel

Three volunteers are recommended to run the taste-tests:

Volunteer A: Provides introduction at the beginning of the taste-tests to participants and presents tasting cups.

Volunteer B: Prepares food and beverage samples and recruits participants to take taste-tests.

Volunteer C: Collects data sheets. Cleans up used cups and trash in between samples and after test.

Recruiting Volunteers

- Recruit volunteers—colleagues, wellness committee members from state/local agencies, students from health and science related departments from local colleges and/or universities, state/local advocates, volunteers from health or other volunteer groups in the community, etc.
- During recruiting efforts, briefly explain to potential volunteers the purpose of the taste-tests and what you hope to accomplish.

Sample Script:

“We are looking to recruit volunteers to conduct taste-tests within government facilities. Taste-tests are an easy and fun way to determine which healthier options could be served or sold on public property. Your efforts would help support the health of employees, visitors to state/local property, and participants in state/local programs.”

Step-by-step Instructions for Taste-tests

1. Decide which items will be assessed during the taste-tests. This will depend on the food service venue being addressed (i.e. vending machines, concession stands, cafeterias, or institutional feeding). Find out from the vendor which items are most popular and seek healthier alternatives. For example: granola bars may be used to replace candy bars; whole-grain, baked crackers could replace fried chips; diet beverages in place of regular beverages.
Find healthier vending options from:
 - Alliance for a Healthier Generation: <http://bit.ly/1of7LNY>
 - National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity: <http://bit.ly/1tk1H9l>
 - John Stalker Institute, A-List: <http://bit.ly/1pcTS2L>
 - Fit Pick: <http://bit.ly/1tk29UT>
2. Identify which state/local government property with vending machines, concession stands, cafeterias, and/or institutional food service you want to support with offering healthier options. Approach the food service company/vendor about conducting taste-tests. Briefly explain that taste-tests provide a way to identify healthier products that their customers would enjoy and be more likely to purchase (talking points for approaching vendors are available at: <http://cspinet.org/images/healthier-options-fact-sheet.pdf>). Set a date, time, and location for the taste-tests.
3. At least one week prior to the taste-tests, post promotional flyers, posters, and/or send emails to state/local employees or other customers of the facility. See model email on page 6.
4. On the day of the taste-tests, encourage people from the facility to participate via email, intranet, flyers, or other communication appropriate to the facility. Inform people that the tests will take only a few minutes and that their participation can help support healthier food choices.
5. If time permits, request that participants first complete a short pre-implementation survey, see model survey at: <http://cspinet.org/images/hfccp-survey.pdf>. A post-implementation survey can be conducted a few months after the facility has incorporated healthier options.
6. Volunteer B should prepare the food and/or beverage samples for the participants by cutting items into bite-size pieces or serving bite-size samples in cups. Be sure to keep samples separated and keep careful track of which items are being assessed.
7. Volunteer A will begin by welcoming the participants and providing a brief introduction, while Volunteer C hands out evaluation forms (see evaluation form on page 7).

Sample Script:

“Thank you for participating in this taste-test. Your input is important in helping to determine which healthier items should be served/sold in this facility so that we can help to better support healthy eating. Please taste each sample and record your responses on the evaluation form. We want to know which products you enjoy and if you might buy the products if they were sold here.”

8. After each sample, Volunteer C should collect any used cups/trash. Volunteer C also should ensure participants are completing the evaluation forms properly and answer any questions they may have.
9. At the conclusion of the taste-tests, Volunteer A should thank each participant for their involvement. Volunteer C should collect evaluation forms.
10. All volunteers should clean the site after the taste-tests and thank the manager of the site for allowing them to conduct the taste-tests.
11. Compile results and identify acceptable items. Share this information with the vendor. Use the data to convince the vendor to offer popular items.

Sample Email

Dear Colleague:

In an effort to better support health at [insert facility name], we are adding some healthier options to the [vending machines/concession stands/cafeterias].

The [insert department name] will be holding taste-tests to ensure that the new options we provide are not only healthy, but also tasty. The taste-tests should be quick, easy, and fun.

We'll share a summary of the results with our vendors to help ensure that the healthier products sold are products you enjoy.

Help out and get some free snacks!

Date:

Time:

Location:

Best,

Taste-Test Evaluation Form

Score System

- 5 Excellent
- 4 Good
- 3 Fair
- 2 Poor
- 1 Very Poor

Directions

1. Place the numerical score in each box
2. Provide any additional comments to explain your answer

	Product			
Appearance				
Flavor				
Would you purchase this item? (Yes or No)				
	Product			
Appearance				
Flavor				
Would you purchase this item? (Yes or No)				
	Product			
Appearance				
Flavor				
Would you purchase this item? (Yes or No)				

For more information on how to improve the nutritional quality of foods and beverages in public places, contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at 202-777-8352 or nutritionpolicy@cspinet.org.