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**From Partnerships  
to Policy:**

Promising Practices for  
New Food Policy Councils

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**FOOD POLICY  
NETWORKS**



**JOHNS HOPKINS**  
CENTER *for* A LIVABLE FUTURE



The logo for Food Policy Networks, featuring the text "FOOD POLICY NETWORKS" in white, uppercase letters on a dark blue rectangular background.

## FOOD POLICY NETWORKS

### **About the Food Policy Networks project**

The Food Policy Networks project is a project of the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, based at the Bloomberg School of Public Health. Through FPN, CLF works to build the capacity of food policy councils (FPCs) and similar cross-sector stakeholder groups to collectively advance equitable, healthy, and sustainable food systems through policy, programs, and partnerships. Since 2013, CLF has supported FPCs through research and data collection about FPCs, a listserv, monthly webinars, virtual networking, advising to individual FPCs, and convenings of FPC leaders. For more information, visit: [www.foodpolicynetworks.org](http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org).

### **About the Center for a Livable Future**

Since 1996, the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future has been addressing some of the most pressing issues in the food system while advancing public health and protecting the environment. As an interdisciplinary academic center based within the Bloomberg School of Public Health, the Center for a Livable Future is a leader in public health research, education policy, and advocacy that is dedicated to building a healthier, more equitable, and resilient food system. For more, visit: [www.jhsph.edu/clf](http://www.jhsph.edu/clf).



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Cover Image credit: DeVon Nolen, West Broadway Farmers Market; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2015

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# Preface

**T**he first edition of *Doing Food Policy Councils Right: A Guide to Development and Action*, published in 2012, is the most downloaded item in the Food Policy Networks (FPN) project database of 1,400 resources. It has been used to launch numerous food policy councils (FPCs). To the creator of this original guide, Mark Winne, we are grateful. Over the years, he's shown enduring faith in collective action, and he's continued to guide the FPN project and many FPCs across the continent.

We started to update this guide in 2016, beginning with an outline. At that time, we already knew that there were so many more things that could be said about FPCs, how to help establish them, and the important roles they play. It only took six more years, four more surveys of FPCs, and a national forum to publish this new edition. Throughout this period the FPN project team continued learning and documenting the evolving role of FPCs, particularly as racial reckoning became undeniably intertwined with our food system and the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded. We heard and saw how the pandemic reinforced the need for FPCs—solving complex problems requires people with a diversity of experiences and expertise.

Since 2013, the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF) has supported the expansion and evolution of an FPC network throughout the United States. Just as this network has advanced, so too has the work of CLF, which recognizes the need to work in partnership to develop innovative and strategic approaches for meaningful food system change. Through research, education, advocacy and policy action, CLF seeks to advance a more sustainable and just food system. Transforming our food system in this way is not possible without collective action; the work of FPCs is an essential ingredient. We are excited about what the future holds for CLF, the FPN project and your food policy council work.





# Introduction

The first version of this manual appeared in 2012 with the name *Doing Food Policy Councils Right: A Guide to Development and Action*. Since then, the need for effective food policy councils (FPCs) has only grown, although the composition of councils and the issues they address have changed. Many councils now place more emphasis on fostering greater diversity among their immediate membership and with the other organizations they collaborate with to tackle their community's most pressing food system problems. And the scope of the problems has evolved, too. Today, there's greater recognition of the need to move beyond food security and other issues we addressed in 2012, to look at racial inequities in the food system, food systems resiliency, and environmental sustainability.

Another change since 2012 has been the extraordinary growth in the number of FPCs and their practitioners. In 2012, there were 205 FPCs in the United States and tribal nations, compared to 301 in 2021. While even the most experienced FPC staff or member will find something helpful in this manual, it is more likely that those who are relatively new to FPCs will gain the most from this manual. This guide is written within the context of the government systems in the United States and includes examples mostly of FPCs in the United States.

Figure: Percent of active FPCs in tribal nations and the United States at the end of each year, from 2000-2021. Source: Food Policy Networks project annual survey of food policy councils.

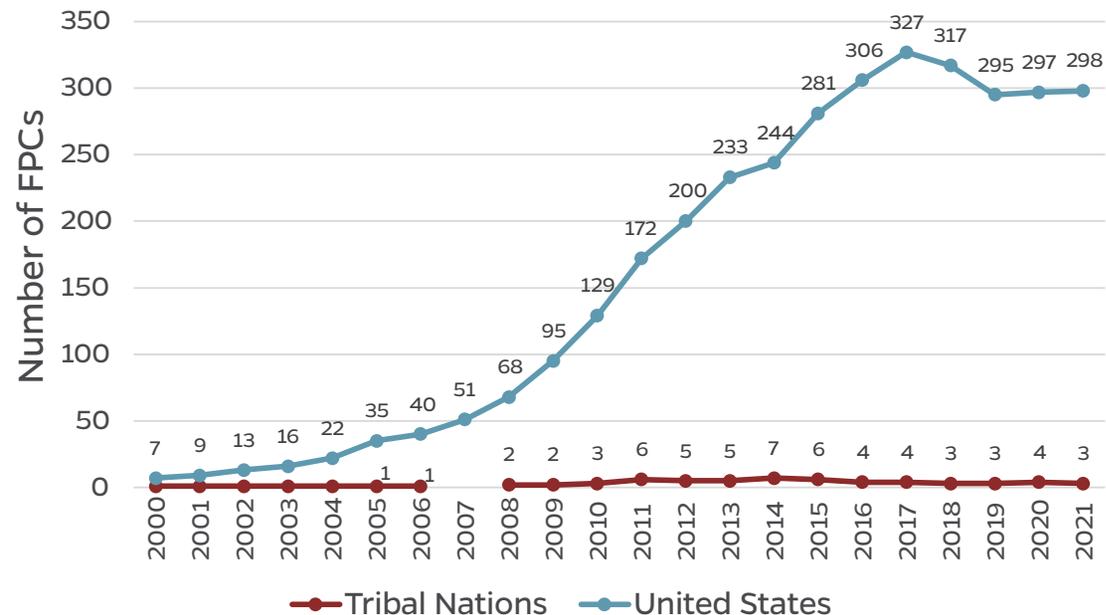


Image credit: Kelly Kogan ; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020

One more change to note: the original 2012 guide was produced under the auspices of the Community Food Security Coalition. The coalition no longer exists, but its mission of supporting food policy council work is now upheld by the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF) via its Food Policy Networks (FPN) project. The CLF views collaboration among diverse sectors—community, government, nonprofit, and private—as a long-term strategy to create systemic and meaningful improvements in the food system. The FPN project aims to build the capacity of FPCs and similar cross-sector stakeholder groups to collectively advance equitable, healthy, and sustainable food systems through public policy, programs, and partnerships. The CLF also serves as a clearinghouse for research about FPCs and is the publisher of this revised guide.

One thing hasn't changed since 2012. People interested in starting an FPC need resources to get their council off the ground and take action in their community. This guide provides those resources, both in the text itself and in many links to useful materials from both the FPN project and other experts in the field regarding how to build healthier and more equitable food systems.

With an FPC in place, you can begin to draft, champion, and implement the policies that can help achieve your council's goals.

# Chapter 1.

## The Role of Food Policy Councils and the Food System

**W**hen the COVID-19 pandemic erupted in 2020, it shined a bright light on the frailty of many of the systems we often take for granted, such as health care, transportation, and housing. The pandemic also highlighted and exacerbated structural inequities, based on race and income, in many of those systems.

How we grow and distribute food makes up another vital system, one that touches us all every day. The pandemic reinforced this point, as people who lost jobs flocked to food banks, forming lines of cars that sometimes stretched for miles, and low-paid workers in the food industry were deemed “essential,” meaning they were required to report to the workplace, where they faced greater exposure to the virus.

These issues came on top of problems in the food system that predated the pandemic and will likely still be challenges for years to come. They include health problems related to poor nutrition; the loss of small- and mid-scale farms; the consolidation of agriculture and food businesses; the environmental impacts of agriculture; the impacts of climate change on agriculture; and the difficulties some communities face, in both urban and rural areas, to have easy access to affordable, safe, culturally appropriate, healthy food.

Tackling ongoing food system issues and addressing crises like a pandemic call for a collective effort to attain strong food policies. Broadly defined, **food policy** is a set of decisions made by governments at all levels, businesses, and

Image credit: Matt Kelly; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2016



## What exactly is a food policy council?

Here's one definition of an FPC, and of related groups that might go by different names: Food policy councils work to address food systems issues and needs at the local (city/municipality or county), state, regional, or tribal-national levels. They represent multiple stakeholders and may be sanctioned by a government body or exist independently of government. They address food systems issues by advising, shaping and helping enact policies that further their goals.

organizations that affect how food gets from the farm to your table. A food policy can be as broad as a federal regulation on food labeling or as local and specific as a zoning law that lets city dwellers raise honeybees. A food policy may also include an organizational or business policy related to which and how foods are purchased (i.e., procurement policies).

Your reading this manual means you likely have a strong interest in food issues, and you want to help shape food policy at some level. You may already be involved in that policy process. Decades ago, food experts and activists realized that the average person, for the most part, doesn't have much influence in shaping the vast number of policies that shape the food system. One way to address this lack of participation was by creating FPCs, to bring together various stakeholders in a community food system and give them a say in constructing a system that reflected their values and needs.

Of course, there's nothing "average" about residents who have a deep interest in food issues that directly affect their families and their neighbors. The ones who become involved in food policy work are willing to invest substantial time and energy to represent and serve others in their community who have similar interests or perspectives but can't be as actively involved, for whatever reason. And when they serve on FPCs, those residents who do participate work with professional stakeholders from a variety of organizations across the food system.

## Diversity, Inclusion, Racial Equity and FPCs

As noted in the introduction, more and more, FPCs are grappling with how to create an inclusive culture, how to diversify their membership, and how to address racial inequities in the food systems using policy. These changes are not brought about easily or immediately, and there are multiple ways to approach these issues. Who is included in the council and what diversity looks like depends on the community. Conversations about race and equity are uncomfortable, and in some communities may be so polarizing that it appears best to avoid them altogether.

As a virtual community, the Food Policy Networks project and the network of FPCs in the United States are learning together about how to approach diversity, inclusivity, and equity. This guide presents approaches used by different FPCs to develop values statements, establish membership

seats for communities of color, monetary compensation for members serving in non-professional capacities, and policies that improve land access for Black farmers. There is much to learn and grow on from their attempts, but each FPC will have to forge their own path in approaching diversity, inclusion, and equity. The approaches presented in this guide are intended to provide you with what knowledge and tools we have today to help you whenever you are ready to engage in these issues.

Image credit: Adrionna Fike, Mandela Food Cooperative; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2015

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# The Growth of Food Policy Councils in the United States

Today's FPCs come in different sizes and sometimes address different issues. But at heart they reflect the idea of food democracy—a term coined by Professor Tim Lang during the 1990s. To him, food democracy means “the long process of striving for improvements in food for all not the few.” Achieving that goal means bringing a wide array of stakeholders together to ensure food security – that there's enough affordable, easily accessible, culturally acceptable and nutritious food for everyone. Lang also linked food democracy to economic and social justice for the people who raise, process, distribute, and sell our food, an idea known today as food justice (see chapter 3 for more on this). Food justice is also related to racial equity. Racial equity is pursued by making structural investments in communities of color such that optimal outcomes might be reached, including in nutrition and food security.

Years before Lang offered his definition of food democracy, FPCs were already at work. The first FPC started in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1982 (see sidebar). The first statewide council appeared in Connecticut in 1998. In between those dates, FPCs struggled to take off, as the food movement itself was still evolving and did not yet understand and embrace the multiple connections within the food system, and local and state governments did not see food as a priority concern.

The boom time for FPCs came with the 21st century. From about eight councils in the United States in 2000, the number grew to about 50 by 2007, and then swelled to 301 by 2020. The growth resulted from several factors, including:

- networking
- the diversification and growth of the larger food movement
- the expanding discourse on food democracy

- a convergence of dietary health, food security, and environmental concerns
- the growing importance of public policy in promoting sustainable and equitable food systems

Helping to fuel the interest in and introduction of FPCs was the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC), which established a Food Policy Council Project in 2007. CFSC supported the expansion of FPCs across North America with some online resources, a one-day national gathering for FPCs before the CFSC conference in 2009 (about 200 people attended), and other forms of training and technical assistance. CFSC closed its offices in 2012, and its FPC functions were transferred to the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. CLF's Food Policy Networks project added new capacity and resources, including greater communication technology and programming, to develop and strengthen FPCs. As the number of councils grew, so did the scope of their concerns, with more councils tackling diversity and equity issues, economic justice, and climate change. Aligning with this growing interest, the CLF hosted the first national virtual conference, The Power of Food Forum, in 2021, bringing together more than 525 people from 167 FPCs along with similar groups advocating for policies that create equitable and sustainable food systems.

It might seem like a daunting task, challenging the interests that support the food system status quo. Many of those interests have a vast economic stake in shaping the system to suit their needs. In 2019, agriculture, food, and related industries contributed more than \$1 trillion to the US gross domestic product. Those sectors employed more than 22 million people. Along with the economic considerations, promoting concepts such as food democracy and social justice might feel like a hard sell in some communities, especially during a time of increased political polarization. But at its core, the work of a FPC addresses something basic, something we can all relate to—our need for food that nourishes us.

## The First Food Policy Council celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!

It all started with Professor Robert Wilson and a handful of his students at the University of Tennessee Graduate School of Planning. In 1977, Wilson and his team studied how well the city of Knoxville provided affordable, nutritious food to all its residents. The answer: not well at all. The city was losing farmland, diet-related disease was on the rise, and hunger was spreading among lower-income residents. City residents working on food insecurity read the report and recognized how it connected to their efforts, and then they convened a team of community leaders to convince the city government to create the Knoxville Food Policy Council in 1982. Although it lacked regulatory power, the council's work led to such achievements as free or low-cost breakfasts for low-income students and the expansion of public transit to accommodate improved access to grocery stores. Renamed the Knoxville-Knox County Food Policy Council in 2002, to reflect an increased geographic scope, the council is still going strong as it enters its 40th year of collaboration.

Forty years later and the council is still committed to addressing food insecurity, but it now uses a lens of diversity. The council is building relationships with Latinx and refugee residents and will hold educational

events on hunger in the LGBTQ+ community, to better understand how to address the diverse food needs of the community. The council is monitoring trends in food insecurity by annually creating a countywide food system report that maps work and tracks datapoints around food issues.

In 2022, council members will be working with the community as co-creators to conduct a community food security assessment. The goal of the assessment is to better understand community assets, needs, and barriers through data collection, Participatory Action Research, and the convening of diverse voices in the community. The process will be facilitated by the United Way of Greater Knoxville and their new Director of Food Security Systems with participation from Knox County Health Department, the Community Food Security Advisory Committee, and [Three](#)<sup>3</sup>. The results of the assessment will be used to drive a subsequent Community Food Plan rooted in community-identified outcomes and strategies.

For more information about the history and current work of the Knoxville-Knox County Food Policy Council, visit: <http://www.knoxfood.org>.

Your local council doesn't have to take on the most controversial food issues in the nation. Instead, it can tackle the most pressing food issues in your community. That might mean providing more access to affordable, nutritious foods in either urban or rural areas. It could mean establishing thriving farmers markets and community gardens to help achieve that goal—and help local farmers in the process. Or the top issues in your community might include advocating for access to land and capital for farmers of color. This manual outlines some of the tools you can use to create and sustain your own effective FPC to take on this work.

Image credit: Randie Hovatter,  
Universities of Shady Grove; CLF Food  
Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2015





Image credit: Suraya Arslan, Community Agroecology Network; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2016

## Chapter 2. Digging Deeper into Food Systems

**S**ince the creation of the first FPC, council members and other stakeholders have continually expanded their concerns and refined concepts integral to creating effective food policies. Yes, making sure everyone has access to nutritious, affordable, culturally acceptable food is still a key goal, as it was in Knoxville in 1982. But increasingly, FPCs are moving beyond a concern for having that kind of access—the idea of food security—to look at such concepts as food system resilience and justice and equity within the food system.

Will every FPC begin by diving into all these topics at once? Probably not. But it's good to share an understanding of the concepts so council members have a framework to use as they turn to these issues. The definitions offered here might also help council members educate their communities about these increasingly relevant concerns for setting food policies.



Image credit: Ali Mendelson, Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2017

# The Food Supply Chain

How does the food we eat get to our tables? The steps involved are called the food supply chain, which has six main components:

- how and where food is grown
- the processing of food
- the distribution of food
- the sale of food
- food consumption
- what happens to the waste created by the other processes

Image credit: Jennifer Horan, United Way of New York City; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2017



# The Food System

The food supply chain is an integral part of the larger food system. We've used the term already, and you might have a sense of what a food system is, but let's take a deeper look. Here's one definition of a food system, taken from the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council:

“The food system is woven together as a supply chain that operates within broader economic, biophysical, and sociopolitical contexts. Health, environmental, social, and economic effects are associated with the U.S. food system, often with both beneficial and detrimental aspects.”

You can look at food systems on a global level or zero in on a household food system. FPCs, however, are usually focused on community food systems (town, city, county, region), with some issues reaching up to the state, tribal nation, and federal levels. At heart, a food system is about the relationships between everyone involved: consumers, clients, employees, elected officials, producers, and other stakeholders.

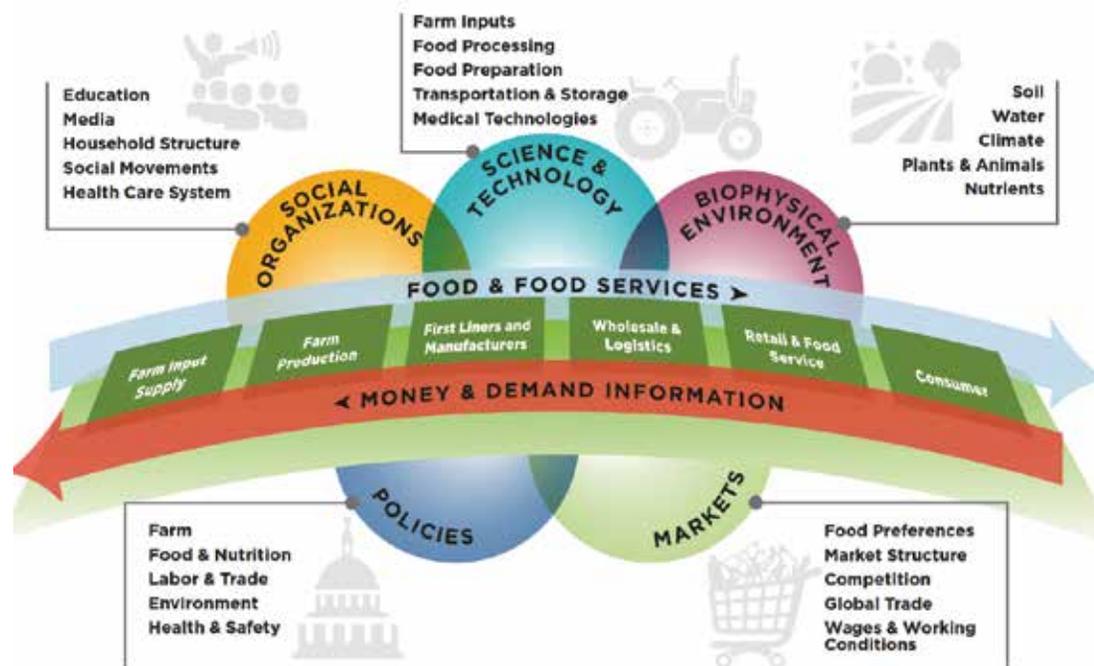


Figure: Links between the food supply chain and the larger biophysical and social/institutional context. Source: Institute of Medicine and National Research Council. 2015. A framework for assessing effects of the food system. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Use with permission.

## Systems Thinking

Stepping back a bit from the food system in particular, let's take a quick look at systems in general, and why thinking in terms of them can be useful. One definition of systems thinking comes from Kathleen Zurcher: "The practices of seeking to understand a system as a whole, focusing on causal relationships among parts of a system (rather than on the parts themselves), examining the system from multiple perspectives, and using a broad array of tools to design high-leverage interventions for achieving system transformation." A systems approach helps us look at the big picture of a particular resource or activity. With that wider context, we can see how component parts are interconnected and how different systems may interact. Taking a systems approach to food or other complex subjects can lead to such benefits as:

- ▶ Understanding indirect effects and unintended consequences
- ▶ Identifying real solutions instead of short-term fixes
- ▶ Developing sustainable solutions
- ▶ Prioritizing data collection
- ▶ Testing interventions on a small scale, as a pilot, or as a simulation before spending money on real-world trial and error

Within an FPC, thinking in terms of the food system means considering such things as:

- Encouraging a comprehensive approach to solving issues
- Targeting the root causes of a problem when considering policy solutions
- Considering how policies or programs affect the well-being of the community, and brainstorming possible unintended consequences of those policies
- Collaborating on projects or policies with partners not working directly on food system issues, such as organizations addressing racial equity, housing, transportation, etc.
- Inviting and enabling community residents to take a leadership role

As you've seen, food systems interact with many facets of an economy and have impacts that go beyond just producing, distributing, selling, and eating food. Given how many pieces must fit together for the system to work, it's important that a system be able to survive sudden shocks, such as a pandemic, natural disaster, or social uprising, and adapt to changes over time, such as a warming climate and the threat of sea-level rise. In other words, the food system must be resilient, and resilience is something many FPCs are starting to address.

The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future's Food System Resilience Project studies how communities can prepare for disruptions in the food system. Studies by CLF and its collaborators have revealed some key methods for building resilience into a food system, including:

- Having diversity and redundancy in supply chains
- Including the food system in disaster-preparedness and recovery planning
- Involving stakeholders from many areas, including businesses, nonprofit, and policy makers.

Understanding the different components of the food system can help your FPC train its focus on the issues most relevant to your community

# Chapter 3.

## Food for All: Equity and Justice

**C**onfronting racial inequities in the food system is at the core of many FPCs' work. While over a third of councils were already using a racial and social equity framework to guide their policy and advocacy actions, following the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and increased national attention on structural racism in 2020, we witnessed a renewed focus on racial and social equity among FPCs. Some FPCs also reported that the pandemic strengthened their push to address food inequities in communities of color.

Historically, the food system in the United States has not always served everyone equitably, as evidenced by such things as less access to healthy and affordable food in neighborhoods of color, pollution and intolerable living conditions created by industrial farming, and low wages for food retail and farm workers. In the United States, the food system is largely dominated by a relatively small number of corporations that control the production, processing, distribution, marketing, and selling of food. Along with the rise of FPCs has come an increasing desire to give consumers an alternative to the offerings of that system, often through the promotion of farmers markets and policies that preserve and encourage urban, small- and mid-scale agriculture.

Tied into addressing those barriers is the idea that creating food systems that work for everyone is an issue of racial equity and socioeconomic justice. Everyone—regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, income, nationality, religion, sexual preference, physical ability or age—should enjoy, and be able to fully participate in shaping a sustainable and healthy food system. For FPCs, food justice can be



Image credit: Brian Oh, DC Greens; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2017

addressed in different ways, including making sure underserved communities have the power to grow, sell, and eat healthy food, which can mean overcoming racial inequities of the past. It can also mean raising food in sustainable ways, using methods that reduce harm to the environment, or rural communities, or the people paid to raise and process the food. It might mean seeking better pay and working conditions for people who harvest crops or serve food in restaurants.

It's critical to note that there is a difference between the concepts of equity and fairness. Fairness, according to Dr. Damien Thompson at the University of Colorado, Boulder, implies evenhandedness or impartiality. But striving for fairness is an inadequate goal when trying to redress wrongs in a food system that, Thompson said, "has been historically based on truly inhumane and unfair treatment of people, land and animals."<sup>1</sup> Equity aims to overcome generations of unfairness by producing outcomes for a disenfranchised group that are on par with the empowered group. In trying to address historical inequities, it might be more important to, for example, give more money to farmers who are people of color or members of other marginalized groups, rather than fairly dividing available funds.

Confronting discrimination is not comfortable or easy, but working to remove barriers so that people of color can access resources and policy processes is core to achieving racial equity. For FPCs, using a lens of racial equity is a process of learning and undoing. This process could mean forming a working group to better understand the social and economic practices that, knowingly or not, determine who makes decisions and who has access to capital in our food system. It could also mean aligning the policy priorities of the FPC with campaigns that support a living wage, child tax credits or voting rights campaigns. These efforts aim to break down structural barriers to wealth and the policy process for people of color.

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1. This quote is from the opening plenary, Looking Back & Planning Forward, at The Power of Food Forum: Cultivating equitable policy through collective action on September 20, 2020. You can [view a recording of the plenary here](#).

The challenges of the pandemic and addressing systemic racism have touched FPCs across the United States. The crises have brought a new focus to examining and changing our food systems to benefit everyone. FPCs, more than ever, have a key role to play in connecting the different stakeholders in the food system to create an equitable and resilient food system.

## How FPCs Strive for Racial Equity

Here are some ways FPCs are addressing racial and social equity issues:

- The **Zoo City Food and Farm Network** in Kalamazoo, Michigan, advocated for land access and agricultural use variances to permit growing food in neighborhoods that are disproportionately affected by and/or are at risk for food insecurity.
- The **Asheville Buncombe Food Policy Council** contracted with the City of Asheville, North Carolina, to convene community members to develop a set of recommendations for reparations to address food-security related harms caused to Black neighborhoods and families by the City's urban renewal policies.
- The **Cultivate Charlottesville Food Justice Network**, in Virginia, collaborated with the City Council to appropriate funds to support the Food Equity Initiative, an extensive planning and community engagement process to identify policies and funding to tackle the root causes of food insecurity.
- The **Jefferson County (CO) Food Policy Council** Racial Equity Subcommittee developed a commitment statement and written history of racial injustice and drafted a Racial Equity Policy Toolkit to ensure that policies and programs supported by the council are intended to dismantle and reform systems of oppression and systemic racism.

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## A Glossary of Terms

Here's a quick overview of some of the terms used in this chapter and throughout the manual.

**Diversity:** The ways in which people differ, encompassing all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. These could be race, ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values. (Source: Independent Sector, "[Why Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Matter](#)", 2016)

**Equity:** A state in which all people in a given society share equal rights, access, opportunities, and outcomes, which are not predicted or influenced by one's identity characteristics, including race, gender, and class. Equity is achieved by providing targeted investments to "meet people where they are" to create equitable opportunities. (Source: Bread for the World, "[Applying Racial Equity to U.S. Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs](#)", 2019)

**Food justice:** The benefits and risks of how food is grown and processed, transported, distributed, and consumed are shared equitably (Source: Gottlieb, R., & Joshi, A. (2010). *Food Justice*. Cambridge: The MIT Press).

**Food policy:** The laws, regulations, and funding at different levels of government as well as within public and private institutions that inform how, why, and when food is produced, transported, distributed, consumed, and disposed.

**Food policy council:** An organized group of stakeholders that may be sanctioned by a government body or may exist independently of government, which works to address food systems issues and needs at the local (city/municipality or county), state, regional, or tribal nations levels through policy, programs and partnerships.

**Food security:** The physical and economic access for all people at all times to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. (Source: Food and Agriculture Organization, World Food Summit 1996, Rome Declaration on World Food Security.)

**Food sovereignty:** The right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems (Source: [Declaration of Nyéléni](#), 2007). "Food sovereignty would exist when we see the people who are actually producing the food and the people who are consuming the food are also benefiting from the economic value that is created by the production and sale of that food." (Source: Malik Yakini, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network)

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## A Glossary of Terms

**Food supply chain:** Encompasses the activities involved in getting food from field to plate, from agriculture to processing to distribution to retail to waste disposal.

**Food system:** A system gathers all the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the output of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes. (Source: North Carolina Food Resilience Advisory Board, Duke World Food Policy Center & Center for Environmental Farming Systems, “[North Carolina Food System Resilience Strategy](#)”, 2021).

**Food system resilience:** A reliable source of safe, nutritious, accessible, equitable, and acceptable food over time and one that can adapt to local and global challenges posed by shocks and stressors, like climate change, pandemics, urbanization, political and economic crises, and population growth. (Source: Tendall, D. M., Joerin, J., Kopainsky, B., Edwards, P., Shreck, A., Le, Q. B., ... Six, J. (2015). Food system resilience: Defining the concept. *Global Food Security* , 6 , 17–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2015.08.001>)

**Inclusion:** The participation of diverse individuals and groups in the decision-making processes and development opportunities within an organization (Adapted from [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: A professional development offering of the eXtension Foundation Impact Collaborative](#)).

**Racial equity:** A type of equity, racial equity is achieved when targeted investments enable people of color to overcome the structural discrimination they encounter—thereby eliminating racial divides between communities of color and their white counterparts, and allowing communities of color to reach optimal outcomes, including in food security and access to land and capital. (Source: Bread for the World, “[Applying Racial Equity to U.S. Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs](#)”, 2019)

**Systems thinking:** The practices of seeking to understand a system as a whole, focusing on causal relationships among parts of a system (rather than on the parts themselves), examining the system from multiple perspectives, and using a broad array of tools to design high-leverage interventions for achieving system transformation.” (Source: Zurcher KA, Jensen J, Mansfield A. Using a Systems Approach to Achieve Impact and Sustain Results. *Health Promotion Practice*. 2018;19(1\_suppl):15S-23S. doi:[10.1177/1524839918784299](https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839918784299))

For a glossary of terms related to race, check out the [Racial Equity Tools Glossary](#) developed by MP Associates, Center for Assessment and Policy Development, and World Trust Educational Services, October 2021.



Image credit: Sarah Galligan, Colorado Food Policy Network and UpRoot Colorado; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2017

# Chapter 4. Some Whys and Whats of FPCs

**L**et's say you are interested in starting an FPC in your community. You'll need to start by approaching others, and you will need to understand and capitalize on their interests. So, you'll need an answer to the question, why should they engage in an FPC?

The answers to that, of course, are varied. Some individuals identify a need for an FPC in their community for a specific, personal reason. Parents may want the food that their children eat in school to be as fresh and nutritious as possible. Farmers may be wondering if they will make ends meet from season to season. A public health practitioner may want to promote policies and programs that improve access to healthier foods such as fruits and vegetables.

Here's another good answer: FPCs foster communication and civic action at the grassroots. They're a chance for people to shape, from the bottom up, the nature of a system that can seem distant and bewildering, even as it affects so much of their lives. As you saw in the previous chapters, achieving food democracy and social justice is a key part of most FPCs' missions.

FPCs reflect the diverse interests and needs of the people in their communities. They also reflect a food system comprising many components. Because of the scope of the system and the variety of stakeholders, FPCs can sometimes face a daunting task: finding ways to include diverse voices and priorities from the community. But that's another answer to "Why an FPC?" Working together, council members and the public can pinpoint the most pressing food needs for their community and propose—or take—effective action.

Image credit: Jennifer Bedrosian; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020



By drawing on the knowledge and experience of people from all segments of the local food system and the community—residents most affected by food systems inequities as well as professionals—an FPC becomes a source of information for the policymakers in government. A council can also help government agencies see how their actions affect the food system. For example, people working at a local department of education might not see that the decisions they make about where to buy food for schools are directly related to local land-use/farming issues and labor conditions. But they are.

No state has a “Department of Food Security”—yet—but an FPC can take on the essence of that role for communities of all sizes. It can look for those areas among government agencies where food issues intersect. FPCs can also be a bridge between the public and private sectors on food issues. And they can be a primary source of food education for the residents at large, addressing such topics as:

- nutrition
- food-related health issues
- equitable access to healthy food
- economic development related to food
- sustainable farming
- land use and farmland preservation
- food waste reduction
- conditions for food system workers

We sometimes talk about the three “P”s of community food system work. The first P is projects—a government agency, commercial entity, a community group of volunteer residents or nonprofit undertakes a specific project to address a specific need. Starting a farmers market is just one example. The second P is partners—food security and equity rely, in large part, on bringing together

people from different organizations and economic sectors to collaborate on food system issues.

The last P is policy—and that’s where FPCs come in. Their primary goals include:

- connecting economic development, racial equity, food security efforts, preservation and enhancement of agriculture, and environmental concerns
- sustaining the development of and supporting the expansion of small and mid-scale agriculture and sustainably produced foods
- reviewing proposed legislation and regulations that affect the food system
- making recommendations to government bodies, and sometimes institutions
- gathering, synthesizing, and sharing information on community food systems

Just as no two community food systems are alike, not all FPCs approach *policy* the same way. Some see it as the body of laws, ordinances, regulations, and statements on food that derive from various government agencies. Some see it as what government actually does—or doesn’t do—regarding the food system. Some FPCs have identified a policy agenda to pursue new or better policies, while others work with the government to adjust programs to better meet the needs of the community. Still others see food policy as the broader interaction of many organizations in the community to address their particular concerns. Seeking policy change can also mean looking at large institutions, such as hospitals and universities, and how their practices can harm the local food system or help to strengthen it. And while an FPC focuses on external policies relating to food, it also establishes its own internal policies, such as a commitment to inclusivity or how it makes decisions.

FPCs do not enact policy; they advise policymakers and government agencies that have policy making power, such as a zoning board or a commission on en-

## What is Policy?

The CDC defines **policy** as a law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive, or voluntary practice of governments and other institutions.

Another definition comes from Emily Broad-Leib, of the Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic: Laws and regulations that govern our environment and behavior by outlining specific conduct, who should do it and how, and for what purpose.

vironmental quality. They might also lack the clout to counter the influence of interests that oppose their initiatives. That inability to take on high-powered political and economic forces leads some councils to sidestep potentially controversial topics, such as farmworkers' rights or placing limits on factory farms. But they can work to make sure farmers markets thrive in their community, or that their state addresses the need for farmland preservation.

FPCs are also involved in education efforts and the implementation of policies and programs related to the food system. One example comes from the **Chatham Community Food Council** of Chatham County, North Carolina. It partnered with a neighboring county's food council to work on a video education series about Black farming in the two counties. The series is designed to encourage local action around justice for Black farmers and increase equity in the food system for the farmers.

Image credit: Marcus Hill, Forsyth Community Food Consortium; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2016



## What Kind of FPC?

Who initiates the process of starting an FPC and who ultimately takes part in it can dictate the structure an FPC takes. The Food Policy Networks project divides FPCs into five broad organizational categories. Each has its benefits and challenges.

<b>Category</b> (percent of FPCs with structure)	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
Housed in a nonprofit (33%)	Quick start-up, usually in-kind contributions from the nonprofit, which also provides fiduciary oversight; greater initial credibility due to affiliation with existing organization	May be difficult to expand the scope if it conflicts with nonprofit's mission; focus on policy may be limited or not encouraged if there is a misunderstanding about advocacy rules for nonprofits; connection to and support from the nonprofit may waver if leadership changes within the council or nonprofit; membership may rely too heavily on the nonprofit.
Embedded in government (25%)	Strong potential to work on policy; access to financial and human resources, data sources and a broad range of government departments; increased credibility among some groups	Change in government leadership may result in less support for or termination of work; priorities usually driven by elected officials or government staff, which may or may not seek input on those priorities; can be difficult to develop community leadership/ownership.
Grassroots coalition (20%)	Opportunity for the community to take the lead or play a key role in setting the agenda; policy work tends to be issue-based and practical, with large constituent base; fewer restrictions on ability to advocate for policy change; flexibility to engage a broader membership	Sometimes resource-constrained or entirely volunteer-run; more difficult to maintain or sustain efforts if there are insufficient resources; taking a systems approach may be difficult because of issue-specific nature or lack of expertise among partners; an anti-government bias can hinder ability to conduct food policy work
Nonprofit (15%)	Level of resources is usually correlated with ability to make progress on policy agenda; able to develop a policy or program agenda that is based on what is needed at the community level	Application process for nonprofit status is onerous; associated costs and obligations with operating a nonprofit; may not have direct connections with elected officials, which can hamper policy progress; may face lobbying and advocacy restrictions
Embedded in a university/college/Extension (5%)	Access to resources including grant management, content expertise, administrative support and students who are looking for research projects and volunteer opportunities	Some universities discourage advocacy; bureaucracy associated with large institutions

## Does Your FPC Need to Be a Nonprofit Organization?

Setting up your FPC as a nonprofit can present challenges, especially for a new organization. Achieving 501(c)(3) status requires time and money and can distract from addressing the food needs of the community. A growing number of FPCs are housed within existing nonprofits or rely on some form of sponsorship from a partner organization. One form of sponsorship is fiscal sponsorship: existing 501(c)(3) charitable organizations may provide administrative services to groups or individuals doing work related to the sponsor's mission and assume some or all of the legal and financial responsibility for the sponsored party's activities, including receiving grants on its behalf. An FPC entering a fiscal sponsorship relationship may, but not always, pay a small fee in return for the sponsor's services. A fiscal sponsorship allows FPCs to maintain autonomy and focus on program and policy work while receiving help with necessary administrative functions. It also allows donors to take a charitable deduction and ensures that institutional donors (e.g., foundations) are funding eligible recipients. For more information about fiscal sponsorship, visit the [National Network of Fiscal Sponsors](#). As the FPC grows and becomes more established, it may consider applying for 501(c)(3) status.

Here's an example of each kind of organization:

- The **Western Prairie Food, Farm and Community Alliance**, a regional FPC composed of public officials, private sector partners, and food producers from nine counties in Northwest Kansas, is a project of the Western Prairie Resource, Conservation and Development Council, which also serves as the alliance's fiscal sponsor.
- In 1997, Connecticut lawmakers created the first statewide FPC in the nation. The **Connecticut Food Policy Council** is part of the state's Department of Agriculture and its members are chosen by state lawmakers and department heads.
- The **Hawai'i Good Food Alliance** is an independent, grassroots coalition of community leaders from across the state's islands.
- The **Greater High Point Food Alliance** began as a group of concerned residents who organized a food summit to discuss food insecurity in High Point, North Carolina, in 2014. The group continued to organize annual food summits and coordinate efforts to develop more just and sustainable food systems, evolving into a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 2019.
- The **Greene County Local Food Council** in Ohio brings people together "to support and encourage a secure, healthy, and sustainable food system." It is embedded within Ohio State University Extension Greene County, which also provides in-kind staff support for coordination and facilitation.

Choosing an FPC's structure is not necessarily a permanent decision. Many councils' structures evolve over time as they, for example:

- Figure out what works best for their community
- Receive more, or less, political support
- Develop new priorities
- Find new funding opportunities

So, a task force might evolve into an FPC, a grassroots organization may become a nonprofit, or a council initially under government direction may become independent.

One example of how an FPC changed and adapted over time comes from the **Cass Clay Food Partners** (CCFP). The organization’s work stretches over two states: Cass County in North Dakota and Clay County in Minnesota. It began as the Cass Clay Food Systems Initiative, launched in 2010 by public health and Extension professionals in the two counties. The initiative is now the CCFP, or a network of networks that forms a web of cross-sector relationships. The CCFP includes a steering committee, a food commission and a food action network. The steering committee is the core of the network, sets the agenda for the food commission, and conducts policy research. The food commission is an advising body formed through a joint powers agreement between the counties. The food commission has elected officials and at-large community members from seven jurisdictions. The food action network is the grassroots citizenry of motivated and interested individuals who want to see food systems change in the community. For more details see [“Navigating Borders: The Evolution of the Cass Clay Food Partners](#) and [Cass Clay Food Partners: A Networked Response to COVID-19.”](#)

## Food Policy Councils Today: A Snapshot

(All figures from the 2021 Food Policy Networks Project Survey)

**301**

FPCs in the USA

**3**

FPCs within tribal nations

**20**

Councils in development

### Breakdown by geographic focus:

**37%**  
county

**20%**  
region

**19%**  
both city/municipality and county

**14%**  
city/municipality

**9%**  
state or territory

**1%**  
tribal

# Working With Governments

Working with government is inevitable if an FPC wants to change policy or translate food policies into action. There are two ways that government plays a direct role in an FPC’s work: as members of an FPC or as the sponsor for an FPC. Government representation on an FPC most often is staff from a specific agency or department serving as a member of an FPC. Some FPCs have elected officials, or a designee, participate as members of the council. Government representation can help a FPC better understand and improve access to the policy process. Government representation can also serve as a feedback loop to elected officials about what issues are important to a community. On the flip side, government representation can delay FPC decisions because government staff may need to seek government approval to act or may only be able to act on issues that are a priority of the government agency or administration. For FPCs that are the result of a mayoral or gubernatorial directive (in other words, not codified as in a city ordinance or state statute) or are an advisory board of the local or state government, alignment of an FPC’s priorities with government priorities is an important consideration. FPCs without a formal relationship with government have more flexibility in whom they work with to support their policy priorities.

	Benefits	Limitations
Government staff or elected officials are members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Help to understand and navigate the policy process</li> <li>▶ Direct connection to key decision-makers in government</li> <li>▶ Advocate for FPC priorities with other government staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ May lack authority to act on behalf of government without prior approval</li> <li>▶ Support and actions may have to align with agency or administration priorities</li> <li>▶ Limitations on advocacy activities</li> </ul>
Embedded in government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Formal recognition as an advisory body to government</li> <li>▶ Staff, and possible financial, support</li> <li>▶ Greater access to government staff and/or elected officials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Limitations on advocacy activities</li> <li>▶ Not a policy-making body</li> <li>▶ Priorities should align with the administration and may need to shift with the change in an administration</li> <li>▶ Limited flexibility in council and meeting structure</li> <li>▶ Could deter community engagement</li> </ul>

Once you establish a council, you need to consider another aspect of working with government officials: advocating for your policy goals with elected leaders and their staff. Advocacy describes a wide range of actions and activities that seek to influence the world around us. Advocacy is an effective tool that can raise awareness of issues an FPC is involved in, garner community support, and mobilize community members. Advocating for your goals with government officials can include:

Providing advice to a government agency or commission that submitted a formal request for technical assistance or advice

- Conducting and distributing nonpartisan analysis or research on a specific piece of legislation
- Broadly asking for more political attention on a social issue
- Organizing an educational public forum for local politicians to debate and share their views on various food issues
- Gathering information on a topic
- Meeting with legislators to educate them generally about an issue.

Related to advocacy work is lobbying, which is also intended to influence lawmakers or legislative staff at any level of government. Lobbying can be direct—an FPC member contacts a legislator or staff member—or grassroots. With the latter, a council tries to shape public opinion about proposed legislation or encourage community members to support or oppose legislation.

Not all FPCs engage in lobbying, but if yours chooses to, you should know the laws at the federal and state levels that regulate lobbying, and a council's organization structure can influence its lobbying efforts. You can learn about lobbying restrictions based on a council's structure in the Food Policy Networks project's **[Advocacy & Lobbying 101 for Food Policy Councils](#)**.

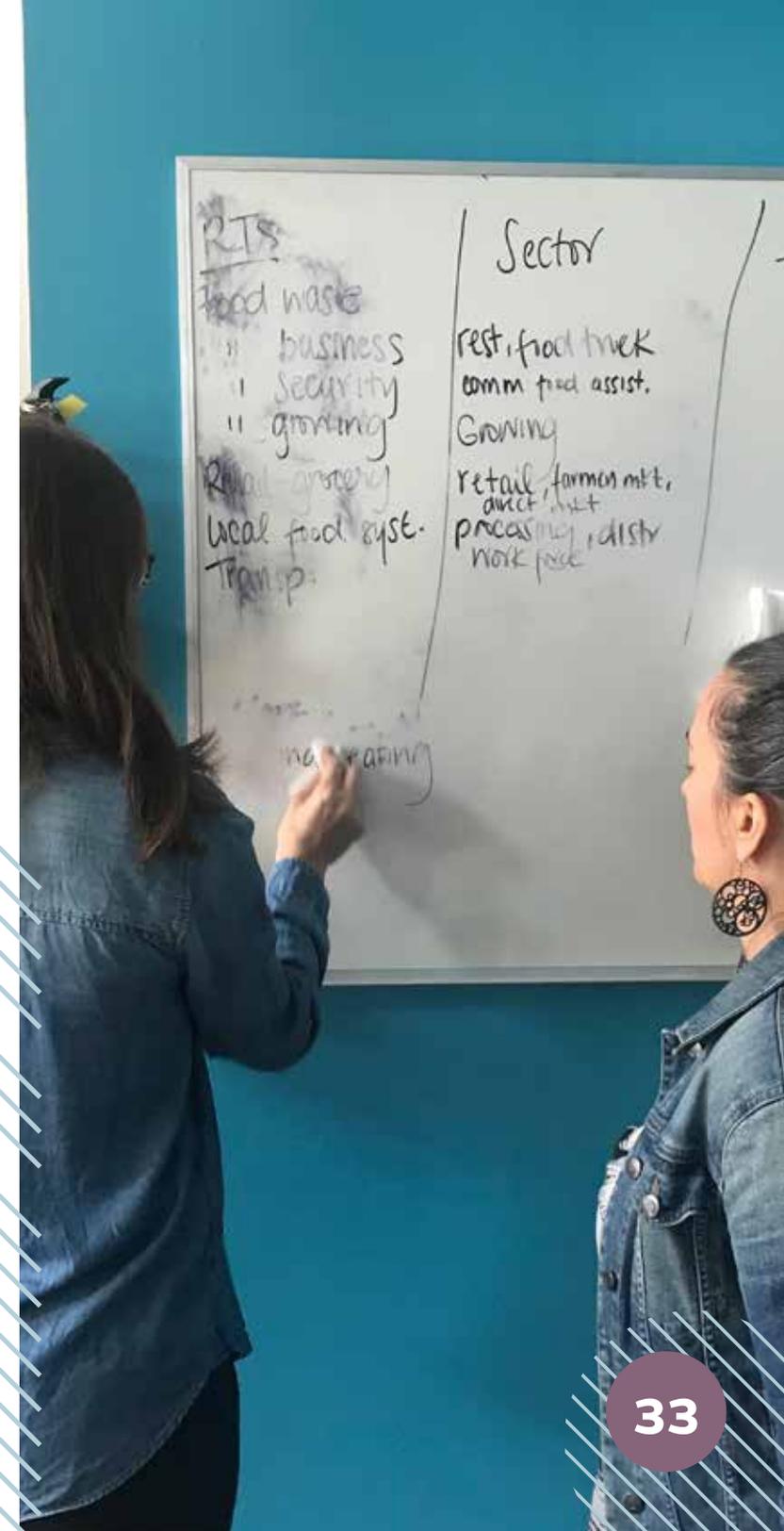


Image credit: Steve Ventura; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020

# Chapter 5. First Steps in Creating an FPC

As much as we believe in the power of FPCs to affect positive systemic change, creating an FPC might not always be the best step for a community. They are not a one-size-fits-all solution to food system problems. So, a fundamental question to consider is, do you need a food policy council?

To answer that, consider another question: What problems are you trying to solve by starting a food policy council, or what is your purpose for creating an FPC? Creating an FPC is not the right avenue to take if you're more concerned about a single issue relating to food, such as addressing hunger or starting urban gardens. In most cases, single-focus issues already have organizations addressing that concern, and single-issue coalitions can be successful in changing policy, without the effort and resources it takes to begin an FPC. Local food banks, for example, help address hunger in a community, and organizations in your area might already be running urban agriculture programs. There are plenty of resources available for starting an organization with that single focus. For FPCs, the emphasis is on having a broad scope on different food system challenges, bringing together many stakeholders, and coordinating with other institutions, from government offices to nonprofits and schools.



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## Before You Start

Some other questions to consider before trying to start an FPC:

- Do you need a food policy council?
- What problems are you trying to solve with an FPC?
- Do these problems you've identified need input from different stakeholders within the food system and the community?
- Who is leading the effort to start a food policy council? Is it an initiative of one person?
- What data are available to help define the problem?
- Are people affected by the problem leading or deeply engaged in your efforts?
- Have you reached out to local policymakers or government employees for help?
- What resources are available to support the FPC?

## Steps of Development

Community Food Strategies, a multi-organizational team that supports food councils in North Carolina, created a helpful [resource](#) about the possible stages of development of an FPC. These steps are covered in more detail in this and subsequent chapters.

- **Seed:** Explore if your community needs a council; identify existing assets; talk to community members and government leaders.
- **Start-up:** A task force begins to design the council while engaging the community; gather information.
- **Growth:** First council members create statement of purpose/goals/values and prioritize issues; develop partnerships; engage the community.
- **Maturity:** The council develops and updates strategic plans and continues building relationships, while making adjustments to its structure and goals, as needed.

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## What's in a Name?

Once you've established a need for an FPC, a first step is deciding what to call it. In part, the name may reflect what stakeholders constitute the council and how it was established. We often use the general term "food policy council" to emphasize the effort of these groups to reform policy. *Policy*, though, can be an uncomfortable term in certain contexts, which is why FPCs go by many names: food council, food action network, food and farm alliance, food and hunger coalition, healthy food access committee, food systems collaborative, or community food partnership. But whatever their name, these groups carry out the essential work of an FPC: to bring together various stakeholders and use the political process to shape and improve the local food system.

What distinguishes some of these different forms of food policy organizations?

- An **alliance** is a group of people or organizations that agree to work together toward a common purpose
- A **coalition** brings together different groups with a predetermined policy agenda or shared interests.
- A **council** brings together people to consult, deliberate, or make decisions. For FPCs, members usually have autonomy to vote on what actions to take, without having to go back to a sponsoring organization to receive input or approval on a measure.
- A **committee** is usually a subset of another organization, or a group of people named to examine a particular issue, usually made up of members of a larger group.
- A **network** is an interconnected group or association of persons with similar interests.
- A **task force** is a group formed to work on a single defined task or activity. Typically, a task force assesses the current condition of a particular problem, determining what can be fixed and making recommendations on how to implement the fix. The task force then presents its findings and recommendations to the organization that created it; that organization then decides if and how to act on the proposed solutions.

Whatever its name, each council will have its own concerns; local, state, regional, or tribal community needs will shape which stakeholders should take part and what your policy and program priorities will be. As the Drake University Agricultural Law Center said in its 2005 [Q&A about FPCs](#), "Food Policy Councils are not a 'one-size-fits-all' process. Councils need to reflect and focus upon the needs of the communities in which they are formed." And typically, a council will form with a core group of representatives from different facets of the local food system. They will address such things as a mission statement and values, then recruit the larger membership that can turn that vision into concrete policy work.

# Creating New Councils

## State

In 2010, two states on opposite sides of the continent started FPCs, and their creations reflect the diversity of how councils can come to be. The **Alaska Food Policy Council** is an independent organization. It began with a call for interested parties to attend a series of meetings to address the idea of a council. Among the 80 or so people who turned out were employees from state and federal agencies, representatives of tribal nations, farmers, and others directly connected to the state food system. By 2012 more than 100 organizations and individuals were active participants in the new council.

The **Massachusetts Food Policy Council** was created through legislation proposed in spring 2010 and signed into law later that year. Government members are appointed from the state house and senate, representing both major parties, and agency representatives from the executive branch. The governor names seven members from groups within the food system representing local boards of health, public health, distribution, farming, direct to consumer, food safety, food processing, and a soils expert. Members of other stakeholder groups are chosen to serve on an advisory committee.

## Local

The **Dane County Food Council** in Wisconsin was formed in 2005 as the result of a report from a subcommittee of the Dane County Board of Supervisors, a food summit, and resident testimonies and petitions. The findings from those sources prompted a resolution by the Dane County Board to create Wisconsin's first FPC. Over the years, the Dane County Food Council has focused on exploring issues and developing recommendations to create an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable local food system for the Dane County region. Its work has connected with the neighboring Madison Food Policy Council, and the two councils began organizing joint meetings in 2021.

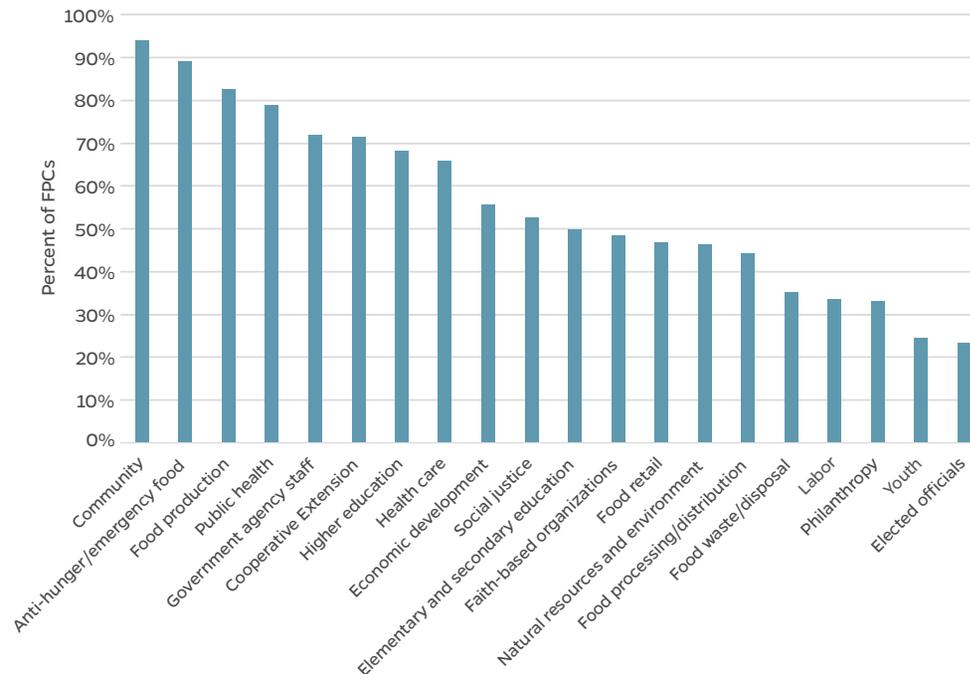
COVID-19 shed light on the fragmentation of the local food system in Collier County, Florida. The **Collier County Food Policy Council** was initiated in July 2020 by the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council. The FPC currently has over thirty stakeholders including Collier County Department of Health, Collier County Public Schools, Harry Chapin Food Bank, and University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Services Cooperative Extension Service and Family Nutrition Program. The partnership has worked to build communication across sectors to ensure a resilient food supply. The Board of County Commissioners signed a proclamation in February 2021 "recognizing the accomplishments and continued work [of the FPC...] to improve the public health and prevent chronic disease through nutritionally sound practices in Collier County."

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# Partnerships and Networking

In part, the success of an FPC rests on building relationships. The first step in building a group that will become an FPC is to reach out to some of the stakeholders in the food system or allied organizations of all kinds. In most cases, the first people and entities brought on board are part of the community food system, broadly defined. They're the ones who are most knowledgeable about the food issues the FPC hopes to address. But membership can and should extend beyond that to include other stakeholders whose activities or concerns intersect with food system issues. The key is finding people who have an interest in local food issues. Some councils include members from local transportation and education departments, agencies addressing the needs of refugees, educational institutions, religious groups, and medical professionals, to give just some examples of the potential sources of members not directly part of the food system. People from outside of the food system can be allies who bring new resources and ideas to the table. Defining what your goals should be can influence who you contact for your group. Seeking a regional council, for example, will mean contacting a larger pool of people and government officials than trying to start one for just a single community.

Once you have recruited your initial stakeholders, you need to get them all together. This meeting gives you a chance to explain the benefits of an FPC and let others share their vision of what an ideal community food system would look like. Some consensus should emerge about the scope of the proposed council's work and what form it will take and how the council will make decisions, which should lead to the formation of a mission statement of some kind. After that, the council can expand its membership over time.



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Figure: Percent of FPCs with members representing each sector. Source: 2020 Food Policy Networks project annual survey of food policy councils.

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## Next Steps: Values, Vision, and Mission

### Mission Statement vs. Vision Statement

Are they the same? Most organizations would say no. One distinction sometimes made between them is that the mission statement focuses on what a council's focus is today: what is it doing, who does it serve, and how does it do that. A vision is more future oriented and aspirational: what does the organization want to work toward, what changes does it hope to make to serve the community. As we see in the examples from Mississippi, Cortland, and San Diego, many councils' vision statements are similar or nearly identical, because we're all interested in the same ultimate outcome. Where councils become unique is in their mission statement.

An appropriate FPC mission statement, regardless of what it's called, will get at the heart of the facets of the food system that need to be changed or improved. The council's focus can include food security—guaranteeing access to affordable, nutritious food, produced and sold as sustainably as possible—food sovereignty, sustainability, land use, food justice, or other issues.

The seed of an idea for starting an FPC has been planted in your community—perhaps by a community coalition or academic department already involved in food issues, or perhaps by a group of concerned residents. The urge to create an FPC might also be a response to an acute crisis that puts pressure on the local food system, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Whatever the circumstances, the core group of initial stakeholders who want a council have held meetings and perhaps received government sanctions of some kind.

### **Now what?**

Before tackling the nuts and bolts of food systems issues, a new FPC should formulate and release a public statement of its values and goals. For some councils, that means drafting a mission or vision statement, or both. Other councils create what they call values statements or guiding principles. These statements should reflect the common values of FPC members, such as achieving food security, environmental justice, cooperation, and inclusivity. But mission and vision statements are not only about the food system, programs, and policies. They are also about the process of managing the FPC, including how the FPC will make decisions. Remember, food democracy is as much about how people's voices are heard as it is about the impact of food policies and programs.

Creating any of these statements that define the council's reason for being and its goals will be the first effort at consensus building. The broad strokes should be easy since members already share an awareness of food systems issues. Getting at the details of specific first goals and how to achieve them might require doing a community food assessment, which is discussed in Chapter 7 - What should your FPC do?

Here's how some FPCs have stated their vision, mission, and/or guiding principles:

## **Mississippi Food Policy Council**

**Mission:** To invest in building the capacity of Mississippians to become people-centered policy nurturers.

**Vision:** To make racially equitable, environmentally sustainable and economically just policy contributions to the transforming of Mississippi's food systems.

**Beliefs, Values and Principles:** This statement reinforces the council's commitment to food and racial justice, food security, and sustainability; you can see the full statement [here](#).

## **Cortland Food Project (New York)**

**Mission:** Cortland Food Project collaborates with community members and partners of the local food system to advocate for and support policies and actions that promote a healthy population, social equity, economic revitalization, and environmental stewardship.

**Vision:** We envision a local food system where all community members of Cortland County have access to healthy, affordable, equitable, and sustainable food sources.

## **San Diego Food System Alliance (California)**

**Mission:** To cultivate a healthy, sustainable, and just food system in San Diego County.

**Vision:** We envision vibrant community food systems rooted in justice and sustainability, where everyone has equitable opportunity to produce, distribute, prepare, serve, and eat nutritional and culturally appropriate food. In our vision, producers and food workers are treated fairly, sustainable and regenerative practices are prioritized, people are engaged, communities are empowered, and farms, fisheries, and food businesses are thriving and contributing to local economies.

**Core Values:** The San Diego Food Systems Alliance has identified eight values—respect, inclusivity, collaboration, community, prosperity, health, sustainability and justice—that are woven throughout their work to promote collaboration, influence policy and catalyze transformation.



Image credit: Stacy Macklin; CLF Food Policy Networks  
Photo Contest, 2020

# Chapter 6.

## Membership

**Y**ou've established the need for an FPC, and core stakeholders have set down some kind of vision for the council's scope and goals. Now it's time to expand the membership and decide how the council will function. The latter is usually spelled out in bylaws, which the core group may have produced. Or a committee of the full membership may propose bylaws for the whole membership to consider. See more about bylaws in Chapter 9.

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### Who Should Serve?

A council needs members with certain characteristics. Most councils today strive for diversity of all sorts in their members. It's good to include people with a variety of viewpoints or different priorities, but who support a shared vision. Here are some guidelines to consider when recruiting members.

Effective council members usually share a few key characteristics:

- They work well with others and can cultivate connections with a broad range of people.
- They educate themselves about the key issues and work to share their knowledge with others. That education effort is particularly important with community and government leaders who have the influence to shape specific actions and outcomes.
- They question the form of the current food system and seek ways to improve it for the benefit of all—the essence of food justice.
- They consider what is best for the common good and not just the interests of the organization that they represent.
- They understand the council's mission and represent the different issues a council has identified as part of its purpose.



Image credit: Diana Ash, Montgomery County Food Council; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2016

# Inclusive Civic Engagement

The Kirwan Institute, which has a [guidebook on civic engagement](#), believes the concept of civic engagement is about more than practices. It is also a set of conditions. These reflect such things as a community’s ethnic and racial makeup, the education and income level of residents, and the presence of existing principles that guide civic participation. The institute defines civic engagement as “the practices, principles and socioeconomic conditions that comprise the environment in which people interact with their community and come together to make and implement community decisions that provide justice and opportunity for all community members.”

The institute offers six principles for civic engagement, which can shape how your council recruits members and then keeps them engaged in the council’s work:

- ▶ Embrace the gifts of diversity
- ▶ Realize the role of race, power, and injustice
- ▶ Practice “radical hospitality” by inviting and listening, especially to community members whose voices tend to go unheard
- ▶ Build trust and commitment
- ▶ Honor dissent and embrace protest
- ▶ Adapt to community change

Another perspective comes from the Healthy Food Policy Project, a partnership of three academic institutions, that outlines what it calls authentic resident engagement. That means tapping into the knowledge and experience of all residents, being especially mindful to work to remove or overcome historical and ongoing barriers to inclusion and the impact of systemic and structural racism. You can learn more about authentic resident engagement [here](#).



Image credit:  
Carolina  
Sanchez and  
Kara Rodriguez;  
CLF Food Policy  
Networks  
Photo Contest,  
2018

Image credit: April Whicker, Northern  
Colorado Food Cluster; CLF Food Policy  
Networks Photo Contest, 2016

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## Role of Community

Over 90% of FPCs report to have members that represent the community. Who these members are, who they represent and most importantly how they are engaged are key to the priorities and actions of a council. Food democracy is about resident-led decisions but not all residents have the same access to the policy process. FPCs can lead the way for resident engagement by starting with how and who is leading the decisions and formation of the FPC.

Today, FPCs are particularly concerned about making sure their membership is diverse—that it reflects those segments of the community most affected by food system injustices and gives them a voice in defining food-related problems and shaping solutions. That includes residents of communities of color, farmers and farmworkers, low-income consumers, food retail workers, seniors, and youth. The breadth of membership creates a diverse knowledge pool for the council to draw on and gives more parts of the community a vested interest in the council's success. Having diverse voices also helps organizations see issues of social justice and equity through a lens that recognizes the effects of systemic racism on the food system.

Contacting potential stakeholders and convincing them to take part in an FPC takes time and effort. Be prepared to do that legwork—and to do it all over again, if people who commit to the concept later drop out. Also consider that, at times, you might be reaching out to individuals or organizations that are reluctant to work with government or “official” agencies. You will need to gain the trust of the people or organizations. Building trust means first reaching out to the people in those communities to listen to their concerns and ask them what they need from their food system. The **DC Food Policy Council** co-hosted a series of community meals with a local nonprofit in neighborhoods with low food access to talk with residents about how they perceive their food environments, how current local policy initiatives are working (or not) for them and gather their suggestions on

## Including Youth

To encourage the participation of students and other young people in food policy work, some councils have set aside seats for youth or started youth policy councils. In Toronto (Ontario, Canada), for example, during the early 2000s, the city's food policy council saw increased interest from young people in its work. Given that, the city created the **Toronto Youth Food Policy Council**, the first of its kind in the world. It focuses on many issues pertinent to its members (aged 16-30) including student food insecurity, migrant farmworkers, and urban agriculture. In North Carolina, the Center for Environmental Farming Systems sponsors the **North Carolina Food Youth Initiative**. It brings together high school students, continuing General Educational Development (GED) students, and recent graduates who are already addressing food justice issues in their communities to create a statewide network designed to build relationships among existing organizations. Meanwhile, in its **operating principles**, the **Food Policy Council of Buffalo & Erie County** (NY), composed of government representatives and food systems stakeholders, dedicates a stakeholder seat to youth.

how District policies could better meet their needs. These meals brought together FPC members and residents to share and learn from one another.

Building trust also means being willing to accept people or organizations whenever they decide to participate, which may not be immediately. The **Los Angeles Food Policy Council** offers an example of how the process of reaching out to stakeholders can unfold over time. Begun as a directive of the mayor, the council spent its first two years forming relationships and building trust with community leaders and organizations. The council held listening sessions, roundtable discussions, and one-on-one interviews, and led targeted recruitment of members. Taking the time to meet with people and being intentional about the organizations that they approached helped the council to form trusting relationships with groups that might otherwise be skeptical of an initiative started by the government. This approach also helped the council to find the right people with policy experience to serve on its leadership team.

Not all individuals or communities have the capacity to commit to yet another project. Communities of color may not have the emotional bandwidth to take on yet another oppressive system. Farmers and farmworkers may not have the time to sit through an afternoon meeting. While it may be important to the FPC for these people to be members, the FPC may have to find a different way to include their perspective. This may include asking for a recommendation of someone that may have the capacity to attend FPC meetings. It could be that an FPC member regularly meets with the stakeholder at a time that is convenient for the stakeholder to provide an update about the council's work and to seek their input on specific FPC decisions.

Food policy councils can promote inclusion in several ways:

- Reflect the desire for diversity in their values/mission statement.
- Designate seats on the council for representatives of specific groups.
- Set a goal for existing members to reach out to potential members from traditionally unrepresented groups.
- Seek to collaborate on projects or policy strategies with organizations or groups led by people of color.

FPCs can also promote inclusion by making meetings more accessible, by being mindful of meeting times, location, and language accessibility. For groups not part of government, selecting less formal or less “professional” methods of operating meetings may make the participants feel more welcome. You could add evening and weekend meeting times, locations such as community centers and churches located in the targeted neighborhoods, providing childcare services, translations services, and travel stipends, if necessary. Potluck suppers are often a good way to draw people to a community meeting. For more information on diversity and inclusion on FPCs, see “[Food Policy for All](#)” and this [webinar from](#) the Food Policy Networks on strategies for effective community inclusion.

But inclusion is more than having a diverse membership. Communities of color and representatives of marginalized groups need to feel welcomed and heard, and that their contributions are reflected in the work and priorities of the council. Giving them a chance to demonstrate and use their particular skills and life knowledge may be something that they have not been given the opportunity to do before in a community setting. An FPC also needs to create mutual accountability among its members. That means all are willing to support each other, and that there is shared power and responsibility within the council.

The **Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council** (FPAC) has been changing their approach to membership to be more inclusive in reach and engagement of people that have been harmed by food system inequities. They're trying to do this by:

- “shifting leadership from city government and institutions to people who are experiencing food systems challenges and enacting community-based solutions
- valuing and centering community voice, expertise, and lived experience
- fundamentally shifting FPAC’s operations to reflect what residents and communities need to affect policy change and influence city government.”

It helps to have a plan to do this work, and to that end, FPAC is undergoing a **Strategic Planning Process to Uproot Racism and Center Equity**. In starting this process, FPAC recognizes that “Like many other food policy councils, FPAC has historically catered to people working professionally in the food system, such as city officials, non-profit workers, business owners, and academics. While their contributions are necessary and valuable, this bias makes invisible the people who are enacting community-based solutions to food inequities and struggling with food systems challenges, such as a family experiencing food insecurity or a food worker who doesn’t make a livable wage.” Relying solely on volunteer work, which traditional types of council members have provided, makes it difficult for poor and working-class people to participate. To address that, FPAC is working to uphold a commitment to equity work within the council by providing a stipend to recognize members’ contributions. All members of the council are eligible to receive a stipend. However, to encourage distributing resources equitably, members who are paid by their employer to attend FPC meetings are encouraged to opt out of the stipend program at their discretion.

Other communities have tried to promote public engagement by creating separate resident advisory boards to inform food systems decision making. Several cities, including Baltimore (MD), Salt Lake City (UT), and Greenville (SC), have created resident food equity advisory groups to inform the food policy priorities of the city government or FPC. Salt Lake City created its **Resident Food Equity Advisors** in 2020. The city reached out to more than 80 community organizations and refugee community groups to find advisors and ended up with 11 people from different backgrounds, but with a shared interest in food system issues.

Image credit: Ali Mendelson, Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2017





# Chapter 7. What Should Your FPC Do?

**W**ith the membership and structure of your FPC in place, you still have plenty to do, including additional assessment, program and policy work. Where to start?

*Assessing* and *planning* are two words that come up often in the early days of an FPC. Most councils do some sort of assessment of the local food system—what currently exists, what are obvious needs. From the data gathered in the assessment, the FPC can tackle a strategic plan or action plan.

An important way to move from assessment to plan to action is to build bridges with the community. This outreach goes on since the first discussions of forming an FPC, but now it takes on added importance. To meet your objectives, you'll need support from people outside the council—other nonprofits, residents, and especially government officials. It's important to reach out to the groups you've identified as allies and enlist their help in assessing what the community needs. They can then reach out to their members and constituents to help gather information, develop a plan of action, and begin to make the plan happen.

Food “summits” and other public events are ways to bring people together, discuss the issues facing the community food system, help the council prioritize which issues to tackle first, and begin to form strategies for crafting the policies that will address those issues. Some events FPCs host to conduct this outreach include community forums, community meals, and tours of local farms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many councils transitioned to organizing virtual events. The **Palouse-Clearwater Food Coalition** in Idaho, for example, hosted a **virtual food summit** to identify areas of resilience and weakness in the regional food system that had been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While virtual engagement has its own challenges, it also offers some benefits, such as the ability for more people to attend without having to travel or find care for dependents, or to record event sessions for future viewing.



Image credit: Christine Grillo; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020.

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## Understanding Your Food System

FPCs have developed different ways to gather the information that helps shape their work. Traditionally, many FPCs did community food system assessments, and at times, an assessment done by another organization has been a catalyst for creating an FPC. Other FPCs conduct health impact assessments or food economy assessments. In all cases, the goal is to get the best picture possible into different facets of the local food system, including social, economic, and cultural factors that influence food production, distribution, and consumption. The work can be done by a group from within the council, working with people in the community who have first-hand knowledge of a particular part of the food system: farmers, grocers, gardeners, government officials, consumers, workers, and recipients of food assistance. Universities are also another great resource for assessment tools and expertise.

Ideally, the information collected during an assessment will show all the ways the various food sectors are connected, or not, and how food issues relate to community goals and values. The assessment examines both assets and needs. Some of the information might be available in existing government reports or at relevant government websites. Armed with the knowledge an assessment produces, an FPC can begin advocating for the policies and programs that create food justice, drawing in as many stakeholders as possible into the process.

Here are three examples of community food assessments and what they produced:

In 2020, the **Piedmont Triad Regional Food Council (NC)** completed the Triad's **[Regional Food System Assessment](#)**, covering 12 counties. The assessment was intended to form a baseline for understanding the regional food system, examine economic opportunities for strategic investments, and create shared ownership and equity principles for the region and the local advocates who make up the food system. Key topics examined included food security, markets and economic impacts, farm and food production, supply chains, food flows, and

community assets. The assessment included equity findings in every section of the report and recommendations for continuing to embrace underrepresented voices in further outreach and engagement, particularly with “furthest from justice communities.” Projections also examined trends and impacts of COVID-19 on food systems. In the spring of 2021, the Council hosted [Learn-Build-Eat](#), a virtual launch event, to share the findings with the community.

**North Central Kansas Food Council** completed an [assessment for their 12-county region](#), with a total population of around 136,000 people. The assessment explored demographics, farming and food production, food processing and distribution infrastructure, the retail food environment, healthy food access, consumer eating behaviors, food waste, and economic impact in the region.

**Tompkins County Food Policy Council (NY)** conducted a [food system baseline assessment](#), based on community conversations, in-depth interviews, focus groups, surveys, neighborhood canvassing, and data collection from early 2020 through mid-2021. The assessment looked at the current condition of such things as food production and distribution, the different ways to access food, and food security, personal nutrition and health, and food waste and recovery, outlining both challenges and opportunities in each area. The plan, “Tompkins Food Future” provides a roadmap towards greater resilience, equity, economic opportunity, and human and ecosystem health. It includes 10 goals with corresponding recommendations to address the following community priorities: adapting to climate change; building production capacity; greater coordination across the food system; improved access to healthy affordable food; strengthening the local food economy; improving land access and

Image credit: Chara Bouma-Prediger; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020



equity in the food system; encouraging innovation; protecting natural resources; reducing food waste; and improving health outcomes.

More detailed guidance for planning and carrying out community food assessments is available from Community Food Strategies' [\*\*Best Practices Learned from Regional Food Assessments\*\*](#) and Oregon Food Bank's [\*\*Conversations Across the Food System: A Guide to Coordinating Community Food Assessments\*\*](#).

Image credit: Jill Egland, Kern Food Policy Council; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2017

# KERN COUNTY FOOD SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

Indicators for a healthy food and agricultural economy

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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# Alternatives to a Community Food Assessment

While community food assessments serve a purpose, at times FPCs may only want to understand a single issue of the food system or may only have resources to look at a few parts of the system.

Instead of conducting a community food assessment, a council may develop food systems blueprints or informational briefs, which are brief documents summarizing an issue and relevant policy recommendations. The **Cass Clay Food Partners**, a regional FPC which operates in the Fargo, North Dakota/Moorhead, Minnesota Metropolitan Area, developed a series of [food systems blueprints](#) for the city of Fargo on a variety of topics, from backyard chicken keeping and cottage food laws to farmers markets and municipal composting. Similarly, the **Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council** has written numerous [white papers on food systems issues in Colorado](#) including agricultural workers, meat value chains, and preparing for food security in an age of limited natural resources.

Other councils target one area of the community food system for a “micro assessment,” rather than spending too much time tackling the macro. Public workshops, community meals, and forums are great ways to see which issues are important to the community and worthy of a targeted assessment. During the pandemic, the **Ohio Food Policy Network** used its 2020 annual meeting, held virtually, to get community input on the network’s policy priorities for the year. Participants could write a note sharing their idea and the organizers grouped and consolidated the notes by similar themes to condense the feedback into a few priorities moving forward.

## Food Systems Data

Before embarking on collecting your own data, your FPC may want to review existing metrics and data sources. Two databases of food systems indicators may be of particular interest to FPCs: the [Food Systems Indicator Database](#) created by the Nutrition and Obesity Policy Research and Evaluation Network (NO-PREN) and [Measuring Racial Equity in the Food System: Established and Suggested Metrics](#) created by Michigan State University's Center for Regional Food Systems. The Food Systems Indicator database includes information from published reports, websites, and academic articles that address measuring different aspects of the food system. Measuring Racial Equity in Food Systems includes a selection of metrics related to race or ethnicity and the food system pulled from reports and peer-reviewed literature. These databases can help FPCs and other groups looking to assess, monitor and evaluate their local food system. You can see examples of metrics you may want to review related to different food systems topics, such as healthy people, vibrant farms, sustainable ecosystems, food access, or racial justice, and where you can find data on that indicator.

*Continued on next page...*

Here are some examples of more targeted assessments FPCs have done:

In Missoula, Montana, the **Community Food and Agriculture Coalition** (CFAC) produced the white paper, [Losing Ground: The Future of Farms and Food in Missoula County](#), which explores the loss of agricultural land in the County and provides recommendations on how to protect agricultural land moving forward. The council then organized a coalition of stakeholders to defeat a proposal by the state's Realtor association that would have prohibited local governments from considering the impact of proposed subdivisions on agricultural land use. The coalition has continued to review and comment on subdivision proposals and their potential impacts to agriculture. CFAC promotes land-use policies that protect the most viable farm and ranch lands while providing predictability to developers, planners, policy makers, and residents. CFAC worked with the County to develop specific agricultural enhancement areas within the zoning code, which will permanently protect agricultural land from development along the urban fringe.

The **District of Columbia Food Policy Council** published a [DC Food Economy Study](#) in 2019 which explores the economic and employment impacts and growth trends of the District's food economy since 2001. It examines different sectors, including food retail, food service and bars, food and beverage manufacturing, and food and alcohol product wholesalers, and includes recommendations on how to strengthen the District's food economy.

Members of the **Southwest New Mexico Food Policy Council** were concerned about the quantity and quality of food distributed through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "The Emergency Food Assistance Program" (TEFAP). The Council led a [Health Impact Assessment](#) in 2015 to explore the region's "emergency" food distribution system. The assessment explored three key issues related to the 1) quantity of food distributed, 2) nutritional value and quality of food sources, and 3) the unique infrastructure issues faced by rural and frontier communities struggling to address growing food insecurity. The assessment correlated data to health indicators of low-income families in the region, most of whom are children, the elderly and Hispanic.

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# Food Policy Audit

Another good starting point for a more tailored assessment is looking at the role local, regional, and state governments play in the food system. Which departments are involved in administering Women, Infants and Children (WIC) programs, which ones would play a role in land use policies? This kind of study is also sometimes called a *food policy audit*, as it surveys the existing programs and policies at work within a community food system. With this information, an FPC can look for ways to create synergy between different government departments and at the various levels of government. The food policy audit also helps point out where the status quo falls short in achieving a healthy, equitable, and sustainable food system, offering a blueprint for an FPC's possible first objectives.

**Franklin County Local Food Council** in Ohio developed a [food policy audit](#) in 2012 to assess the county's agro-food related policies and programs to gauge its performance in promoting local food, sustainability, and community food security; strengthening zoning and land use; addressing public health and food access; and fostering social equity. Learn more about food audits in these resources:

[\*\*The Food Policy Audit: A New Tool for Community Food System Planning\*\*](#)

[\*\*From Civic Group to Advocacy Coalition: Using a Food Policy Audit As a Tool for Change\*\*](#)

*...Continued from Food Systems Data*

Here's an example of something like this in practice: the **Adams County Food Policy Council** of Pennsylvania built a [food policy dashboard](#) to track data points that are useful for community partners. It includes data and fact sheets related to the economic reality in Adams County, anti-hunger, healthy food access, economic development, food production, food loss/waste reduction, and community health outcomes.

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# Food Systems Mapping

## Data Collection Guides

Other tools for gathering information include surveys and focus groups. The USDA has some [guidelines](#) for how to collect data using these methods and how to easily present the results in graphic form.

The Centers for Disease Control has a detailed look at [how to carry out a retail food assessment](#).

Some FPCs have turned to maps, using Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping technology, to help analyze different parts of their local food system and understand geographic disparities, especially among traditionally marginalized groups. FPCs can turn to experts in GIS for help, who include university professors or graduate students and city/county planners.

GIS may show potential connections between datasets, but additional research is often required to understand true relationships and meaning. Maps can be a great tool, but they are just one tool in an FPC's toolbox.

Here are two examples of how FPCs used mapping:

- The **South Carolina Food Policy Council** created a [Food Systems Roadmap](#), an interactive story map that includes an [inventory map](#) and [resource directory](#) to support the growth and development of South Carolina's food system across the value chain. The map includes key infrastructure points such as farmers markets, processors, food hubs, cold storage, and support organizations. It also includes various data from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Census of Agriculture.
- The **Southern Nevada Food Council** partnered with the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada to create a [Healthy Food Access Webmap](#), an interactive tool that includes data related to healthy food access and food security in Clark County, allowing users to identify areas where residents may lack ready access to healthy food options.

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## Policy Scan

FPCs might conduct policy scans to track the policies that affect their food system currently, or those that are being considered by policymakers. Here are two examples of policy scans by FPCs:

- The **California Food Policy Council** and nonprofit Roots of Change began producing [annual reports to track food and agriculture legislative policy](#) in the state in 2013. The organizations continued to conduct the analysis until 2018, when the California Food and Farming Network converted the report to a scorecard. CAFPC continues to issue policy reports focus on the impact that state legislation has had on local food system work by its member councils, the challenges of implementing state policy by the grassroots, feedback loop to the capitol, and a call to action in many cases.
- **Maricopa County Food System Coalition (Arizona)**: Published a [best practices report](#) in 2020 that includes policy examples from across Arizona, including about how to get food in general plans.

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## Storytelling

Councils may find it preferable to share stories alongside or in addition to data to illustrate how food systems policies influence people directly. In Indiana, the **NWI Food Council**, in partnership with the Hoosier Young Farmers Coalition, received an Indiana Humanities Grant. The primary objective of the grant was to shift narratives around farming in Indiana by amplifying the voices of farmers throughout the state. They used the funds to record podcasts and a storytelling workshop for the communities they serve. The human-interest stories help illustrate their impact and reach. Storytelling prompts kick off every board meeting and they make storytelling a primary training tool for board engagement.

### Food System “Tour”

The **Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council** took a small group of council members on a [tour of ten Colorado sites](#) representing the components of their state’s food system, from community-supported agriculture (CSA) farms to more traditional farming operations and organizations dealing with farming issues. Policy council members learned first-hand about local food issues, and producers and activists got to communicate their concerns to people who support their efforts.

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# Strategic Planning

## The Strategic Planning Process in Alaska

The **Alaska Food Policy Council** began its strategic planning process in 2011. It's a large council with volunteer members, and 24 of them took part in the session. Over two days, the group pinpointed goals, objectives, and strategies for a three-year period. For other groups, a shorter time frame for the plan might make more sense, especially since a new council might take longer than it anticipates to find its footing. If you do go with a longer time period, plan to check in annually to see how well reality has hewed to the plan. At the Alaska session, the group chose to locate five broad areas of the food system and food security that would form the core of its plan: access; economic development; safety, security, and protection; sustainability; and public engagement. Of course, each FPC might come up with their own "sectors" to organize its goals and objectives.

Whatever kind of assessment or information-gathering tool you use, your council next has to sort through the information and make a plan of action. If you don't already have a vision/mission statement, constructing that now will guide the strategies you hope to pursue in the future.

Food policy councils often develop plans that drive their priorities and workflow. These plans can come in a variety of forms, including a strategic plan internal to the FPC, an action plan that encompasses the community's broader goals, or even plans about specific communications activities the FPC may undertake. (See more about action plans below.) In some cases, you may run across a "food plan," though this term could refer to several types of plans.

A *strategic plan* is developed and owned by a single organization or entity, like an FPC, and provides a high level of detail on the direction of the organization's work. An FPC's strategic plan lays out goals for where the council wants to be in three to five years and the strategies for how the council will achieve its goals. A strategic plan can focus on goals related to transforming the food system and/or the structure, governance, and operation of an FPC. It may also be informed by input from stakeholders outside of the organization.

Here are two examples of strategic plans

- The **Milwaukee Food Council** (WI) created a [strategic plan](#) in 2020 to guide the council's work for the following two years. It included a vision and mission statement, an outline of priorities, and the council's commitment to equity and food justice.
- The **New Orleans Food Policy Action Council's** (LA) [strategic plan](#) laid out a three-year plan of action, with specific priorities in such areas as food production and access.

This guide from Community Food Strategies on [Developing Strategic Plans](#) offers more examples.

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# Action Plans

Instead of, or in addition to, creating a strategic plan, some councils create an action or implementation plan. It outlines the steps, or activities, to be taken to carry out actions or changes that are generally agreed upon by the broader community about what needs to be done and who should be doing it. For this reason, an action plan is often developed jointly with multiple stakeholder groups or is informed by a diversity of stakeholders, including community members. An FPC may be the primary organizer of the plan, but the responsibility of carrying out and measuring actions is loosely assigned to key partner organizations throughout the community. In some cases, an action plan may be commissioned or adopted by a government entity. Here are some examples of FPC action plans:

- The **San Diego Food System Alliance** created [Food Vision 2030](#) in partnership with the broader community. Developed over two years, the process included comprehensive literature review, in-depth analyses, hundreds of interviews, several focus groups, and broad community engagement. They engaged the full community with a particular focus on uplifting the voices of those most affected by inequities in the food system. They sought community feedback in two phases. The first phase was to gather insight on needs and aspirations which informed the development of the draft goals, objectives, and strategies. The second phase was to obtain input on a set of draft goals, objectives, and strategies. Overall, they engaged nearly 3,000 residents, with more than 60% from residents of marginalized communities and essential food system workers.
- In 2017, the **Douglas County Food Policy Council** in Kansas created the [Douglas County, KS Food Systems Plan](#) to guide policy change in

support of the local food system over the next 10 years. The plan was developed as part of the process to update the Lawrence-Douglas County comprehensive plan and is incorporated by reference into the resulting Plan 2040. The plan includes five goals that span the food system, from food entrepreneurs and natural resource conservation, to healthy food access, equitable food systems, and food waste.

- The **Massachusetts Food System Collaborative** convened 35 listening sessions with over 300 food system stakeholders around the state during the COVID-19 pandemic to revisit the 2015 [Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan](#). [Massachusetts' Local Food System: Perspectives on Resilience and Recovery](#) updates the food plan with new recommendations based on what was learned during COVID-19, plus some new or more specific ideas that have arisen since the first plan was published.



Image credit: Maggie Nowak; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020

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## Conducting a Planning Session

For FPCs, planning can play several roles, but ideally the planning session brings all stakeholders together to reach a common understanding of their purpose, and to see the connection between food and policies that can shape the overall food system. For a new FPC, the planning session is as much about getting acquainted as working out a detailed plan. Whatever form a planning event takes, members should emerge with a list of guideposts or milestones that reflect the council's core values.

A meeting to work out a plan can take several shapes. Some groups go on a retreat. Others hold meetings that last from a few hours to several days. Your finances will dictate, to some degree, whether you go for the BMW of planning sessions or settle for the more functional Kia.

Selecting dates for meetings as well as the amount of time to allot for a meeting must also take into consideration the demands and responsibilities of the members, especially those whose work and personal lives don't automatically permit participation in something like an FPC. If, for instance, a member requires childcare to participate in a meeting, the FPC should budget for that cost if a member needs reimbursement.

Having an outside facilitator can be highly productive. These professionals are trained to make sure everyone gets involved and feel part of the process as well as to keep one or two strong voices from dominating. A facilitator can also keep everyone focused on the task at hand and summarize or distill key points as necessary. The Food Policy Networks project maintains a [list of consultants](#) with experience in the strategic planning processes, as well as in organizational development, policy evaluation, meeting facilitation, and a range of other areas. If a council doesn't have the funds to hire a facilitator, it might want to check with local Extension Offices to see if they have a facilitator who can run a plan-

ning session for free. A community foundation might be willing to fund planning activities, including hiring a facilitator. It never hurts to ask. A facilitator might be willing to provide services pro-bono.

One goal of the session should be to let everyone hear each individual stakeholder's perspective, to get a sense of the diversity of knowledge and experience represented. At the same time, those varied voices have to be ready to work toward consensus, or at least commonality. The planning process should set the tone for achieving that in future council work. The session should also be another step toward building trust among the council members.

The planning process is mostly about discussing a wide range of options and then setting priorities for what should be done first. The idea is to move from a few broad principles and values to the more concrete steps that can be taken to achieve them, realizing that shifting political and economic sands—or more pressing food security issues—can make the plan a fluid document.

Image credit: Hannah Lencheck and Laxmi Palde; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2018



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## Policy First!

Some discussion during the planning process might focus on the relative benefits of focusing on policy. Policy work is important because it touches on broader issues with, hopefully, long-lasting returns. Policy work should be your primary goal; however, FPCs often take the lead role in getting a program off the ground, particularly in areas where people must play multiple roles. For example, if there is a pressing need for an emergency food distribution program and there's no one else to do it, a council might take the reins.

Undertaking a program should also reinforce larger policy goals. Creating a farmers market or having one put in EBT machines for low-income residents using the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is part of a larger policy objective—improving access to affordable, nutritious food. Keep policy outcomes uppermost in your thinking as you make your plans.

Policy work is important because it touches on broader issues with, hopefully, long-lasting returns. But government policies can also change quickly and with little public input, as new political players become involved, or can simply be ignored by bureaucracies that choose not to implement them. The shifting political wind in the community makes vigilance a key attribute for a successful FPC.

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## From Plan to FPC Structure

The recommendations from a strategic plan often shape the alignment of an FPC's structure. Carrying out the various parts of a strategic plan requires a division of labor. Councils usually set up committees and smaller groups—call them task forces, subcommittees, working groups—that tackle the specific core values or goals outlined in the plan. Ideally, council members with specific areas of expertise will work on an appropriate committee. Or committees can include people who are not members of the FPC but have expertise on that topic area. For example, a subcommittee dealing with land-use and zoning concerns could invite a city or county planner to be a member of the committee. City or county planning offices can be a valuable resource. Their staff have a broad vision and a concern with the long-term development of a community. Likewise, an effective FPC is looking at local food issues in a far-reaching, systemic way. We talk more about the working groups and committees that can play a role in turning the plan into achievable actions in the next chapter.

Image credit: Mark Willis; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2019



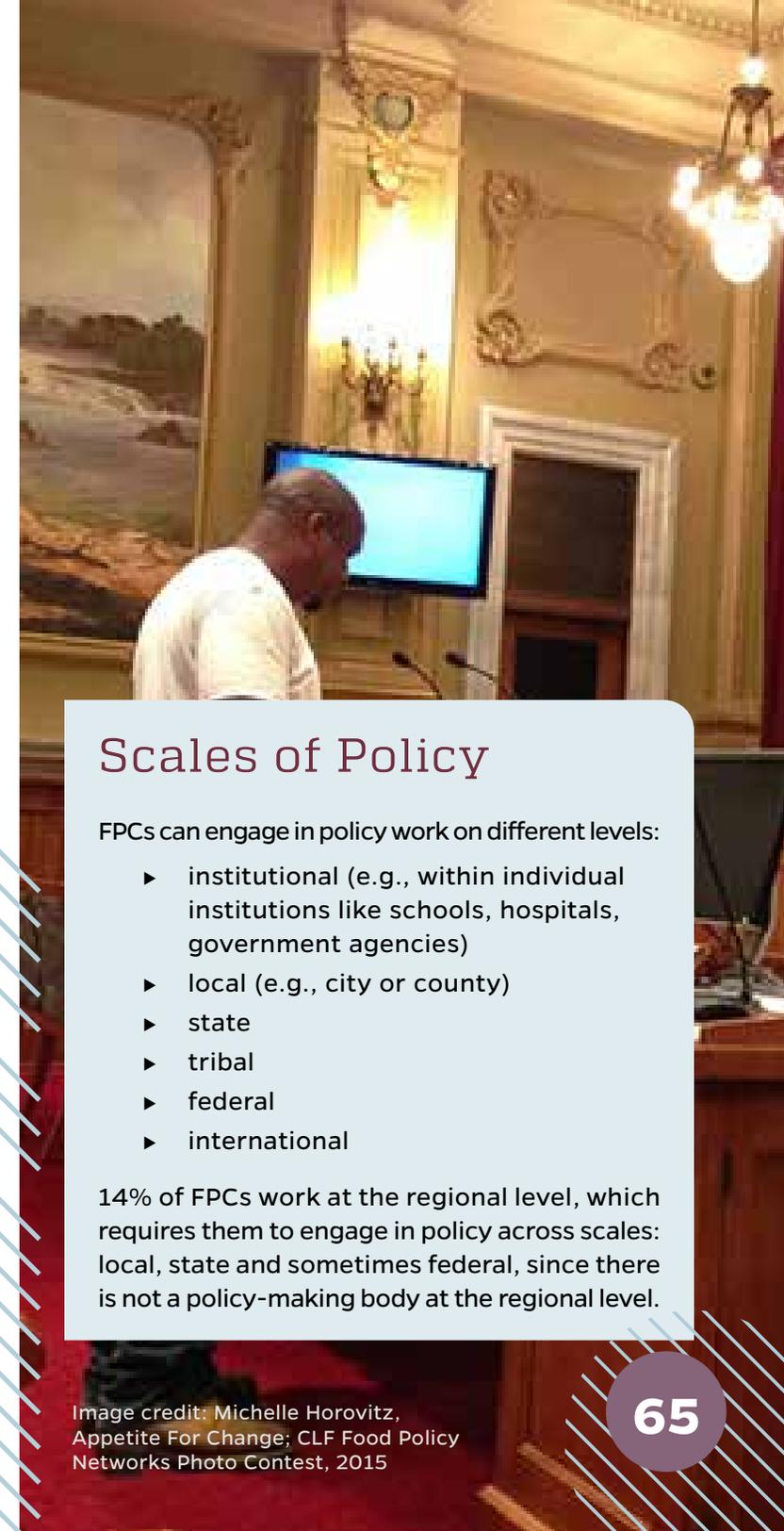
# Chapter 8.

## Putting the “Policy” in an FPC

You’ve already seen an overview of what a policy is and the kind of policy work an FPC can do. Now, let’s take a closer look at policies, from how they are created to how they are implemented. FPCs are concerned mostly with public policies, ones made by state, local, and tribal governing bodies. They may also address policies generated by institutions, such as schools and hospitals. Policies can be reflected in laws and ordinances, regulations, or in permitting and licensing processes. Policies can also appear in statements of intentions or direction—such things as resolutions or executive orders.

With your vision/mission statement in place, some sort of strategic plan in hand, and a working council, you now have to prioritize which policies to pursue first. Historically, specific issues in a local community were often the impetus for creating a council. Those issues might include a documented rise in hunger, the loss of historic farmland, a natural disaster, or an incoming government that has stated its interest in addressing food system issues. With public attention already focused on that topic, FPCs would promote policies that addressed that immediate concern. Or council members would decide a priority area to work on. But what we’ve seen in the last two years, as a result of the pandemic, is that there have been opportunities to work on food policies that didn’t exist before.

One example comes from the **Del Norte and Tribal Lands Community Food Council** in California. According to Amanda Hixson, Food Program Director for the Council, “The silver lining of COVID-19 is that it has kickstarted a broader collaboration of willing stakeholders that I had been struggling to form before



### Scales of Policy

FPCs can engage in policy work on different levels:

- ▶ institutional (e.g., within individual institutions like schools, hospitals, government agencies)
- ▶ local (e.g., city or county)
- ▶ state
- ▶ tribal
- ▶ federal
- ▶ international

14% of FPCs work at the regional level, which requires them to engage in policy across scales: local, state and sometimes federal, since there is not a policy-making body at the regional level.

COVID.” Government response to the pandemic also made new money available to Del Norte and other FPCs. “We went from famine to feast,” remarked Hixson.

Whatever policies you tackle, use the affiliation of your members—whether they come from the community, business, government, education, or nonprofits—to leverage their contacts to help turn policy recommendations into reality, with meaningful impact on your community food system.

## Promoting New Mexican Agriculture

Farming has been a way of life for New Mexicans for thousands of years, and as such, the **New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council** (NMFAPC) and others working on food issues thought the state could do more to promote agriculture. Since its creation in 2003, the council and affiliated groups have secured hundreds of thousands of state dollars annually for such initiatives as farm-to-school and produce-incentive programs for WIC and SNAP participants, and for lower-income senior citizens. For example, using funds from the USDA’s Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program, Santa Fe-based Farm to Table organized the city’s Southside Farmers Market (later renamed “Del Sur Market”), which provides a more accessible location for the city’s lower-income families to

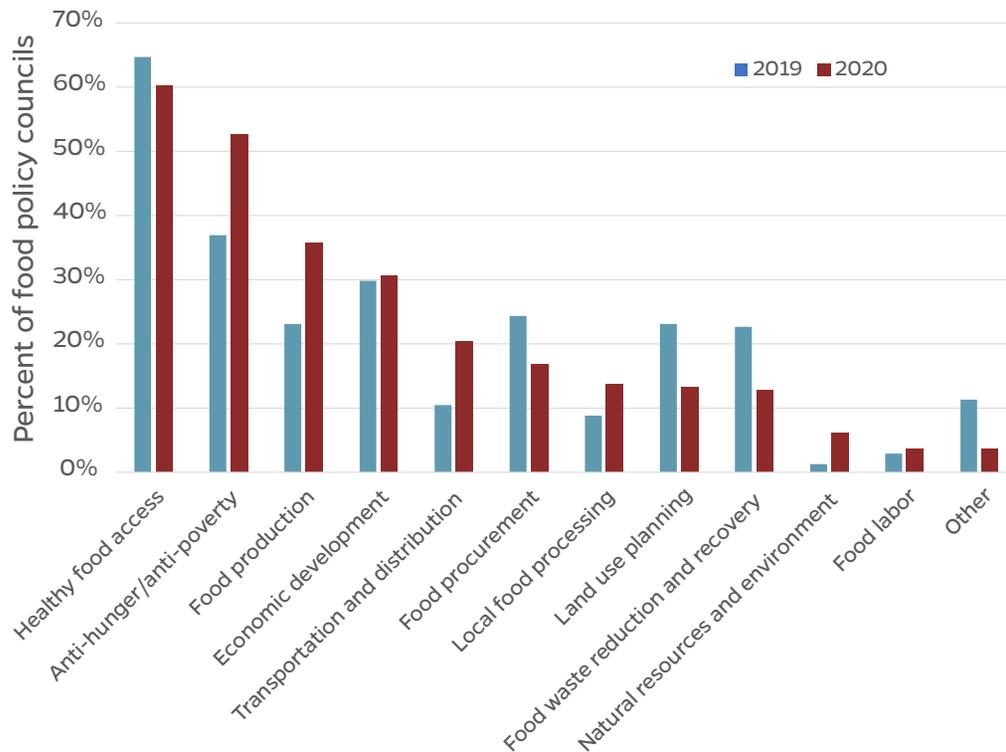
shop. Today, that market is sponsored by a local hospital and offers three different produce-incentive programs to area residents. Statewide, during the 2019-2020 school year, almost \$1.2 million was spent by 57 New Mexico school districts purchasing food from New Mexico farmers. That food was served to 171,000 students. After many years of touting the value of farm-to-school to farmers and educators, Farm to Table and the NMFAPC convinced the NM Public Education Department to create a full-time position dedicated to farm-to-school administration. In the newest addition to the state’s lineup of direct-from-the-farmer programs, nearly \$150,000 in state funds are being used to purchase locally grown food for Senior Meal Programs.



# Policy Areas

An FPC can have a range of policy goals. Here are some policy areas that receive attention from councils. You can get a sense of specific accomplishments from the “Wheels of Achievement,” which reflect the policies, partnerships and programs of various FPCs for [2016](#), [2018](#), [2019](#), [2020](#), and [2021](#).

**Food procurement** focuses on how and which foods are bought and distributed by both public and private institutions, such as schools and hospitals, with an emphasis on having those institutions procure foods that align with stated social, health, and environmental values as much as possible.



## Food procurement

The **Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council** in Ohio makes it easy for institutions, like schools and early childcare centers to buy from local farmers through planning, education and advocacy. In 2019, the FPC was awarded a USDA Farm to School Planning Grant to create the Greater Cincinnati Regional Farm to School Action Plan. This process helped to build regional coordination and the infrastructure for four school districts to participate in the Feed Our Future campaign. This campaign supports food service professionals in using local foods in school menus and builds the capacity of educators to bring food systems lessons into their classrooms. Lastly, the FPC works with institutions to adopt policies to make it easier to buy food from more than just wholesale food distributors.

Figure: Top 3 policy priorities of FPCs in 2019 and 2020.

Source: 2019 and 2020 Food Policy Networks project annual surveys of food policy councils.

## Good Food Purchasing Policy

Many FPCs have advocated for the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP), which encourages institutions to consider five main values when buying food: local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, nutrition, and animal welfare. Procurement changes can be achieved by a change in institutional policy or a local or state law that requires schools or other public institutions to buy a certain amount of produce in line with these values. The **Chicago Food Policy Action Council** first convinced city officials and Chicago Public Schools to adopt the GFPP guidelines when considering food purchases, and then was able to expand it to all of Cook County. For more information about the GFPP, visit the [Center for Good Food Purchasing](#) website.

## Land use planning

The **Food in Neighborhoods Community Coalition** in Louisville, Kentucky, helped rewrite urban agriculture sections of the city's Land Development Code to reduce barriers and increase flexibility for urban agriculture. The changes, adopted in June 2021, include allowing community gardens in all zoning districts and ending regulations on parking spaces needed at those gardens and market gardens.

**Healthy food access** includes programs that encourage food and nutrition incentives at farmers markets, policies to improve access to healthier foods for low-income people, and school wellness policies, which can stress both improved nutrition and exercise.

**Food waste reduction and recovery** focuses on ways to divert excess food from landfills and incinerators to anti-hunger initiatives, or to turn waste into useful products, such as compost or biodiesel.

**Anti-hunger/anti-poverty** can focus on various areas, such as encouraging enrollment in SNAP and other federal social assistance programs, creating programs that help students access nutritious meals when school is not in session, or advocacy for livable wages.

**Land use planning** focuses on the inclusion of food and agriculture in planning and zoning activities, such as creating an agricultural land use, passing an ordinance that allows for urban agriculture, ensuring that food and agriculture are included in land use plans, and farmland protection efforts.

**Food production** is a broad policy category. It includes creating new markets for farmers, ranchers, and fishers; advocating for policies that encourage sustainable and regenerative production practices; and raising awareness about buying from local producers.

**Local food processing** looks to promote small-scale food processing. This can include advocating for laws that support cottage food industries, easing permitting regulations for value-added entrepreneurs, or supporting the creation of community kitchens, where culinary entrepreneurs can share facilities.

**Food labor** includes everyone who produces, processes, distributes, sells, and serves food. Policy work in this area is focused on wage earners, as opposed to business/farm owners and entrepreneurs, and addresses such things as minimum wage standards, sick leave, and working conditions.

## Close Up on Climate Change

Some FPCs are taking action to address growing concerns about climate change. Councils have been working to reduce or mitigate greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change in several ways:

- ▶ advocating for policies to encourage more plant-based diets
- ▶ reducing wasted food
- ▶ supporting farmers in transitioning to more climate-friendly production systems
- ▶ increasing awareness of the impacts of climate change on agriculture
- ▶ working to preserve farmland and promote urban agriculture
- ▶ encouraging governments to create food resilience plans

Learn more about councils working across these different areas from [this blogpost](#) from the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future.

FPCs may also consider advocating for the [Cool Food Pledge](#), a climate-friendly food procurement policy. Dining facilities such as restaurants, businesses, city governments, universities, and hospitals can commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with food served by 25 percent by 2030. This is a level of ambition in line with achieving the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement.

Image credit: Amanda Chin, The Food Project; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2017

## Transportation and distribution

To improve access to grocery stores by people who rely on public transportation, the **Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition** in Missouri and Kansas convened the Grocery Access Task Force, which studied the conditions at 44 bus stops, surveyed 360 residents, and conducted focus groups and ride alongs. The task force had three recommendations: 1. information - regional transit agency update route maps to include WIC grocery stores; 2. infrastructure - allocate GO Bonds (Kansas City, MO) and pass Complete Streets policies (Kansas City, KS and MO); 3. affordability - support Zero Fare Transit (Kansas City, MO). As a result of the task force's work, and advocacy by the Coalition and partner agencies, the City of Kansas City, Missouri allocated new bond funding and passed a new complete streets ordinance to support grocery shopping by bus, and the regional transit authority provided new trip planning tools and bus stop signage to show grocery stores near bus stops.

**Natural resources and environment** covers a wide range of issues associated with sustainability and conservation, including water and land conservation efforts, promotion of organic or regenerative agriculture practices, regulations to reduce use of pesticides and inorganic fertilizers, and issues related to climate change and resiliency.

**Economic development** focuses on policies that promote and support the development of food and agriculture as economic drivers. This could include the development of food hubs, which seek to connect small food producers with institutional buyers, or the promotion of local food businesses and farms.

**Transportation and distribution** looks at ways to make it easier for consumers to reach healthy food retail outlets through biking, walking, or public transit. On the distribution side, policies might focus on last-mile food distribution from wholesale suppliers to food retailers.

For toolkits focused on developing and implementing **local** and **state** food policies, see "Good Laws, Good Food," created by the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic and the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. Topics covered include food system infrastructure, land use planning and regulation, urban agriculture, and school food and nutrition education.

## Which Policies to Pursue?

The examples of policy areas above are not exhaustive and, as we mentioned, you might have one that's unique to your community. FPCs should try to set their policy priorities so they can use their time and resources in the most effective way. If a council did a community food assessment or used another tool to gather information about their food system concerns, the results of that research should shape policy priorities.

A council can decide what to pursue using this [tool](#), which helps them rate policies based on their feasibility, ranked 1, 2, or 3, relative to different criteria. For example, how much does the policy reflect the council's mission or vision statement? How well does the policy address recommendations made in a strategic plan? Is there a local official or public figure who champions the proposal? These considerations, and more, can direct councils to the policy issues where they can have the most impact.

Image credit: Amy Kuras, Detroit Food Policy Council;  
CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2017



Another possible way to assess priorities is by sending out a survey to organizations in your network. The **Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition** (KS/MO) did this in 2018, asking respondents to rank their top concerns in three general policy areas: food security, institutional food, and farming. You can see the survey [here](#).

Still another tool to help prioritize policy work was created by the **Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council** in Colorado. It used this [Policy Criteria Screen](#) to weigh the merits of policy ideas being considered by its Policy Working Group. The criteria examined include the demonstrated interest; how effective, impactful, scalable, tested, and equitable the policy is; and how much the policy is aligned with the council's policy platform, Food Vision and Action plan, and other relevant plans. The Denver council's process for setting policy priorities also considered the political feasibility of a policy. Will residents and elected officials be open to addressing, let alone implementing, a proposed policy?

There's no question that some FPCs will want to tackle food system issues that could be controversial. Individual councils will have to decide if they want to invest their political capital in potentially divisive issues. Of course, what's controversial in one community might not raise an eyebrow in another. And larger issues that impact the food system might also stir disagreements within a council, as the pandemic showed for at least one FPC. The **Whatcom County Food System Committee** in Washington, housed under the county council, reported that it lost its farmer representative, as the pandemic exacerbated the already-strained relationship between large farmers and labor representatives.

# Chapter 9. Operating a Food Policy Council

**A**s you can see, policy work can take a variety of forms. Since FPCs are advisory—they can't enact policies—they have to marshal good evidence and key allies to get things done. Those efforts are easier when council members have a handle on operational issues. This chapter gives a brief look at some of those issues and how existing FPCs handle them.

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## The Governing Structure

Who serves on a council, what their responsibilities are, and what the council will do can be spelled out in a number of ways. For government-affiliated councils, some of these basic issues are defined in the resolution or law that created the council. The **Santa Fe Advisory Council on Food Policy** in New Mexico was created by a joint [resolution](#) of the city and Santa Fe County. It set the number of members at 13 and specified that nine would come from the private sector and two each from the city and the county. The resolution also outlined the council's basic duties, such as monitoring city and county nutrition programs and making policy recommendations for the food system.

Details of the organization's structure and duties also appear in a council's bylaws, although not all councils have bylaws per se. For volunteer or non-incorporated councils, these are sometimes called governance guidelines. The Public Health Law Center defines bylaws, in part, as “written rules that govern the internal operations of an organization and define the organization's purpose, membership requirements, and the management of its operations including how meetings should be conducted and how offices are to be assigned... Bylaws provide



guidance, structure, goals, and priorities, which are especially vital for a newly formed council.”

The topics covered in bylaws include:

- the name of the organization
- its purpose
- the council’s duties and responsibilities, including how it will address equity and inclusion
- requirement for membership, including whether there are non-voting members and terms of members
- frequency of meetings
- how decisions are made
- committee structure
- leadership positions and titles (e.g., chair or co-chair)

You can read more about bylaws for food policy councils [here](#).

The **Montgomery County Food Council** in Maryland offers one example of how a council might be structured. It has a board of directors, which is required for any council that operates as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. In addition to establishing the number of Council and Board members, with a maximum and a minimum, and criteria for who can serve, the [bylaws](#) also set out the role of officers and the executive director. The Council’s bylaws establish committees and subcommittees; it calls the latter working groups, which usually focus on one specific issue area. The original committees outlined were Policy, Development, and Monitoring and Evaluation. The working groups were Environmental Impact, Food Economy, Food Education, and Food Recovery and Access. The bylaws note that members could propose new committees and working groups as needed. The bylaws, however, do not extensively address diversity, so the council recently formed a [Food](#)

**Security Community Advisory Board** that brings together residents with lived experience of food insecurity and a Racial Equity Committee to implement a Racial Equity Action Plan.

Another **example of bylaws** comes from the **Cass County Local Food Policy Council** in Iowa. Unlike the Montgomery council, which is a nonprofit, this FPC is embedded in government and members are appointed by the Board of Supervisors, two of whom participate in the council. The council consists of up to nine members with an interest in food-related issues representing a mix of backgrounds relating to the food system, local advocacy groups, and government. Non-voting members, called associates, can also participate. Members choose officers and an executive committee.

Image credit: Vanessa Garcia Polanco, Rhode Island Food Policy Council; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2017



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# Leadership

## FPC Leadership Examples

Here are three examples of how an FPC might structure its leadership:

- ▶ The **Dubuque County Food Policy Council** in Iowa is led by a chair and supported by a co-chair.
- ▶ The **Whitman County Food Coalition** in Washington has two co-chairs, along with a vice-chair and secretary, who are all members of the executive board.
- ▶ The **San Mateo Food System Alliance** in California is led by a Steering Committee of five members, which seeks to represent the diversity of the membership and the regional food system as a whole and is made up of members of the alliance. A local non-profit is contracted to serve as the network manager and provides facilitation and coordination support.

Having an effective leader, or leaders, is key when it comes time to making an FPC operate and ensuring that the multiplicity of voices is taken into consideration, as referenced earlier in Chapter 6. Some councils go with a board-like structure, like the ones many nonprofits have, which put a single person in charge—a president or chair. But some councils have shared leadership models. Whichever model your FPC chooses, keep in mind some of the characteristics that good leaders possess, including:

- respect for all members
- appreciation of historical and sociological context of the community
- demonstration of humility and courage

Additionally, leaders may need to possess an ability to remain neutral during discussions and skills at facilitating meetings. Some councils may rotate facilitators so that the leader is not the only one facilitating.

Some councils may mix and match leadership models, e.g., some have a chair/ vice chair and a steering committee, or co-chairs and a steering committee.

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# Making Decisions

Even though the members of FPCs may have a shared commitment to their vision for the food system, they also have diverse backgrounds and experience. Making decisions as a group, in any group, can sometimes test the members' and staff's patience.

As we mentioned earlier, much of the work on some FPCs is done by various committees. They shape proposals before bringing them to the full council for a vote. Whatever voting method is used to reach decisions, the council should engage in open, healthy debate before settling an issue. The process should allow everyone to feel comfortable expressing opinions. The “open” part of the debate and decision-making process is key. The council should work in a transparent way, with no backroom deals.

At times, the debate might move from healthy to heated, and a staff member from one county FPC said that's when he steps in to defuse the situation. That way, “they can be upset with a staff member and not someone else on the council.” Keeping discussions focused and non-inflammatory also relies on the skills of the person running the meetings.

Some disagreement is bound to arise when FPCs tackle more controversial issues, such as minimum wage or environmental regulations. Some FPCs, as they get off the ground, opt to initially focus on less contentious issues, so they can build relationships and momentum, then turn to more controversial projects. The [\*\*National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation\*\*](#) has many online resources that address how to hold meaningful discussions on a wide range of topics and come to decisions.

How does an FPC ultimately decide what to pursue? There are several different models for group decision making, as outlined by network weaving expert June Holley:

- Majority voting: more than 50 percent of members agree on decision
- Consensus: everyone must agree on decision, a process that can be slow
- Consent: someone may block a proposed decision, but they must suggest an alternative
- Co-design: many people are involved in collaboratively designing new structures or processes
- Advice: everyone can give input, but a smaller “circle” makes the decision. You can learn more about circles as part of the decision-making process in this [webinar](#) by June Holley.

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## When Members Don't Vote

At some times, not all members of a council will take part in the decision-making process. Some government-affiliated members of an FPC might abstain, but other members from time to time might also feel a conflict of interest or have another reason for not voting. For government employees, this can happen when the members' specific department or the administration as a whole might have a stated position on the issue, and the members don't want to be in conflict with it. Members with ties to business or other nonprofits might have the same constraints. This circumstance, however, should not keep the council as a whole from pursuing the issue.



Image credit: Mark Willis; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2019

# Staffing

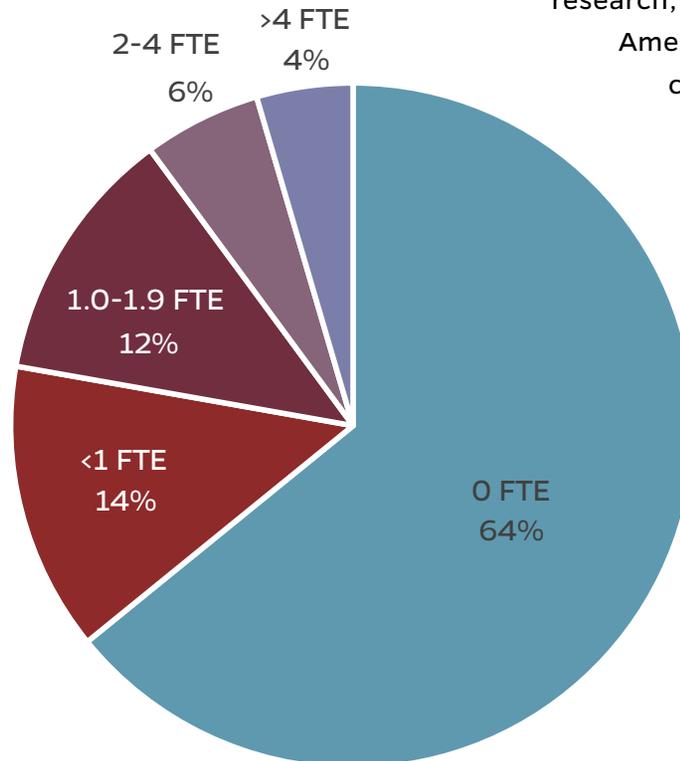
## Paid Staff

Along with the members who volunteer, an FPC needs to consider the value of having paid staff members—if it can afford it. As the chart here shows, most councils do not have paid staff. For those that do, many start off with a single coordinator or director, who can keep a council organized and moving forward. This could be a full-time or part-time position, depending on the council's needs and funds.

With leadership and a governing structure in place, FPCs can turn to their day-to-day operations. Councils sometimes rely on a half-time or full-time staff person to help with those tasks. For many FPCs, though, the idea of having staff is only a pipe dream. Many FPCs benefit from in-kind staff support either from a nonprofit or government employee. The **Prince George's Food Equity Council** in Maryland is staffed by a nonprofit public health institute, which also provides fiscal sponsorship for the council. For many councils, staff work falls on the members themselves, who are likely volunteers.

Some councils turn to **AmeriCorps VISTA** members, who work for a national service program designed to aid nonprofits on the local, state, and national levels. Members of the AmeriCorps VISTA program have worked with FPCs to support boards and committees, develop marketing materials, conduct research, and update websites, among other duties. Engaging AmeriCorps VISTA members can be useful to councils because it requires relatively minimal financial investment from the council to receive full-time staffing support for a temporary period.

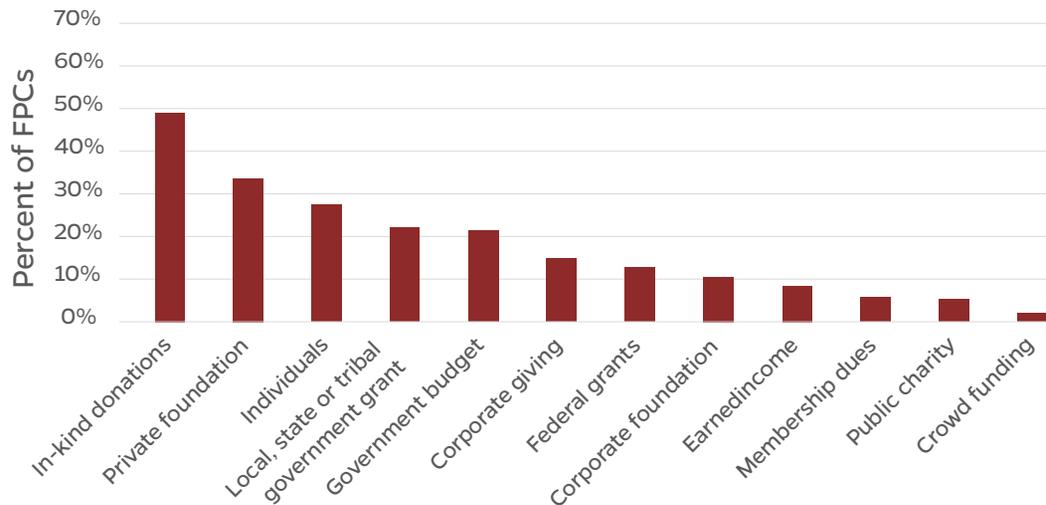
Figure: Percent of FPCs by number of paid staff in full-time equivalents (FTE). Source: 2020 Food Policy Networks project annual survey of food policy councils.



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# Funding

Whether or not an FPC has paid staff and other resources comes down, of course, to money. The reality is, about two-thirds of FPCs have budgets of \$10,000 or less. FPCs will pursue nonprofit—501(c)3 or 501(c)4—status to independently seek funding for their council work. Nonprofit FPCs or ones housed in nonprofits are more likely to receive funding compared to other organization types. A greater proportion of councils organized as nonprofits have budgets over \$100,000 compared to other organization types. Among the FPCs that receive funding, they typically count on a mixture of foundation grants, government money, and individual and in-kind donations. Not surprisingly, the amount of funding an FPC receives influences the amount of policy work it can do.



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Figure: Percent of FPCs that received funding from select funding sources in 2019.  
Source: 2019 Food Policy Networks project annual survey of food policy councils.

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FPCs are eligible for funding under various federal programs, primarily through the US Department of Agriculture, such as:

- Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program
- Local Food Promotion Program
- Farmers Market Promotion Program
- Regional Food Systems Partnership Program
- Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP)
- Local Foods, Local Places Grant (joint program with the Environmental Protection Agency)
- National Institute of Food and Agriculture Award
- Rural Business Development Grant

You can learn about these and other programs through this Food Policy Networks [document](#), which also has specific examples of FPCs that received federal funding through the programs in 2020. The **Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance** in New York, for example, received \$170,000 from the USDA Regional Food Systems Partnership Program to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the collaboration, including operational structures, recruitment and engagement, and government partnerships. For other possible funding sources for FPCs and examples of how several councils combine income sources, read [Funding Food Policy Councils: Stories from the Field](#).

When approaching foundations for money, remember the broad nature of FPC work and tailor grant requests to foundations that support the following areas:

- health and nutrition
- hunger
- education
- community development
- civic participation and engagement
- capacity building (improving nonprofit effectiveness)
- environmental sustainability

As you start the fundraising process, keep these ideas in mind, too:

- Emphasize the positives of FPCs beyond such obvious goals as achieving food security, food justice and equity, and sustainability. Councils serve broader goals, such as bringing together people from various sectors to work collaboratively and providing technical expertise to governments on the food system.
- Think broadly and creatively about which local organizations and institutions may have common interests with the FPC (e.g., health insurance companies or hospitals).
- Do your homework—research the funders’ interests, guidelines, and what they have supported in the past. Once you have done some research, talk to the funder’s appropriate program staff about your ideas if possible.
- Consider whether accepting funds from a particular business or organization could affect the FPC’s integrity or ability to speak out on important issues (or create even an appearance of this).
- Plan for continuity and sustainability of funding—what happens if one source dries up, for example if there is a change in government or if a foundation changes priorities or sunsets?

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## Communication

It's hard to overstate the importance of communication for an FPC, both external and internal. For this reason, the CLF created [\*\*Developing A Communication Strategy: A Guide For Food Policy Councils\*\*](#) that takes a deeper dive into communication strategies and FPC examples and offers worksheets to get started.

An FPC is most effective when the community knows it exists and understands what its goals are. You'll need support from people and organizations outside the council to turn your recommendations into policies that impact the food system. Some FPCs create a *strategic communications plan*, which describes an organization's communication goals, objectives, values, key audiences, channels, messaging, and activities. Other councils have a communications committee to help guide their work. A committee can develop messages, provide regular oversight of the FPC's communication activities, serve as a media advisor and liaison, and develop relationships with the media. Some combination of council members and staff usually handle the communications for most FPCs.

For external communications, you will have different audiences and different methods of reaching them. To reach decision-makers on public policy, you can network with them face to face, as well produce and distribute reports that reflect current food system conditions and what your FPC hopes to achieve. Communicate your concerns and achievements frequently with your local, state, and national elected officials and their staff. If your FPC is part of a city or state government, you may need to go through your appointing body, such as the city council, but often you can directly communicate your support of a certain bill or possible legislative action. Members should attend relevant local or regional government meetings to present updates whenever possible.

Community engagement, which can include public events such as food summits and farm tours, helps build awareness and support. And getting out your



Image credit: Amanda Chin, The Food Project; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2017

message through both traditional and social media helps your message reach an even wider audience.

With traditional media, you should send press releases to local outlets to promote events, public meetings, and policy or legislative successes. An FPC could also designate someone on the council or affiliated with it to write opinion pieces for the local paper.

For most councils, using social media means having a website that is updated frequently, a Facebook page that is also current, and perhaps having presence on such apps as Twitter or Instagram. Having a website is the best way to connect directly with stakeholders, donors, and the community at large, although there are costs involved with purchasing a domain name and having the site hosted. Having someone design the website can be a one-time expense, but building a simple site on WordPress, Wix, Weebly, or Squarespace, among others, could be done by someone in your organization or a volunteer with some technical savvy. The website [DonorBox](#) examined free and low-cost platforms that nonprofits can use to build a site.

Along with describing a council's mission, activities, and achievements, a website can let stakeholders share their stories with a large audience. A website ideally should also have a way for people to make donations online. And once a site is up, someone should be in charge of making periodic updates, so the content is fresh. The website doesn't have to only highlight the FPC's activities, it can also highlight relevant "goings-on" throughout your community.

Unlike building and maintaining a website, social media is free, and the variety of apps commonly used let you choose the best one, or more, for your needs. Social media is particularly useful for creating a dialogue, rather than simply broadcasting your message. But social media outlets are most effective when they are used frequently. Posting on these sites lets you engage with people who already know about your work and help you find potential new donors, volun-

teers, or members. This 2021 [article](#) in *Forbes* looks at the various platforms and how nonprofits can use them to increase their visibility and attract donors.

To recap their achievements, some FPCs choose or are required to release an annual report. But a council shouldn't feel obligated to publish a glossy report, or to wait for a year to pass to trumpet its accomplishments. That's the beauty of having a website and posting on social media—you can communicate directly and immediately to a wide audience, without any filters.

However you choose to communicate with your external audience to promote your efforts, the underlying goal is to work for policy change. You want stakeholders in the community to be informed about issues in your local food system, then work with you to address them. In other words, your external communication activities should help you set the stage for future policy proposals. You can “prepare” the public and policymakers with stories about the food system, projects, and people, and even spotlight policy initiatives from other cities and states that you may want to adopt in your community.

For internal communication, members can educate each other, with some councils setting aside time at meetings for members to share information. The communication that takes place during an assessment and planning process is also an opportunity to educate each other about different part of the food system. In fact, this should be an ongoing part of the FPC's work, as its members are constantly learning about each other's work. An FPC could also create a newsletter for members and to share with partner organizations. To facilitate this internal communication, a council should designate a member to take notes at meeting and share information afterward. Some tools for sharing information internally include starting a listserv, Google Group, or private Facebook Group, which allows members to post messages and documents just to group members.

# Chapter 10.

## Measuring Your Impact: Monitoring and Evaluation

**T**he monitoring and evaluation of FPCs and their activities can serve many purposes. Collecting and tracking data helps an FPC determine if it's reaching its goals in shaping effective policies that are making concrete changes to the food system. Monitoring and evaluation are also useful for showing funders, government officials, and your community what you're doing and for highlighting your successes.

- **Monitoring** lets you check the performance of a project over time, with the goal of understanding how something is working and when and if modifications are needed.
- **Evaluation** is a tool for assessing the extent to which program or policy goals were met. The results of this process can be shared to demonstrate lessons learned and the impact of a particular program or policy.

While monitoring and evaluation are important, they can be challenging. At times, when doing advocacy work, it can seem like nothing concrete is happening or that your progress is not always linear. Successful advocacy efforts are characterized not by their ability to proceed along a predefined track, but by their ability to adapt to changing circumstances at multiple levels of government and across institutions. The Food Policy Networks project has outlined steps you can take for successful monitoring and evaluation in [\*\*Get it Toolgether: Assessing Your Food Council's Ability to Do Policy Work.\*\*](#)

Image credit: Dagmar Holl; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020



Some of the tools you can use for the monitoring and evaluation process include:

- Surveys (household, social network, organizational)
- In-depth/key informant interviews
- Focus groups
- Direct observation
- Community mapping/social mapping
- Story telling

Getting outside help from a university, for instance, in designing and implementing an evaluation is a common FPC practice.

So, what kind of evaluation should you do? You may want to evaluate the FPC itself and how it operates. You may want to evaluate what the FPC has been able to accomplish in its action plan or to evaluate a specific program or policy in the action plan. Evaluations can be both internal and external.

Image credit: Pratyoosh Kashyap; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020



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## Internal Evaluation

With an internal evaluation, FPCs gather information to assess the satisfaction of its members with the general operations of the council. This type of evaluation is important to understand what is working well, and where improvements are needed. It usually asks questions about how the FPC is operating, relationships, benefits, etc. Evaluation topics may include the following:

- Are FPC meetings productive, focused, and effective?
- Are members engaged across multiple sectors? Do you have the right mix?
- What are members' expectations of the FPC and are these expectations met?
- According to members, how successful is the council in achieving its goals? What factors help support this success?
- Does the FPC effectively work with partners to meet its goals?
- Is the FPC able to address opportunity gaps?
- What challenges does the council face? How do members overcome these challenges?
- What are ways to improve the council?

Evaluation results can be used to make improvements in the partnership that may include expanding membership to represent food-related sectors; building the knowledge and skills of partners; improving the functioning and effectiveness of the partnership; or increasing engagement of partners in program planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [\*\*Partnership Evaluation: Guidebook and Resources\*\*](#) clarifies approaches and methods of partnership evaluation, provides examples and tools, and recommends resources for additional reading.

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## External Evaluation

### Building Evaluation Capacity

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy (HACFP) benefitted from a comprehensive **evaluation** of its approach and operations, as well as the extent that its work resulted in positive outcomes for residents, the city, non-profits, and the implementation of policies and ordinances. Evaluators conducted interviews; reviewed secondary documents; and fielded surveys of residents, government employees and nonprofits. The evaluators used instruments to track **meeting logistics, interactions, and decision-making processes; meeting outputs; and policy flows** starting with inputs all the way to outlining desired impacts in the community.

External evaluation simply means evaluating the efforts of your FPC—what you said you were going to do and what you actually did. While most FPCs have few resources available to evaluate, there are creative ways to track your accomplishments.

If you have developed an action plan, you'll want to focus on the extent to which policies, initiatives, and approaches specified in the plan are implemented, while also noting the challenges in accomplishing objectives in the plan. Evaluation of the implementation of the action plan requires you to collect or look for available sources of data to show implementation of these programs or policies. For example, if you have an activity to provide electronic benefits transfer (EBT) machines to farmers markets to accept SNAP benefits, then detailed information on the farmers markets participating in the program and increased EBT sales can be obtained from both your SNAP program and the Department of Agriculture as evaluation measures to show the implementation of the program. Likewise, if you have an activity that includes the passage of a chicken or bee ordinance, you can collect the number of permits issued.

If you maintain a website or Facebook page, include a tab that highlights your accomplishments. People want to be associated with efforts that are getting things done—make it easy for them to discover why your FPC is worth joining or supporting. One example of this comes from the website of the **Food Policy Council of San Antonio** in Texas, which has [a page dedicated to the council's accomplishments](#). An FPC can also maintain a scorecard or dashboard on their site. Along with posting achievements online, some groups produce an annual report to showcase their accomplishments. The **Montgomery County Food Equity Coalition** in Ohio, for example, published an [annual report in 2020](#) that looked at its successes in such areas as sustainability, economic development, and agriculture.



Image credit: Justin Munroe;  
CLF Food Policy Networks  
Photo Contest, 2018

So far, we have been talking about evaluations that track specific objectives, outputs, and outcomes. Another approach is values-based planning and evaluation described in the [\*\*Whole Measures for Community Food Systems \(CFS\) tool\*\*](#). Whole Measures CFS reflects ideas developed by the Center for Whole Communities, whose mission is to create “inclusive communities that are strongly rooted in place and where all people—regardless of income, race, or background—have access to and a healthy relationship with the natural world.” The Whole Measures CFS tool is based on six fields of practice that reflect a vision for whole communities. The fields include Justice and Fairness, Strong Communities, Vibrant Farms, Healthy People, Sustainable EcoSystems, and Thriving Local Economies. At its core, Whole Measures CFS aims to assess strengths and weaknesses of food system activities based on values assigned to each of the fields. This type of planning and evaluation helps develop a shared vision and common measures among partner organizations. It also helps explore areas of difference so that stronger collaborations can develop. Dialogue between diverse groups in the community is a key part of the process—as it is, really, in all aspects of an FPC’s work.

Evaluation of FPCs can take many forms and be conducted for different purposes. At a minimum the evaluation should address *what worked* and *what changed*. For example, how did you implement the initiative and how could it be improved (what worked) and in what ways did the initiative make a difference (what changed)? Your partners must be engaged in developing the evaluation to help ensure that the evaluation is designed to answer questions important to the partners, which increases the likelihood of continued support of the program and that the evaluation findings will be used.

You can find more information about evaluation in the FPN webinar [\*\*“Edible Inquiries: Food Policy Research Connections – Monitoring and Evaluation.”\*\*](#)

# Chapter 11.

## Lessons Learned

**T**he people who form an FPC often come from diverse backgrounds—socio-economically, ethnically, geographically. They may have various experiences with or knowledge of the community food system. But they share a commitment to achieving a wide range of goals in their communities, including:

- food security
- food system resilience
- food justice
- racial equity
- inclusivity and diversity
- sustainability
- addressing the impacts of climate change on the food system and vice versa

Making changes to the food system means focusing on the three “P”s of Projects, Partners, and Policies. FPCs, of course, sometimes work on projects and must form partnerships. But their real concern should be that third P— shaping the creation of policies at the local, state, regional, and tribal nations levels that create a food system that works for everyone.

Image credit: Clare DiSanto; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020



You've seen that FPCs come in many "flavors," and only you and those you work with know what works best where you live. But regardless of your particulars, several points addressed throughout this manual will help any FPC do its work:

- Cultivate relationships with as many stakeholders as possible, including community groups, businesses, government agencies, and existing nonprofits or advocacy groups.
- Invest in and engage with residents from communities who are harmed by the current state of the food system.
- Include a diverse range of people that reflect the demographics of your community.
- Educate the public and policymakers constantly.
- Look for synergy between all levels of government.

We've looked at examples of what food policies councils have done to achieve those goals, and there are dozens more. For instance, in 2020, the **Nebraska Food Council** partnered with a state senator on a legislative interim study to examine farm-to-school programs in Nebraska. The council took the lead in drafting the Interim Study Resolution authorizing the Legislature's Agricultural Committee to research, write and issue the farm-to-school report. That work led to the passage the next year of a law that created a farm-to-school program in the state department of education. The legislation was written by Sen. Tom Brandt's office with input from the Nebraska Food Council. And in Pima County, Arizona, the county **Food System Alliance** helped overturn county health regulations that made it hard for schools and restaurants to serve food raised on small farms. Across the country, people see a need for systemic change in how we raise, process, distribute, and consume our food.

You now have the tools to create a key component in bringing change to the food system. You can follow the models of others dedicated to food security, food justice, and racial equity while forging specific policies and programs that

target the needs of the people most impacted by food systems challenges. The problems we face across the country in building a better food system sometimes seem overwhelming. But working with like-minded people from across the food system, you can build networks, educate, and create policy changes that help many people. As part of an FPC, you can make a difference.

At times, food policy work can be frustrating. Lawmakers might ignore your recommendations; funding can be scarce; members might have varying levels of commitment to the cause. But seeing a policy put in place that brings fresh fruits and vegetables to school kids, or helps farmers steward land their families have worked for generations, makes the frustrations melt away. FPC work is vital to ensuring that the fruits of this land of plenty are enjoyed by all.

**FOOD POLICY  
NETWORKS**



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