



Boston Collaborative for Food & Fitness

East Boston Community Assessment – Compiled Data

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Survey Development and Data Collection

Report by P.K. Newby

In the spring and summer of 2008, several members of the Boston Collaborative for Food and Fitness (BCFF) participated in the development of a survey designed to assess food and fitness behaviors among Bostonians living in five neighborhoods of interest: Dorchester, East Boston, Jamaica Plain, Mattapan, and Roxbury. Together with a team of graduate students at the Tufts School of Nutrition Science and Policy, the group developed an initial draft of a survey based on BCFF interests. To the extent possible, content areas (e.g., neighborhood safety) and questions used on the survey were based upon extant questionnaires identified in a literature review conducted by the Tufts students. After this draft was developed, it was reviewed and modified by members of the Food and Fitness committees of the BCFF and the final survey was compiled with the assistance of Kirstin Newby (Scientific consultant). The final survey, entitled "What do You Think About Food and Physical Activity in Your Neighborhood?" comprised 16 pages and 64 questions in three key areas: (1) Demographics (e.g., income, age, sex); (2) Food (food intakes, preferences, and expenditures; shopping behaviors and preferences; factors influencing food purchases; and interest in growing food); and (3) Fitness (neighborhood physical activity practices; neighborhood fitness facility use and non-use; neighborhood walking and biking; and commuting practices). The first page of the survey assured individuals that participation was anonymous and confidential and they could choose not to answer any questions. The survey was written in English and was also translated to Spanish and Haitian Creole. As well, the survey was posted online for use directly in the community organization offices.

Between July and November 2008, six community organizations working with the BCFF administered the survey to convenience samples in their (five) neighborhoods. Specifically, youths working in each organization received brief training in data collection and approached people in their neighborhoods about taking the survey. Each of the community organizations had different approaches to data collection and surveyed different population groups. For example, many of the survey participants in Mattapan were individuals at a farmers' market, which was the focus of some of the community development work in that neighborhood. (No further information about where other individuals in Mattapan were sampled is available.) In East Boston, individuals were sampled at the following organizations and places: East Boston YMCA, Harborside Community Center, Orient Heights Community Center, Curtis Guild School, East Boston High School, Eagle Hill Community Area, Maverick Landing, Paris St. Community Center, and Jeffries Point. In Roxbury, data were collected in various spots around the neighborhood where people tended to congregate, including the park, T stop, Brigham Circle, and the Tobin. No data were provided from the organizations in Jamaica Plain and Dorchester about where individuals were surveyed in these neighborhoods despite repeated attempts to ascertain this information. The vast majority of surveys were completed by individual respondents (i.e., data are self-reported). In less than 5%, surveys were administered by the youth (i.e., the survey was read to the respondent and completed by the youth). No individuals completed the survey directly online.

Following data collection, staff at the BCFF entered survey data into Survey Monkey, a commonly used web-based database (where the online survey resided). In total, 665 individuals participated in the survey, as follows: Dorchester (n=222); East Boston (n=84); Jamaica Plain (n=100); Mattapan (n=102); and Roxbury (n=108). Because this survey was focused on collecting information from individuals living in the five neighborhoods of interest, 39 individuals were excluded from the analysis because they either did not provide information about where they lived or they lived in areas outside the neighborhoods of interest (e.g., Newton). After these exclusions, 616 individuals were included in the analysis; sample size for each question varied, since not all individuals answered each question.

Survey data were analyzed for all participants and also stratified by neighborhood. eight tables were created (appended), and a power point presentation of the findings for the entire group was presented at a quarterly meeting of the BCFF on December 16, 2008. Using the original power point template, findings from the individual five neighborhoods were then presented at the community meetings that occurred in January and February 2009.

Major Findings

All of the findings appear in Tables 1 through 8 (*Appendix 1*) and there is far too much data to discuss every finding in detail; readers are encouraged to consult the tables for the full set of results. Many of the key results (for the total dataset) are also presented graphically in slides from a powerpoint presentation given at a BCFF meeting in December 2008 (*Appendix 2*). Note that neighborhood specific results appear in the tables but not the slides; these data were presented in separate slides at the BCFF community meetings for each neighborhood that were created by BCFF directly. The goal of this section is to highlight major findings from the survey, both as a whole and by neighborhood. Throughout the section, some notes to help guide the interpretations of findings are provided.

Survey Participants

Table 1 provides information about who participated in the survey, both as a whole and in each neighborhood. Aside from income, it can be seen that neighborhoods differed significantly ($P<0.05$) by age, sex, race/ethnicity, language spoken, marital status, and employment. ($P<0.05$ means that differences are “statistically significant,” reflecting real differences across neighborhoods.) Very few respondents in any of the neighborhoods were >65 years old, and only 11% were aged 50-65 years (ranging from 7% in Jamaica Plain and 16% in Mattapan). More than half of all individuals sampled were <35 years, although proportions differed across neighborhoods: 42% of individuals in Roxbury were aged 15-25 years, compared to 14% in East Boston, where 31% were aged 25-35 years. East Boston also had the largest proportion of adults aged 36-50 years (42%).

Overall, the majority of individuals sampled were female (67%), ranging from 50% in Roxbury to 76% in East Boston. As expected, race/ethnicity differed across neighborhoods, with the largest proportion of Hispanics living in East Boston (60%) and Jamaica Plain (52%) and the largest proportion of African Americans living in Mattapan (65%) and Dorchester (50%). The majority of participants spoke English as their primary language (68%), although 19% spoke Spanish as their primary language; 50% of East Bostonians spoke Spanish as their primary language. Eight percent of individuals in Roxbury spoke Cape Verdean as their primary language, while 28% of individuals in Mattapan spoke Haitian Creole. Marital status of participants differed by neighborhood, ranging from 33% single in East Boston to 63% single in Roxbury.

Forty-one percent of individuals worked full-time (ranging from 36% in Dorchester to 44% in Jamaica Plain), with an additional 32% working part-time or self-employed (ranging from 29% in East Boston to 38% in Roxbury). An appreciable percentage of individuals (12% total) were either retired, homemakers, or unable to work. Differences in income across neighborhoods were not significant.

(See Appendix A, Table 1, PK Newby Final Report)

East Boston Survey Data Summarized

Who participated

- 42% aged 36-50 years, 31% 26-35 years
- 76% female
- 60% Hispanic
- 50% Spanish speaking
- 52% married
- 75% full/part/self-employed

Food intakes and behaviors

- 68% reported that higher food prices have affected grocery purchases – the highest proportion across neighborhoods – with 29% skipping meals, 19% eating/serving smaller meals, and 25% eating/serving fewer vegetables
- Approximately 40% of individuals did not consume fruit or vegetables in the home, with around half consuming fruit and vegetables in the home several times per week
- 66% ate meals away from home in the past week
- 42% grow their own food – the highest proportion across neighborhoods – mainly in their own yard (54%)
- 50% would like to grow their own food, mainly in their own yard (65%), while 35% reported interest in growing food in a community garden

(Note on interpretation: it is possible that the higher proportions regarding the issue of household food purchases and growing their own food seen in East Boston is simply a reflection of the fact that these survey respondents are older than in other neighborhoods, who may be purchasing and/or growing food for their family. You would expect these proportions to be lower in a younger, more transient population of singles without children. Thus, it cannot be assumed in my view that East Bostonians are, say, truly more affected by higher food purchases and/or more interested in growing their own food compared to individuals in other neighborhoods.)

Food shopping behaviors and preferences

- Supermarket is the main place food is purchased (78%), followed by a bodega (31%) and big box store (17%), and car is the main way accessed (49%), followed by walking (35%)
- 8% mainly shop at a farmers' market
- The majority of people shop at their favorite place to buy food (86%)

Food purchasing preferences and behaviors

- The majority of individuals stated that taste, price, health, and convenience have some or great impact on their food purchases
- 60% stated that “organic” had some or great impact
- 61% stated that “local” had some or great impact

Physical activity and commuting behaviors

- 83% reporting walking regularly, followed by 26% who belonged to a health club
- 12% reported no regular physical activity
- 23% believe commuting by walking/biking is out of the questions and 17% have never thought about it

Neighborhood physical activity behaviors and characteristics

- 80% like walking/biking in their neighborhood
- 58% reporting using walking spaces/paths, followed by public parks/playgrounds (44%)
- The majority of respondents reported favorable characteristics affecting walking and biking, although fewer said streets were litter free (43%) or well lit (49%)

(See Appendix B, Powerpoint Presentation of Data, PK Newby and MGA Consultants; Appendix C, Community Profile, MGA Consultants; and Appendix D, Bikeability Assessment, MassBike)

Overall findings across neighborhoods

- Income, weekly grocery expenditures, and some of the places where people currently grew food or wanted to grow food (e.g., own yard, another yard, and pots/window boxes) did not differ across neighborhoods.
- The majority of individuals eat away from home, and, in general, people do not consume enough fruit and vegetables at home.
- Higher food prices did always affect vegetable consumption; more people reported that they decreased their meat consumption due to higher food prices.
- The majority of individuals surveyed presently shop at their favorite place to buy food, which was most frequently stated as a supermarket. Individuals in Roxbury and Mattapan were most likely not to shop at their favorite place to buy food, mainly due to transportation time (Mattapan) and difficulty accessing (38%) and cost (30%) in Roxbury. However, the numbers of respondents to these questions are very low, since the majority of individuals surveyed did shop at their favorite place.
- 16% of individuals in all neighborhoods reported a farmers' market as their favorite place to buy food (n=100, 16%) – this number is likely spuriously high since 33% of these individuals reside in Mattapan, where we know that individuals were surveyed at a farmers market. It is more likely that this number fluctuates around 10%, as reflected in the other neighborhoods.
- Convenience, organic, local, brand, and coupons showed no differences across neighborhoods in impacting food purchasing, while the impacts of taste, price, and health on food purchasing did differ across neighborhoods.
- A high proportion of individuals reporting walking or biking in their neighborhoods
- Where individuals were physically active did not differ across neighborhoods, although there were significant differences comparing the proportion who did not get regular physical activity.

- No major differences seemed to emerge across neighborhoods with regards to neighborhood physical activity, as the majority of individuals enjoyed walking in their own neighborhoods. Many respondents “agreed” with many of the statements about their neighborhood, with the main area of disagreement surrounding litter on the streets and the presence of bike paths.
- Because of the small numbers of individuals who were not physically active in their neighborhoods, these findings are not discussed.

***EAST BOSTON COMMUNITY MEETING
SUMMARY OF AREAS OF INTEREST AND CONCERN***

FOOD SYSTEMS

FOOD PRODUCTION

Less factories – more movement towards local food system.
Farmers market, support local farms
Buy our own food (locally grown)
Distribution (grow things that we could exchange) - Trading lobster for oranges

RESTAURANTS

Restaurants with healthier options – in specific spots (near schools)
Be Good (in Eastie)
Healthier fast food

SCHOOLS

Healthier foods in schools – tastier food
Transform school food – farm to school

GARDENING

More community gardens
People growing more of their own food (community gardens, back yard gardens)
Grow crops in greenhouses

IMPACT ON COMMUNITY

People are cooking and eating at home more than at restaurants
Realizing the benefits of eating healthier * (*consuming less overall)
Less litter!!
More community meetings – more info/awareness on what's available (healthy foods, specifically fruits and vegs.)
Healthy food within walking/bus distance

FARMERS MARKETS

More Farmers Markets; More farmers markets accessible to people in EB

LOCAL STORES

Healthier groceries available in stores
Bring Haymarket to Eastie

GENERAL

More fruits and veggies and less fat and meat
Less obesity * (set in box with point below)
More energy, more active * (set in box with point above)

Cheap fresh local accessible with bartering as an option; cheaper prices for produce
More availability of foods like: Baked chips, 100% juice
People need to make healthier choices
Watching what you eat

Influencia de cultura y familia al escoger alimentos * (starred)
More household markets
Mas orgánico, menos químicos, comida mas fresca y huertas de frutas

BUILT ENVIRONMENT / ACTIVE LIVING

WALKING

More people walking to places rather than driving
More places to walk on (sic)
More places to walk to
More walkways

BIKING

More bike lanes
“Foot powered” transportation (bikes, walking, skates, etc.)
Bike lanes – more of them
More/better bike lanes, bike racks – locking bike racks (automated?)

IMPACT ON COMMUNITY

Less traffic
People save \$ - no auto insurance costs
Environment cleaner and greener
Community clean-ups; people know their neighbors better
Meeting new people
Getting healthier
Taking more pride in community
Respectful of community cultures
East Boston needs to increase activity
Youth involvement – need community leaders to step up and get involved
Youth and adults need to organize together – can it be paid work?

PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

More use of parks
More accessible green areas
More and better parks – with less rules

EDUCATION

Education programs leading to clean-ups and neighborhood involvement
Education about areas for activity

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

More indoor recreational places for winter/renovating indoor areas

Field behind Savio/Festa Field put to use

More gyms and places to work out – with different activities and programs

Community centers – More – Updated – more varied activities – dance class

SCHOOLS

More exercise/activities during school

Public schools – mandatory activity

ACTIVITIES

Free activities on Sundays for the community (dance, sports etc.)

Extra safety equipment more accessible (helmets, lights, etc.) – interest varies among young people

Police run bike safety classes (helmets, lights, u-locks)

SAFETY

Security – more of a focus on gang-related activities, less on just groups of kids walking together

1. Facilidades gratis: gimnacios, parques – done se puede jugar, alberca
2. Promover ligas de deportes
3. Mantenimiento en las banquetas/aceras
4. Nuevo piso en Harborside
5. Luz en las calles
6. Zonas seguras
7. Sentido de comunidad – cuidamos nuestro vecindario como nuestro propio hogar

Appendix A: Sample characteristics among 616 survey respondents, stratified by neighborhood, PK Newby

Appendix B: Powerpoint Presentation, PK Newby and MGA Consultants

Appendix C: Community Profile, MGA Consultants

Appendix D: Bikeability Assessment Information Sheet, Mass Bike

Bikeability Assessment Info Sheet: East Boston

Prepared by MassBike for the Boston Collaborative for Food and Fitness

Scope of Assessment

We assessed the following roads using a combination of data compiled by participating youth, additional technical data collection, and traffic counts:

1. Saratoga Street from Chelsea Street to Meridian Street
2. Sumner Street from New Street to Lamson Street
3. Maverick Street from Paris Street to Cottage Street
4. Bennington Street from Meridian Street to Chelsea Street

Observations

- East Boston is a compact neighborhood, highly residential, with a grid layout of one- and two-way streets.
- None of the assessed roads have posted speed limits; estimated vehicle speed was 25 miles per hour.
- Parallel parking is present on both sides throughout the assessed roads, on both one- and two-way streets.
- Sidewalks exist on both sides of all assessed roads.
- The assessed roads are relatively flat, with good visibility.
- Most streets were in fair condition, with some cracks and rough pavement.
- Most streets were wide enough to have a bicycle and other vehicles (car, bus, truck) safely on the street together.
- Except for Saratoga Street, there are bus routes on all assessed roads, and all the buses on these routes are equipped with bike racks. The neighborhood is served by three MBTA Blue Line Stations. Maverick Station was part of the assessment area: it is designated as having bike racks, but none were observed (perhaps due to construction), and the station does not have an elevator, which limits accessibility for bicycles.
- No bike lanes, bicycle-related pavement markings, bicycle signage, or traffic signal bicycle detectors were observed.
- No bicycle racks were observed on the assessed roads.
- No bike shops were observed in the neighborhood.
- A traffic count on Meridian Street, the major north-south road in the neighborhood, revealed very high numbers of cars and trucks/buses, and only one bicycle. Traffic on the other roads assessed was observed to be very low.

Conclusions

- **Infrastructure:** East Boston has fair bicycling infrastructure: road conditions are fair, but no bicycle parking was observed. Most roads observed are wide and low-traffic.
- **Public Transportation:** East Boston has excellent access to public transportation, making multi-modal trips by bicycle and train or bus a good option. Within the assessed area, all of the buses are rack equipped and three Blue Line Stations are bike-accessible.
- **Connectivity:** The major obstacle to increasing bicycling in East Boston is the lack of a bike-accessible route into downtown Boston, and a lack of bicycle-friendly routes exiting the neighborhood in other directions.
- **Overall Environment:** The wide, largely residential streets, grid layout, flat terrain, many choices of parallel streets, and compact neighborhood make East Boston largely ideal for bicycling for local trips and exercise.

Recommendations

- **Bike Lanes:** Sumner and Maverick Streets appear to be wide enough for marked bike lanes; Saratoga Street may be too narrow. While parallel parking throughout the area might weigh against bike lanes, it is largely residential with low parking turnover. Saratoga does have a large number of residential driveways, but these are low traffic driveways. The very high traffic on Meridian Street, particularly bus and truck traffic, weighs against bike lanes, and there are lower-traffic alternative routes, though none as directly north-south as Meridian.

- **Bike Parking:** No bicycle racks were observed on the assessed roads. While largely residential, some bike parking would make it easier to encourage people to ride bikes to visit friends or patronize local businesses.
- **Share the Road:** Bennington Street, a two-way street, is too narrow for bike lanes, but could benefit from "Share the Road" pavement markings and signage.
- **Better Connections:** To encourage bicycle commuting, East Boston residents need to be able to safely exit the neighborhood with their bikes. All bus routes in the neighborhood are already rack-equipped, but we recommend working with the MBTA to relax peak-hour restrictions on bicycles on the Blue Line. Bicycle shuttle service through the tunnels is also an option worth considering.

Appendix E: Walkability Audit, Walk Boston