

Food, Nutrition, and Obesity Policy Research

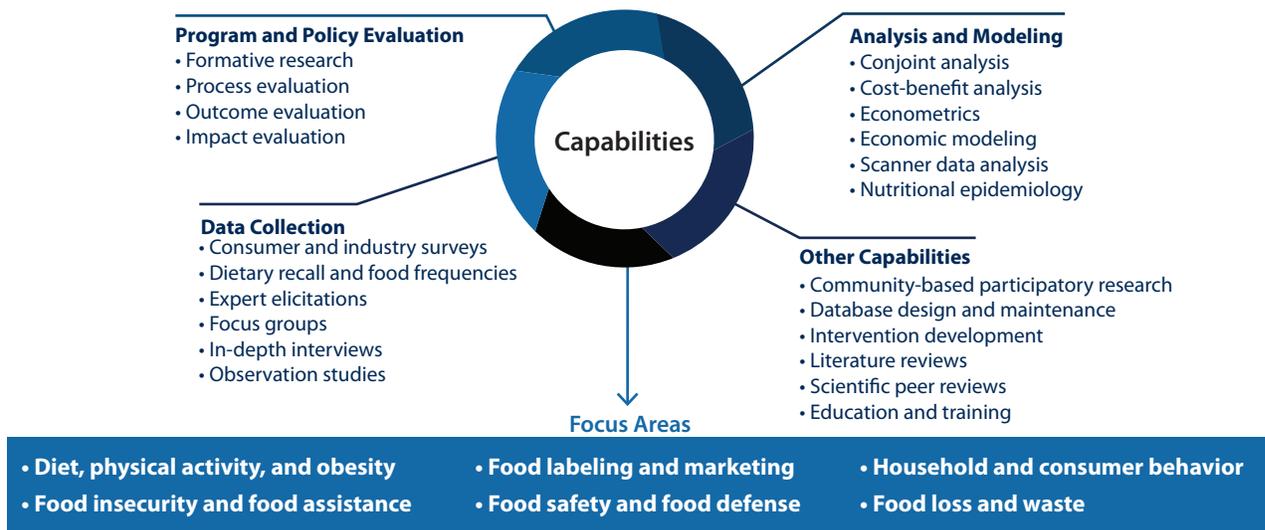


For more than 2 decades, RTI International’s team of interdisciplinary experts has been analyzing and evaluating the effects of programs and policies affecting food, nutrition, obesity, and physical activity to improve health and well-being. We combine an in-depth understanding of a broad range of policy topics with extensive quantitative and qualitative research capabilities.

RTI researchers provide independent research capabilities to help agencies and organizations achieve their missions and address analytical challenges. We study programs and policies affecting diverse populations, including vulnerable individuals and limited-resource households, around the world. Our interdisciplinary staff of economists, program evaluators, nutritionists, behavioral scientists,

policy analysts, statisticians, and survey researchers conduct research for federal and state agencies and private organizations. Recent clients include U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Agency for International Development, and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF).

We apply our capabilities to address policy questions across multiple focus areas.



Project-Related Activities and Highlights

Evaluating the Impact of Front-of-Package Nutrition Labels

For RWJF, we used our virtual grocery store, RTI iShoppe®, to explore consumer response to alternative front-of-package labels to determine the type of nutrition information that consumers need to help them select the healthiest products. The study investigated consumer understanding of product healthfulness and purchasing decisions, and examined the moderating effects of opportunity, ability, and motivation on consumer purchases.

Evaluating Agreements to Promote a Culture of Health

For RWJF, we provided technical assistance for evaluation of food and beverage industry agreements. We developed an industry profile and logic models for food industry transformation, conducted a literature review and process evaluation, and offered recommendations to strengthen grant portfolio strategy and evaluation practices among grantees.

Assessing Outcomes of Farm-to-School Programs

Many states are pursuing farm-to-school legislation to improve quality of school meals, address food insecurity, and confront diet-related diseases. For RWJF, we examined Oregon's procurement policy and nutrition education efforts. After developing a theoretical framework and conducting stakeholder interviews, we quantified the reach, adoption, and extent to which Oregon's school districts are reducing disparities in making healthy food available.

Evaluating Alive & Thrive Interventions

Along with our research partners, we are conducting feasibility and impact evaluations of feeding interventions for infants and young children in Nigeria and other low- and middle-income countries. We are working to improve breastfeeding practices and child dietary diversity by conducting household-based surveys, interviews with health providers, and qualitative data collection with family members and stakeholders.

Evaluating Food Loss and Waste

For USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS), we estimated consumer-level food loss and waste percentages using national survey data, scanner data, and dietary recall data. We coordinated an expert panel to review and recommend approaches to improve estimates of food loss and waste along the food chain.

Improving Consumer Food Safety Education Outreach Efforts

RTI is evaluating consumer food safety behaviors and their response to USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) outreach efforts. We are conducting observations in test kitchens, focus groups, and web-enabled surveys to explore thermometer use, poultry washing, handwashing, and other behaviors; we also are studying the impact of FSIS outreach efforts on these behaviors.

Assessing Scanner Capability of Small SNAP Retailers

For USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, RTI interviewed vendors, administered a national survey of small Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) retailers, and conducted follow-up interviews with retailers to collect information about scanning system cost and adoption rates. We used this information to estimate implementation costs—for individual retailers and the industry as a whole—for adopting scanning systems to help reduce error and fraud.

Measuring the Retail Food Price Environment

RTI is using retail scanner data to develop measures of the food price environment. ERS will use these measures to analyze how food prices affect Americans' food-spending patterns. We are developing survey weights for retail scanner data, mapping barcodes to USDA's food categories, and calculating food price indices by geographic area.

Analyzing Economic Impact of FDA Regulations

RTI develops models and conducts studies that analyze the impact of food safety and nutrition regulations. We have developed models that FDA uses to estimate costs of labeling changes, reformulation of food products, and implementation of food defense practices. We also developed models to estimate impacts of FDA trade policies and consumer response to health information and warnings.

More Information

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