

Emerging Models of Youth Involvement in Food Policy Councils: Four Case Examples

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Abstract

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) are groups of stakeholders that come together to make policy and programming recommendations to improve local or regional food systems. Many FPCs aim to include a diverse group of participants, yet young people are seldom offered the chance to participate in FPC affairs, despite the growth of youth interest and contributions to the food movement. To date, there has been little research regarding youth involvement in FPCs. This research is focused on youth (defined here as high-school aged young people) participation in FPCs, and highlights four examples of Councils that are either youth-led, or contain a youth component of an FPC. The information gathered from interviews informs the recommendations aimed at FPCs so that they may begin or improve on engaging youth effectively in substantive decision-making processes.

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Emerging Models of Youth Involvement in Food Policy Councils: Four Case Examples

Preface

My interest in agriculture and food systems grew out of my passion for and work experience in youth development. Prior to attending graduate school, I spent many years working with young people in outdoor settings. At first, I worked within a youth development model that focused on growth and empowerment through intense physical challenges such as backpacking, climbing or ropes courses.

However, in September of 2009, I took an internship with Hidden Villa Farm and Wilderness Preserve in Los Altos Hills, CA, and began a new chapter in my youth work centered on the intersections of youth development, food, and agriculture. As a garden coordinator for the Education Garden, I spent time sifting compost, digging garden beds, planting seeds, and harvesting produce with children and young adults. Often, garden lessons and observations were tied to issues relating to food justice, sustainability or nutrition. For example, harvesting cherries was paired with a discussion on farm laborers, and planting lettuce led to conversations about improvements that could be made to school lunch programs. Many of the older students, aged 12 to 17, expressed a desire to challenge the injustices they perceived in the food system through policy and advocacy.

When I started graduate school at Tuft's Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning program, I looked for a way to combine my interest and background in youth development with food systems policy and planning. When UEP Department Chair Julian Agyeman offered me the opportunity to design and conduct a research project of my choice, a research project involving youth and food policy seemed like

the perfect way to fuse these interests. Through exploratory research, I noticed that many Food Policy Councils (FPCs) claimed to represent the interests of ethnically, culturally, and professionally diverse stakeholders, yet few seemed to engage or include local youth. Considering the number and successes of youth and food related programs nationwide, I was surprised that most FPCs have not utilized the energy and insight of local youth interested in food and agricultural policy issues. In order for FPCs to truly represent a democratic process in which diverse voices are included, young people must be engaged in the process of reimagining and reshaping the food system.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the United States, there is a rich history of young people leading social change movements. Youth (defined here as High School aged young people) have been critical actors in every progressive social movement, including the Civil Rights Movement; the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) movement; environmentalism; environmental justice; immigrations rights; anti-war and labor movements; and more (Costanza-Chock, 2012; Quiroz-Martinez et al., 2005). For example, Hosang (2006) highlights the key role of youth in the Civil Rights Movement, noting that four years prior to Martin Luther King Junior's March on Washington, civil rights leader Bayard Rustin led a youth march for integrated schools in the streets of D.C. Following that event, teenagers initiated the first successful protests to lunch-counter segregation (Hosang, 2006). In recent years, youth have also been crucial to calling attention to the need for immigration reform, and have been critical actors in the environmental justice movement, through both intergenerational and youth-led efforts. (Costanza-Chock, 2012; Quiroz-Martinez et al., 2005).

Yet today, youth are often portrayed by the media as disengaged, apathetic, and almost entirely removed from civic affairs (Costanza-Chock, 2012). It is only until they have reached adulthood that young people "supposedly evolve into social actors and thus independent contributors to society" (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2006: xviii). Wyn and White argue that such notions of youth as "a time of transition" or of "becoming adults," focus attention on what young people may

become, and ignores the present day reality of young people's lives (Wyn and White, 1997). As a result, there is no pressing need for young people to have decision-making power regarding issues that impact their lives in the present. Wyn and White argue that the conceptual shift from young people as "future citizens" to "present civic actors" forces us to think more critically about the rights of youth, and the necessity of youth representation in civic engagement and policy-making (Wyn and White, 1997).

As with other progressive social movement in the U.S. and abroad, youth play an active and crucial role in the food movement. The food movement is an umbrella term for a host of social movements centered around re-thinking the way we grow, sell, distribute, and eat food. The food movement includes, but is not limited to, the campaign for animal rights and welfare; the campaign against genetically modified crops; students organizing for school food reform; efforts to regulate marketing to children; the rise of organic and locally produced food; food safety; farm bill reform; farmland preservation; food justice; and food sovereignty.

The saliency of the food movement has increased significantly over the last few decades. Marion Nestle credits a new generation of writers (both academic and non-academic) with promoting food advocacy and helping to grow the modern food movement (Nestle, 2010). Nestle highlights the works of author Michael Pollan, author of popular books such as the *Omnivore's Dilemma*, and *Botany of Desire*, as key instigators of food advocacy (Nestle, 2010). Pollan argues that the food

movement's strongest claim on public attention today is likely the fact that the American diet (composed of highly processed foods with excessive fats and sugar) is responsible for "an epidemic of chronic diseases that threatens to bankrupt the health care system" (Pollan, 2010: 4). Pollan, along with other writers and advocates, helped inspire First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign to combat childhood obesity, which has also helped propel issues from the food movement's agenda into the spotlight (Nestle, 2010). Further, large environmental advocacy groups, such as the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Environmental Working Group, have adopted food issues as major campaigns. But while food is the common denominator in all factions of the food movement, what's attracting so many people to the movement is about more than food- - "it's about community, identity, pleasure, and, most notably, about carving out a new social and economic space removed from the influence of big corporations on the one side and government on the other" (Pollan, 2010: 5).

Youth participation in the food movement takes many forms, including school-garden clubs and garden-based education organizations, community development programs, community food assessments, national networks, Food Policy Councils, and more. The following sub-sections provide a sampling of ways in which youth are engaged in the food movement.

Community Food Assessments

A number of food justice organizations are giving young people the opportunity to participate in local food systems reform through youth-led community food assessments. A Community Food Assessment (CFA) is a comprehensive way to determine what is happening with food in a community, and to mobilize efforts to improve the food system. Through such assessments, diverse stakeholders work collaboratively to research their local food system, publicize their findings, and implement changes based on the results of the study (CFSC, 2011). Three organizations that have conducted youth-led community food assessments include the Youth Farm and Market Project, Colonias Development Council, and Growing Youth Project. According to the latter's organizational website, "The Growing Youth Project began in the fall of 2005 as a youth-led community food assessment, aimed at providing youth in the community with valuable employment; promoting an understanding and dialogue around issues residents face with respect to food, health, and nutrition; and developing a vision and action strategy for addressing food justice issues in the community" (Growing Youth Project, no date).

Community Development Programs

A number of community development organizations that have a food systems focus or program have youth members spearheading the initiative. Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE) is a Boston-based non-profit that "builds the power of communities of color and low-income communities in Massachusetts to eradicate environmental racism and classism, create healthy, sustainable

communities, and achieve environmental justice” (ACE, no date). The youth program, the Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project (REEP) includes an after-school youth leadership program and youth-led organizing projects. REEP’s latest campaign, “Grow or Die” is aimed at increasing the amount and access to healthy and affordable food in the community, and utilizing vacant lots to grow food. The members of REEP are directly involved in organizing and implementing the campaign.

National Networks

The Rooted in Community National Network (RIC) was founded in 1998 and has included over 75 organizations nationwide since its inception. RIC is a diverse grassroots movement of youth and adults working together to improve the health of communities through food justice initiatives, urban and rural agriculture, community gardening and food security. In July 2011, Youth (mostly high-school aged) leaders from across the nation came together at the 13th annual RIC Leadership Summit to create a Youth Food Bill of Rights. A few highlights of the bill include youth’s rights to culturally affirming food, to sustainable food, to nutrition education, and to the right to healthy food at school.

School Garden Clubs and Organizations

Afterschool programming and organizations focused on garden-based education for K-12 students have grown tremendously over the last decade. The Edible Schoolyard project, now in multiple cities throughout the U.S., is one of many

organizations helping connect children and young adults to the plants that feed them. While some are focused more specifically on gardening and garden-based education, some organizations, such as The Food Project in Boston, MA, have built principles of food justice and social justice into their programming.

Food Policy Councils

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) are one way in which youth have the potential to engage with diverse stakeholders from the food movement to help drive social change. FPCs are collaborative, democratic groups of citizens that meet periodically to help improve local or regional food systems through policy change. FPCs can be born out of grass-roots efforts or governmental initiatives, and can operate on the local, state or regional level. While many FPCs claim to be committed to including diverse voices, very few are currently known to include youth members.

As demonstrated, there are a number of ways in which youth can engage with food systems reform. This research is focused specifically on youth participation in FPCs. Further, while there are a number of ways in which college age young people are currently engaged in the food movement, this work is focused on the efforts of High School aged young people.

As noted by Ginwright and Cammarota, “there is a reemerging interest in understanding how youth contribute to their communities (Ginwright and

Cammarota, 2006: 267). Increased research on civic engagement in youth will help us better attend to development of citizenship among the nation's young people. As the inequities and environmental consequence of our current system will impact the health of young people for generations, youth involvement in the food movement is an exciting and necessary lens through which to explore active citizenship.

Outline of Proceeding Chapters

Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature regarding food policy, FPCs, youth involvement in the food movement, and different models of youth participation.

Chapter 3 outlines the data collection methods employed in this research. The methodology includes survey research, interviews, and case examples of four FPCs. This chapter also includes a rationale for the case study model used for the case examples, as well as the data analysis processes.

Chapter 4 provides a description of four case examples of FPCs that are currently youth-led or engaging young people in Council affairs.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the case examples through focusing on a number of common themes extracted from the data. It will also include a discussion of the sustainability of different models of youth involvement in FPCs, and highlights some challenges to youth participation.

Chapter 6 will draw out some recommendations for FPCs regarding how to effectively include young people in Council activities, as well as limitations of this research, future directions, and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND & LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature to this thesis. The first half of the literature provides a background on food policy, as well as the goals, structure, and functions of FPCs. The second half focuses on youth civic engagement, youth participation in the food movement, and different models of participation. Notably, very few sources address the issue of youth involvement in food policy, reflecting the need for research on this topic.

I. Food Policy

Food policy is any policy that shapes, addresses or regulates the food system (Harper et al., 2009). Modern food and agricultural policies include, but are not limited to, federal subsidies for farmers; anti-hunger programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program; USDA organic standards, labeling and regulation; and international food aid. These policies fall within the jurisdiction of multiple federal agencies, including Health and Human Services, the Departments of Agriculture, Education and State.

A key piece of legislation that governs food and agricultural policy is the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill is an omnibus piece of legislation that authorizes agricultural programs, conservation programs, nutrition programs, programs for beginning farmers, and many other relevant programs. Other examples of legislation that

address food, nutrition, and agricultural policies include food safety, health care, and child nutrition programs.

The policies that affect the food systems are created and implemented in a piecemeal fashion, contributing to a broken policy environment (Harper et al., 2009). Wilde (2013) notes that “just as other areas of politics in the United States suffer from partisanship and deep regional and cultural divisions, food policy can be mired down in bitter struggles across stagnant political lines in the sand” (Wilde, 2013: 1). In reaction to this fractured policy environment, different branches of the food movement, such as animal welfare, food justice, school food reform, and local food systems advocates, have begun to envision “broad, comprehensive approaches to food policy that include all aspects of the food system that involve feeding a population. In this view, food policy is multidisciplinary, multisectoral and intergenerational, and addresses social, political, economic and environmental factors” (Harper et al., 2009: 9).

The need for more comprehensive and effective food policies is evidenced by a wide variety of social ills stemming from a food system in crisis. Environmental damage from agriculture, including soil erosion, deforestation, and the polluting of surface and groundwater is widespread. A leading concern in the U.S. is nutrient runoff from farms, which can result in a condition known as “hypoxia” in which the presence of nutrients from farms in water bodies stimulates the growth of excess algae, robbing the water of oxygen and resulting in massive die-offs of aquatic life

(Diaz and Rosenberg, 2008). The prevalence of food insecurity in the U.S. has risen drastically over the past few decades, as food insecurity increased during the recession of the early 2000s, failed to improve during the following period of economic expansion, and increased dramatically during the economic recession of 2008-2009 (Wilde, 2013). Further, childhood obesity is increasingly prevalent at all income levels, but is particularly prevalent in low-income households (Institute of Medicine, 2012). This epidemic has closely tracked the increase in cheap calories derived from grain-based ingredients, such as sweeteners, oils, and animal feed (Harper et al., 2009).

These examples highlighted above point to the need for a more comprehensive, inclusive, and innovative approach to food policy. One approach to strengthening local and regional food systems is the formation of Food Policy Councils, which can provide a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to reforming and strengthening food systems (Harper et al., 2009; Kaufman and Pothukuchi, 1999). Food Policy Councils work across sectors, and attempt to establish a platform for coordinated action at the local or regional level.

II. Food Policy Councils

The first Food Policy Council was formed in 1982 in Knoxville, Tennessee. The Council grew out of a study conducted by students and faculty at the University of Tennessee's Graduate School of Planning exploring how well the city of Knoxville was able to provide healthy and affordable food to community members. The

research revealed that hunger and obesity were on the rise, and that the city was losing valuable farmland. City residents working on food insecurity issues used the report to lobby the city government to create the Knoxville Food Policy Council (Burgen and Winne, 2012). Since the inception of the Knoxville FPC, people throughout the U.S. have recognized the need for more citizen engagement in local and regional food policy issues (Burgen and Winne, 2012). As a result, there are roughly 200 FPCs throughout the U.S., each of which reflect the unique needs and goals of their communities.

The goal of most FPCs is to identify policy and programming gaps in their local or regional food systems, and to propose innovative solutions that incorporate principles such as local economic development, environmental sustainability and social justice (Harper et al., 2009). The diverse activities of FPCs include supporting the growth and development of local food markets, improving food security and food access for low-income residents, rezoning cities to allow for more agricultural activities, farmland preservation, school food reform, and many other policy and programs aimed at improving the health of local or regional food systems (American Planning Association, 2011).

Food Policy Councils consist of representatives from many sectors of the food system, including producers, consumers, educators, business owners, chefs, food justice and anti-hunger activists, government officials, grocers, and other stakeholders. They engage with groups across many sectors, including government

programs, grassroots and non-profit organizations, local business owners, public schools and food workers. Food Policy Councils are emerging throughout the United States in response to pressing issues such as obesity, food security and food access as well as to promote policies and programs relating to food justice and sustainable food systems. In amplifying the voices of underserved constituents and communities, FPCs have the “potential to democratize the food system” (Harper et. al., 2009: 6).

Food Policy Councils are established through grassroots initiatives or by local or state government. Many FPCs recruit members for a set term (such as one or two years) and have a limited number of seats, generally ranging from 10-20. Some FPCs also make their meetings open to the public to increase community input, and/or have non-members participate in committees or task-forces (Schiff, 2007).

McCullagh (2012) breaks down the different opportunities for involvement in FPCs:

Table 1: Taxonomy of Food Policy Council Membership (McCullagh, 2012)

Category	Explanation
<i>Full member</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attends general Council meetings regularly • has voting rights • may be the head of a committee or working group (if the Council uses them) • includes traditional roles such as Director, Secretary, Treasurer • may be elected for a set period of time
<i>Working group/committee member</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaged in a specific ongoing or one-time project • may or may not attend general Council meetings • may or may not have voting rights on the Council
<i>Official attendee</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specifically invited to attend one or more Council meetings to offer their professional or personal knowledge • likely does not have voting rights
<i>Meeting attendee</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • member of the general public who attends public Council meetings • likely does not have voting rights on the Council

Table 1 demonstrates that there are a number of ways citizens can engage with local or regional FPCs, though some positions hold more power than others. Food Policy Councils can be comprised of anywhere between one and all categories outlined above.

Schiff notes that a diversity of participants in an FPC “leads to a development of innovative programs, policies, and planning approaches that might not have been created without the synergistic effect created through cross-sectoral communication” (Schiff, 2007: 8). Interestingly, while the benefits of including stakeholders from diverse backgrounds and professions are extolled, Schiff makes

no mention of expanding the diversity of ideas and opinions to include those of local youth.

III. Youth Civic Engagement and Participation in the Food Movement

While our understanding of and participation in civil society is crucial to democracy, little attention has been paid to the broad and diverse forms of youth civic participation (Sherrod, 2006). In “Beyond Resistance: Youth Activism and Community Change” Ginwright and Cammarota argue that deeply ingrained in our understanding of American youth is “the notion that young people are disinterested or disengaged from civic affairs” (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2006: 1). Further, young people are often viewed as empty vessels that adults must fill with knowledge and attitudes (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2006). These views of young people posit them as subjects of change rather than agents *of* change with potential for meaningful civic engagement. Ginwright and Cammarota argue that “the advancement of an active and engaged citizenry requires the edifying practice of acknowledging and supporting youth agency, and young people’s capacity to become subjects of knowledge and social transformation” (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2006: xix).

Food has long been a catalyst of social change. The food safety movement, which began in the early 1900s, focused on changing the unsanitary ways in which food was produced. In the 1960s, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta fought to unionize

farm laborers, and founded the National Farm Workers Association (which later became the United Farm Workers). The current food movement is focused around reshaping the food system towards a more just and sustainable future for consumers, producers, and the environment. Individuals and groups that are working to change the current food system have approached this task with a wide variety of frameworks, including food justice, food sovereignty, anti-hunger, local food systems, animal rights, sustainable agriculture, and community food security.

In “Youth and Food Justice: Lessons from the Civil Rights Movement,” Anim Steel draws parallels between youth involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and the food movement (Steel, 2010). Steel notes that the actions and leadership of young people during the 1960s breathed new life into and changed the course of the movement. During this period, three hundred students that met at a conference and formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Campaign (SNCC) were advised by activist Ella Baker to maintain their agency - - “don’t let anyone else, especially the older folks, tell you what to do,” she advised (Baker, Ella *in* Steel, 2010: 2). Steel argues that finding their own voice and developing leadership skills likely led to landmark Civil Rights actions, such as the Freedom Rides and the Freedom Summer. Similarly, young people are taking leadership roles in the food movement in order to build healthier, more sustainable food systems for their families, communities and futures. These roles take many forms, including participation in school and community gardens, lobbying for healthier school food, leading and attending workshops on food and health, and, for a small but growing handful of young people,

engaging with local FPCs. Steel notes that, like certain Civil Rights groups, organizations should be “open to the contributions and wisdom of all generations” (Steel, 2010: 2).

While young people play an active and crucial role in the food movement, very little research has focused on the nature of youth participation. One of the only known studies to examine the role of youth in food systems reform was published in 2007 by “The Food Project,” a non-profit organization in Boston, MA that combines urban agriculture and food justice with youth development. This report, “State of the Field: Youth in Sustainable Food Systems,” is one of the most comprehensive studies detailing youth involvement in the food movement (Watts, 2007). The report details data gained from surveys and interviews of 41 organizations, programs and movement leaders in order to profile organizations linking youth and sustainable food systems, explore the evolution of these organizations, and determine both the local and national impacts of youth on food systems.

As part of the Food Project’s survey, organizations were asked to comment on why they chose to work with youth. The report notes that organizations choose to work with youth for both philosophical and practical reasons (Watts, 2007). The following is a portion of the reports’ summary of responses:

•Youth are uniquely effective in communicating the organizations’ message to other constituents (youth, families)

•Youth are marginalized in their communities/by society and need additional services and support to be successful

•Youth “get it” better or faster than adults; it is more effective to educate and work with them than it would be to do similar work with adults

•Leaders had previous positive experiences with youth and liked working with them (Watts, 2007).

The Report notes that of the youth and food systems organizations surveyed, 95% manage agriculture or gardening education programs, and that 73% offer nutrition/health programs (Watts, 2007: 9). By contrast, “only 27% of programs leave the garden for the Statehouse, and get involved in food policy legislation” (Watts, 2007: 9). The Report highlights that this indicates both an emphasis on local, community-based work as well as a need for investment in driving change through policy (Watts, 2007).

Youth and Food Policy Councils

As part of her MA thesis on the diversity of FPCs, McCullagh (2012) surveyed 87 North American FPCs and received responses from 43 distinct Councils. Of the 43 FPCs, 6 were determined to currently include youth on their Council, or have taken steps to include youth in the near future. Out of these six FPCs, only two reserved designated seats at the table for youth participants. McCullagh notes that this suggests that “the inclusion of youth generally depends on the specific youth member’s qualifications, not on a requirement that the Council simply include a youth member” (McCullagh, 2012: 30).

In her survey, McCullagh left the definition of a youth member open to interpretation by the survey respondent, and found that, generally, Councils define youth to mean individuals of high school age all the way up to age 30 (McCullagh, 2012). McCullagh determined that a number of Councils reached out to existing youth programs to gauge interest in participating in FPC affairs. "Some youth groups were invited to present about their work at the FPC in hopes that they would continue to be involved in the Council's work or become Council members" (McCullagh, 2012: 30).

McCullagh reports that despite accommodations to attract and support young Council members, major obstacles to their participation remain. Survey respondents noted that finding meeting times that allowed for high school students to attend was difficult, and that many high school students eventually departed for college. Further, one FPC reported that high school students expressed that they have felt intimidated by the presence of members in their 20s (McCullagh, 2012: 30).

A number of the Councils are working hard to overcome these challenges to youth engagement, suggesting that they recognize the benefits of youth participation in Council affairs. To confront the issue of high school participants feeling intimidated by the slightly senior members, one FPC began incorporating icebreakers into meetings. Another Council with youth members meets with the younger participants prior to general Council meetings to brief them on agenda items:

What our plan has been is to always have a youth meetings the day before the large policy Council meeting. The plan was to give [the youth some] background on the FPC, background on what is worked on, talk about what's on the agenda, go over it all in detail, answer questions. We help [the youth] prepare what [they] what they talk about and what they want to say (anonymous, in McCullagh, 2013: 31).

Supporting youth to become active and informed Council members is key to achieving meaningful participation. The following section will explore the positive youth development model and different levels of inclusion.

Youth Development Models and Inclusion

The Positive Youth Development model is recognized by scholars as a way in which to address the negative social stigma associated with youth that may interfere with young peoples' ability to participate in community governance (Mitra, 2006; Cammorata & Ginwright, 2002). This social stigma is perpetuated by societal norms, policies, and media representation that perpetuate the notion that young people are unable or unwilling to participate in a full spectrum of civic activity (Ginwright et al, 2006). A positive youth development framework rejects this stigma, and focuses on the assets of young people and the ways in which they can contribute to societal change in their communities (Mitra, 2006).

In the food movement, many youth development organizations claim to offer services for youth, but less commonly provide the space for youth to take leadership roles in organizational decision-making and planning. The Food Project's report noted that many organizations describe themselves as "youth-centered" rather than

“youth-led.” Almost all organizations surveyed reported that their organizations offer educational opportunities, employment and training for youth, but failed to report providing space and support for youth-led initiatives in the field. Further, “although adult leaders spoke about creating spaces for youth decision-making and highlighted the real responsibilities youth assume in managing markets, creating materials, or otherwise being ‘in charge,’ they also made it clear that youth do not participate on their organizational board of directors, and that in most cases the decision-making youth assume takes place ‘within boundaries’ set by adults” (Watts, 2007: 11).

“Inclusion” in the context of participation in the food movement relates to how individuals are given a voice in defining food system related problems and constructing solutions. Inclusion can be conceptualized by Sherry Arnstein’s eight types of citizen participation, ranging from the lowest level, “manipulation” to the highest level of “citizen control” (Arnstein, 1969).

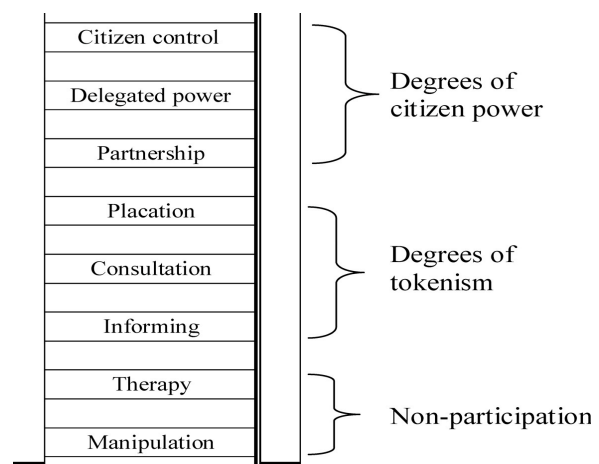


Figure 1: Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation

The results of the Food Project's report suggest that many youth and food organizations operate somewhere in between therapy and delegated power, but rarely do youth in these organizations reach the level of citizen control. This is a critical distinction, as many argue that these lower levels of citizen participation are not enough, and that youth must be provided with the opportunity to be heard and transform social conditions and institutions shaping their lives (Ginwright and James, 2002). One significant challenge to reaching the top levels of Arnstein's ladder is the question of how to build "egalitarian, respectful, and culturally responsive partnerships between youth and adults" (Ginwright et al., 2006: 38). It is not uncommon for youth to be novices in the policy arena, or for young people to hold preconceptions of adults as authoritarian or dismissive (Jarrett et al., 2005). Therefore, when it comes to intergenerational groups, it can be difficult for adult members to determine how best to provide spaces for young people to participate at the level of citizen control.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

I. Research Goals

This research aims to explore emerging models of youth involvement in Food Policy Councils throughout the U.S. While many young people have demonstrated a passion for and commitment to improving the food system, it is unclear whether FPCs are utilizing this energy and creating opportunities for meaningful youth participation. Specifically, this research seeks to address the ways in which FPCs include youth in their policy and programming activities. Currently, very little data exists regarding either the number of FPCs that incorporate youth voices, or the ways in which space is made for these voices to be heard. As FPCs have been predicted to become “the fastest-growing institutional innovation in food governance over the next 25 years” (Roberts 2010: 173), it seems logical that youth, with all they have at stake in the future of food systems, should have a voice in their local, regional or state FPC. This research aims to contribute to the literature by exploring ways in which young people are currently involved in FPCs. A better understanding of the nature of youth involvement can help shape current and future efforts to bring young people and their unique perspectives to the table.

II. Data Collection

Prior to data collection, the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Tufts University granted approval for this research. Following approval, a review of the relevant literature was conducted. Second, a pilot online survey was distributed to FPC coordinators and directors through the Food Policy Council listserv of the Community Food

Security Coalition, a now defunct coalition of North American community food security organizations. This pilot phase helped identify FPCs working with youth, and highlighted the need for qualitative case study methodology given the dearth of survey data. Third, FPCs with youth members were identified as case example candidates and follow up surveys and interviews were conducted with these organizations.

Before transferring its programs and services to partner organizations and members, The Community Food Security Coalition website contained a list of 155 North American Food Policy Councils. Of the 155 FPCs listed, 75 were determined to be accessible via email, as the remaining FPCs lacked updated or correct contact information. The pilot phase of the research consisted of distributing a 16-question survey to these 75 FPCs. The survey included questions regarding whether or not the FPC contained youth members, and, if so, the nature and extent of youth involvement. The questions included Yes/No questions, such as “are youth involved in the Council?” and short answer questions such as “In what ways are specific youth interests represented on the Council?” and “what are the challenges and opportunities of including youth on the Council?” (Appendix 1). We received 15 responses (20% response rate) to our survey, representing diverse geographic areas throughout the U.S. and Canada. These responses were used to identify FPCs with youth members for future case study options.

Data for the case examples were collected through *open-ended* interviews as well as more formal surveys. Yin (1994) notes that interviews may take several forms, and that open-ended interviews allow for the interviewer to ask respondents for facts, as well as for opinions and insights regarding the subject of the interview. Most of the interviews were conducted over the phone for approximately 45-60 minutes. Interviewees who indicated that they would prefer to communicate through email were sent electronic copies of the questions asked during phone interviews. In some cases, for both phone and email interviews, interviewees were sent follow-up questions via email. As outlined in the IRB application, all respondents were kept anonymous throughout the research process. In this document, interviewees are coded by using the codes outlined in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Coding for Interviewees

Name of FPC	Number of Interviewees	Codes for Interviewees (as appears in text)
La Semilla Food Policy Council	3	LSFPC1; LSFPC2; LSFPC3
New Haven Food Policy Councils	1	NHFPC1
Flip the Table Youth Food Council	1	FTYFC1
Worcester Advisory Food Policy Council	1	WAFPC1

While more interviews would have greatly enhanced the findings of this research, many FPC organizers and/or coordinators are presently overburdened with work

responsibilities, and thus it was difficult to find more interviewees. The significance of this limitation will be explored further in Chapter 5.

III. Case Study Rationale

Case studies are used as a research strategy in many fields, including policy, planning, community psychology, sociology, and organizational and management studies (Yin, 1994). As a research tool, the case study is “unparalleled for its ability to consider a single or complex research question within an environment rich with contextual variables” (Schell, 1992: 1).

Initial research beginning in the fall of 2011 revealed that while there was a substantial amount of literature regarding FPCs and food justice, no quantitative or qualitative academic literature regarding youth involvement in FPCs exists at present. Schell (1992) notes that descriptive case studies are appropriate if relatively little research has been done in the field. Yin (1994) argues that case studies are the preferred strategy when the focus is on a “contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” and “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994: 1). Based on the aforementioned arguments, the case study model appears to be an appropriate and effective method to explore youth participation in FPCs. Contextual conditions of FPCs are likely highly pertinent to their decision to include youth members, and it is therefore critical that these factors are explored in the research. Case studies provide an appropriate way in which to highlight the unique contexts of each Council while allowing for the identification of common threads between FPCs.

Due to the fact the majority of participants and coordinators of the FPCs surveyed are volunteers with other full time jobs, it was difficult to obtain interviews for this research project. As we felt that more interviews and other means of qualitative assessment would be necessary to refer to the illustrations of the four FPCs as “case studies,” we have decided to refer to them as “case examples.” As demonstrated in Table 2, each case example has between 1 and 3 interviewees. The interviews, in addition to outside research, comprise the basis for the case examples outlined in the following chapters.

IV. Analysis of Case Example Evidence

While the primary purpose of the case studies is descriptive, that is, to describe four examples of youth participation in FPCs, data from the interviews were also analyzed to reveal any cross-study patterns. Data from the interviews were analyzed through open-coding methods in which responses were grouped according to key words. Some categories, for example, that emerged from this process include: 1) need for full or part time, paid staff 2) importance of community partners 3) benefits of youth participation 4) recognition of youth assets. Then, the data was axial coded by examining the data again in relation to the new categories of data established to determine if any other responses fit into the categories (DiLisio, 2012).

CHAPTER 4: CASE EXAMPLES

Chapter 4 details four case examples of Food Policy Councils that include or are comprised almost entirely of youth members. The case examples are broken down into three sections: The mission of the FPC, a brief overview of the geographical and social context of the Council, and lastly, information on the Council itself. The information provided in this section comes from a variety of sources, but draws heavily on interviews and surveys conducted during the research process. All interviewees and survey respondents are unidentified to maintain anonymity in accordance with IRB approval.

Case Example I: La Semilla Youth Food Policy Council (YFPC) Anthony, New Mexico

Mission

La Semilla Youth Food Policy Council is located in southern New Mexico, and strives to “build a healthy, self-reliant, fair, and sustainable food system in the Paso del Norte region of southern New Mexico and El Paso, Texas” (La Semilla Food Center, 2013). The Youth Food Policy Council (YFPC) is one program of the La Semilla Food Center, a community organization that works with children, young adults, and families to build awareness around food issues and to create alternatives for healthier communities and environments.

Rebecca Wiggins-Reinhard, Farm to School Director at La Semilla Food Center, writes:

When my colleagues and I came together to establish La Semilla, we did so because we share a passion and commitment to engaging and empowering youth. We have witnessed the power that comes when spaces are created for youth to participate in issues that directly affect them and their communities, and the transformation that occurs when they have opportunities to realize their own capacities to create change (Wiggins-Reinhard, 2013: 1).

La Semilla provides programs that include K-8 school gardens, parent/child-cooking classes, youth gardening and cooking classes, and farm-based youth employment. In many of these programs, La Semilla provides opportunities for youth leadership.

Geographical/Social Context

Located in Anthony, New Mexico, La Semilla Food Center was established in 2010. The organization aims to serve the Paso del Norte region of Texas and New Mexico, and is situated within the Chihuahuan Desert. This area includes many *colonias*, communities characterized by their proximity to the Mexican/American border, lack of infrastructure, and low-income, migrant residents.

The El Paso del Norte region is experiencing high rates of obesity, diabetes, and a lack of access to healthy, affordable food. A report issued by the U.S. Mexico Border Diabetes Prevention and Control Project found that, in 2002, 5.3 million adults in the border region were overweight or obese, and 1.2 million had diabetes (CDC, 2002). Further, the New Mexico Food Gap Task Force found that the cost of healthy foods in rural areas of New Mexico was much higher than that of the cost of nutritious foods in urban areas. Based on USDA recommendations of nutritious items, the Task Force gathered a basket of healthy food items that cost \$55 dollars in

a large urban store. The same basket of food was found to cost \$85 in a rural store (NM Food Gap Task Force, 2008).

In 2010, the Colonias Development Council conducted a youth-led Community Food Assessment in the communities of Anthony, Chaparral and Vado (all within the southwest region of New Mexico). The goal of the assessment was to gain a better understanding of food access in these three communities. Interestingly, the youth found that the vast majority of residents surveyed (for example, 93% in Vado) answered “yes” to a survey question regarding whether or not local stores carried the types of fruits and vegetables they wanted to buy (Colonias Development Council, 2010). This was surprising to the youth conducting the survey because there are no grocery stores located within this community. In the assessment report, the youth note that it is likely that the residents of rural New Mexico have a very different idea of what “local” means, as it is common to drive many miles (often between 20 and 40) to the nearest grocery store.

The previous anecdote from the survey demonstrates the value of a youth-led community survey. The youth were able to use their local knowledge to make sense of data that may have looked very different to a person conducting the survey from outside the community. Had a government agency conducted such a survey through the mail, for example, the results may have led outsiders to believe that Vado residents have easy access to fruits and vegetables. In reality, some New Mexico residents travel as far as 70 miles each way to access a grocery store, with rising fuel costs presenting additional barriers to food access (Colonias Development Council,

2010). Because the distance to grocery stores is a daily reality, many residents have a very different conception of “local” than urban dwellers.

One year after Colonias Development Council conducted the Youth-led Community Food Assessment, it partnered with La Semilla Food Center to establish the La Semilla Youth Food Policy Council.

La Semilla Youth Food Policy Council

The Youth Food Policy Council (YFPC) is a collaborative effort between La Semilla and Colonias Development Council. The Council, which ran for nine months, is currently on hold while La Semilla focuses its attention and efforts on creating a Youth Farm from a 14-acre tract of farmland that was donated in 2011.

The Youth Food Policy Council was a 9-month pilot program in which youth ages 13-19 were recruited to discuss pressing food and health related issues, specifically around ways to improve school food. La Semilla staff members recruited youth through the local community center, and also spoke with social workers in local schools to identify interested students. La Semilla was able to offer committed members a stipend of \$500, and was therefore able to increase both the number and diversity of YFPC members.

Many members decided to join the Council because they had previous experiences with food systems work, and/or recognized evidence of a broken food system within their communities. As one former YFPC member noted:

I worked at a community garden before so I knew that in my community there are people who are in need and are making a difference in their lives to have fresh and healthy food available. I knew there was a difference to be made about the food available to my community (LSFPC2).

Another former member, who joined the Council because she enjoys being active in both school and afterschool activities, was particularly motivated by the use of pesticides and herbicides on nearby farms:

...my area is made up of a lot of crops. A lot of those chemicals don't just go in the crops; they can get carried by the air to the homes of my area (LSFPC3).

The La Semilla YFPC members were particularly concerned about school food issues, but, like many other beginning FPCs, quickly realized that they needed to take a step back and learn 1) more about the food system in general and 2) more about the process of creating change. In their weekly meetings, the group decided to walk through the different aspects of the food system. The YFPC started by exploring *production*, examining different examples of monocropping and diversified farms in their community. The Council members also visited a local organic grower and listened to that farmer discuss policies that impact organic producers in the region. To learn more about *processing*, the YFPC had a local grocer come to a meeting to discuss nutrition labeling, and played a game in which Council members attempted to match nutrition labels with their corresponding food items. While exploring *distribution*, the YFPC visited a local food bank to find out more about food security issues within the community. Finally, in their exploration of *food outlets*, the YFPC visited farmers markets and grocery stores, and interviewed

growers and grocers about nutrition, food access, and the layout of retail vending spaces.

The YFPC also spent time studying the farm bill, and learned about how the policies outlined in this legislation trickle down to impact community members and local growers. In particular, they focused on SNAP benefits, and discussed what kinds of foods members of their communities buy with SNAP benefits. Though the first year of the Council was spent primarily on exploring key pieces of legislation and food systems, the YFPC did present to two city Council bodies on what they learned about local food systems during the pilot year of the YFPC and what they are hoping to do in future years.

While the majority of students in the pilot year of the YFPC have graduated high school, a number have continued their work in improving food systems and the health of communities. Two interviewees noted that the Council was instrumental in their decision to pursue nutrition and health related fields in college.

The YFPC is currently on hold while La Semilla focuses on developing the Youth Farm, but there are plans to continue the YFPC and incorporate the farm into programming in the future. The La Semilla Youth Farm will host year-round farm based education programs. Over the next few years, La Semilla plans to develop and implement a few new initiatives. The first is a program for youth 14-18 years old around production and marketing. The 15-week program, which will begin in 2013, will allow for 18 young people to gain knowledge of food production, nutrition,

culinary skills, financial management, and business planning. The second initiative, with a target start date of 2014, is a 10-week fall Food Enterprise Apprenticeship. Selected youth will apprentice as market managers or be placed with other local food enterprises in order to further develop business and leadership skills.

Case Example II: New Haven Food Policy Council New Haven, CT.

Mission

The New Haven Food Policy Council (NHFPC) is a collaborative group of residents working to address local and regional food issues, and the impacts on individuals, communities, business, the environment, and local government (NHFPC, 2013). The Council is comprised of volunteers appointed by the Mayor and the Board of Alderman. The mission of the NHFPC is to “build a food system that nourishes all people in a just and sustainable manner” (NHFPC, 2013). The NHFPC works towards the mission statement through building coalitions and encouraging cooperation between residents, community groups, and city officials, and develops strategies to address food access, hunger, obesity, urban agriculture, economic development, food waste and food education. Further, the NHFPC advocates for policies that improve the food environment of the City, and aims to educate residents and community leaders.

Geographical/Social Context

New Haven, the second largest city in Connecticut, is situated midway between Boston and New York. A significant number of New Haven residents are food

insecure. In 2010-2011, 23.6% of households received SNAP benefits (American Community Survey, 2011), and in 2009, a survey of the cities' low-income neighborhoods revealed that 1 in 5 residents reported not having enough money to purchase groceries within the last 30 days (CARE, 2009). Further, approximately 80% of public school students in New Haven are eligible for free or reduced price lunches (CT State Dept. of Education, 2011). These statistics point to significant levels of poverty and food insecurity within the City.

When compared to the national average, New Haven residents experience high rates of negative health outcomes with respect to the food environment. 23% of all New Haven adults are obese, and the percentage for black New Haven residents is much higher, at 35% (CDC, 2003). Further, in a survey of randomly selected 5th graders from New Haven Public Schools, 50% of children were overweight or obese (CARE, 2012).

There are a number of organizations based in New Haven working to address the prevalence of food insecurity and diet related diseases. New Haven is home to the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, a non-profit research and public policy organization working to prevent obesity and weight-stigma. It is also home to multiple soup kitchens, the CT Food Bank, the New Haven Land Trust (which manages 50 community vegetable gardens), and Common Ground High School, which hosts an urban farm and strives to teach students about sustainable farming and food systems.

The New Haven Food Policy Council

The New Haven Food Policy Council was created on May 12, 2005 by a City Ordinance, and is defined in § 14-41 of the Municipal Code. The Board is comprised of ten appointed representatives and one Aldermanic representative.

The NHFPC is a volunteer advisory board for the City of New Haven. The 11 Council members are New Haven Residents, and are appointed by the Mayor and the Board of Alderman. Council members come from a diverse array of local organizations working towards a better food system, including Yale's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, the New Haven Land Trust Community Gardens, the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, CitySeed, and the New Haven Ecology Project.

Affiliate Council members include various residents and representatives of community groups that actively participate in the work of the NHFPC. While affiliates can help participate in decision-making, they do not hold a vote.

The Youth Coalition of the NHFPC is a group of teens from multiple schools and communities in New Haven actively involved in the work of the NHFPC and in improving food issues in their communities. The NHFPC works with individual teens as well as with organizations (such as CitySeed) working with young people to create a space for youth to take leadership roles in strengthening the food system. The primary focus of the Youth Coalition is school food, cooking education, and community gardens.

When asked about the motivations for including high school aged youth in the NHFPC, an adult affiliated with the Council responded that the Council is looking to draw young people in “not just to get more diversity to address issues, but because they have a lot of energy and are able to create excitement among other New Haven Residents.” She also added that youth “have a powerful voice in the food movement, so it’s very important to include them” (NHFPC 1).

Of the 11 voting members of the Council, one was a High School student from New Haven. However, he graduated last year, and the Council is looking to replace him with another student to continue the tradition of a youth voting position in the future. Voting members of the Council must be at least 18 years old to vote.

A number of youth attend the general meetings, and a few are active members of the working groups that meet outside the general meetings. Many of these students are from organizations that the NHFPC has reached out to, and are primarily interested in urban agriculture and cooking.

In 2012, the Chair of the NHFPC and a staff member from the local organization “CitySeed” worked on formalizing youth involvement through the creation of the Youth Coalition. The Youth Coalition functioned as part of the NHFPC, but met outside the general meetings once or twice a month. However, a few months in, attendance started to dwindle. In an interview, one adult noted that attendance rates decreased because the young people “were not as excited about meetings as they were about projects...they wanted to DO things.” After the adult facilitators realized that they did not have the time to engage members of the Youth Coalition

effectively, they decided to put the Coalition on hold for the time being and instead organized a number of work days for youth in community gardens. Despite the absence of the formal Youth Coalition, a few youth members still attend general Council meetings.

Starting in August 2013, CitySeed and the NHFPC will have an Americorps VISTA volunteer as part of a new program in CT called the Food Justice Youth Corps. The position with CitySeed/the NHFPC is a three-year position, and the VISTA volunteer will focus on developing youth leadership in food justice issues in New Haven. A CitySeed Staff member who has worked closely with the NHFPC noted that both organizations are very excited about having a staff member “dedicated to getting this movement in motion.” She further noted, “There is a lot of energy but we need a person to really focus on [youth leadership around food issues] because the current staff are spread thin and everyone is doing so much” (NHFPC1).

Case Example III: Flip the Table: Youth Food Council New York City, NY

Mission:

New York City’s Flip the Table Youth Food Council (YFC), founded in 2011, is the first youth Food Policy Council in NY, and one of the only youth driven Food Policy Councils in the United States. The mission of the YFC was to provide NYC youth an opportunity to take leadership roles in shaping the food system. One interviewee provided the following explanation regarding motivations for organizing the

Council:

Youth of color, youth from low-income communities, and LGBTQI youth pay the highest cost as a result of the inequities in our food system, and simultaneously aren't granted any agency within the current political system. Compounding the problem is the tokenization of youth within both non-profit organizations and government programs, and the constant use of a deficit model that lays blame on the youth instead of on institutional power structures. Youth and community representation are lacking in the food policy Councils sprouting up in cities nationwide, highlighting structural racism and oppressive power structures. YFC emerged as a solution. Instead of waiting for a food policy Council to form from the top down in New York City and then fighting for a seat at the table, we decided to create our own table, with youth as the leaders (FTYFC1).

In its pilot year, the YFC offered its members the opportunity to engage with food justice organizations, urban farms, and policy makers, and network with peers doing similar work. The youth members were also given an opportunity to meet once a month with a mentor working in a professional field of their choice.

Geographic/Social Context

In New York City, one of the greatest food destinations in the world, 1.4 million residents live in households that cannot afford an adequate supply of food (Berg, 2005). Further, nearly 3 million NYC residents lack adequate fresh food retail in their neighborhood, and three of the five leading causes of mortality in New York City can be linked to diet (New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2005). Food insecurity, diet related disease, and high rates of overweight and obesity have contributed to the increase in both government and nongovernmental organization working to improve NYC's food system. Other interests that have sparked the rise in resources such as school gardens, farmers markets, urban farms,

and food justice organizations include the desire of consumers to connect with local growers, economic development, increasing green space, and garden-based education.

Flip the Table Youth Food Policy Council

Flip the Table YFC was one of the nation's first Youth Food Councils. The Council members included a number of NYC youth aged 14-19, as well as a few adult members, or "allies." While the youth drove the agenda, the adults were responsible for leading skill-based workshops at meetings, helping to facilitate campaigns, fundraising, and coordinating the logistics of each meeting, including food, location, and metro-cards.

While the YFC members expressed an interest in many aspects of the food system, the primary interests of the Council members included school food reform and educating their peers about school food issues.

An organizer of the YFC noted that while there are many organizations in NYC that are conducting excellent food systems reform work, they often work in silos due to limited resources. Therefore, any youth involved in these organizations are limited in their exposure to how social, environmental and food justice interests intersect.

The YFPC was developed with this in mind, as one organizer noted:

We developed a unique structure, whereby well-established community organizations nominate a youth to be on the Council, positioning YFC as a capacity-building and organizing tool to connect the many powerful yet disparate food justice, social justice, and environmental justice organizations in

the city. By building a coalition of youth across multiple entities, we address the challenges associated with fighting systemic injustice on limited resources while amplifying the skills and voices of future leaders. YFC has built a framework so that those directly affected by the broken food system are given an opportunity to take on leadership role to transform it. (FTYFC1).

This model has proved to be inspiring to other groups of young people throughout the City, as the YFC inspired a new Youth Food Council to start operating within at least two known schools in NYC. While the founders had hoped to continue the work of the Council after the pilot year, the Council leaders gained full-time employment and were unable to continue the YFC after the first year. Reflecting on the Council, an organizer noted that “it was a great one-year pilot of an interesting model.”

Case Example IV: Worcester Advisory Food Policy Council Worcester, MA.

Mission

The Worcester Advisory Food Policy Council (WAFPC) was formed in 2006 at the appointment of the now former Mayor, Lt. Governor Tim Murray, with the primary goal being to “engage diverse partners to foster a healthy and just food system and active community involvement” (WAFPC, 2013). Stated objectives of the Council include advocacy, education, and collaboration regarding food systems and the built environment of Worcester. The WAFPC is also known as the “Worcester Food and Active Living Policy Council,” (WFALPC) as the name was very recently changed in order to reflect the Council’s expanded interest in active living and the built environment.

Geographical/ Social Context

Worcester, MA is the second largest city in New England, and home to a culturally and economically diverse group of residents. In Worcester, high rates of diet-related disease suggest low food security. As of 2012, 24% of Worcester residents are obese, and 9% have diabetes- - both these figures are higher than the State average (Allen et al., 2012). Further, the rate of hunger is six times that of Massachusetts's average, and in 14 low-income Worcester neighborhoods, one in three children live in a food insecure household (Allen et al., 2012). Finally, the WAFPC found that between 2001 and 2005, there was a 40% increase in the number of residents served by food pantries and soup kitchens associated with the Worcester County Food Bank (WFALPC, 2006).

Apart from the WAFPC, there are multiple local organizations in Worcester working to address food insecurity and nutrition in the City. One key organization working towards healthier food systems and people is the Regional Environmental Council (REC), a grassroots environmental justice organization that contains a Food Justice program. This program includes an urban agriculture project focused on youth development and empowerment called YouthGROW.

Worcester Advisory Food Policy Council

A member of the WAFPC noted that there are several reasons why the Council decided to seek youth participants. First, YouthGROW, a program of the REC, offers youth the opportunity to grow and sell food at local markets in the city. The WAFPC wanted to expand the opportunities available to these young people to include food

systems work. Second, there is a strong youth movement in Worcester that is involved with public policy work (such as anti-tobacco work) and with after school clubs involved with school gardening and other food systems projects. This provides the WAFPC with a source of local young people that are excited about civic participation and experienced with local food issues. Finally, noted a Council member, “it is important to involve anyone and everyone in food system change, from youth to elderly and everyone in between (WAFPC1).”

Youth are recruited to participate in the Council through community partners currently involved in the WAFPC and through local schools and after school clubs doing work related to food and agriculture. Youth are invited to large, public quarterly meetings and the Council members “try to ensure that the meetings have space for [young people] to participate in meaningful ways (WAFPC1).” The WAFPC has also held “pre meetings” for youth participants so that adult members can help prepare them for the issues being discussed by providing background information and reviewing the agenda. The quarterly meetings are scheduled during weekdays at 3:30 so that the youth members can attend. During meetings, the WAFPC works to ensure that space is provided for youth to share their concerns and opinions, which often takes the form of breakout sessions or small group discussions. Further, during the pre-meetings, adult members work with youth to find ways to ensure that their voices are heard at larger meetings.

Currently, the WAFPC cannot point to any policy recommendation that has been youth driven. However, a Council member noted that the youth participants have

been instrumental to the Council's work relating to school food. For example, youth members helped develop a healthy smoothie initiative that was piloted at one school and then expanded to other High Schools throughout the city. In addition to school food, the Council members are particularly interested in urban agriculture and developing a walking/exercise trail on a local public school's campus.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Through examining the responses of survey participants and interviewees, a number of patterns emerged from the case examples detailed in Chapter 4. This chapter will explore these themes in detail, and highlight common threads between the FPCs as they relate to each theme. The thematic categories identified include 1) the need for a full or part time, paid coordinator, 2) the necessity of preparing youth for meetings, 3) common reasons for including youth members, 4) common goals of youth involvement, and 5) the importance of community partners.

I. Need for a Full or Part Time Paid Coordinator

One resounding theme highlighted in each case example is the need for a full or part time, paid coordinator who can help organize and manage either a youth-led FPC or a youth component of an FPC. Both La Semilla Youth Food Policy Council and NYC's Flip the Table Youth Food Council are no longer operating largely due to the lack of a full time staff member dedicated to keeping the Council running. Currently, the La Semilla Council is on hold because it was too difficult for staff members to keep the Council running while simultaneously building the Youth Farm. Interviewee LSFPC1 emphasized that while the Youth Council was a priority, the organization did not have enough staff members to continue the Council while construction of the Youth Farm was underway. NYC's Flip the Table Youth Food Council ended after the pilot year because the volunteer coordinators began working other full-time positions, and were unable to continue volunteering their time to organize the Council.

However, unlike La Semilla, NYC's Youth Food Council has no concrete plans to resume operations.

Unlike the Youth-Led Councils mentioned above, the Worcester FPC and the New Haven FPC still have active youth members participating in Council affairs.

However, while youth are still participating in the New Haven FPC informally, the more structured Youth Coalition discussed in Chapter 4 is currently on hold because “staff are stretched so thin and everyone is doing so much” (NHFPC1). While Staff members from other paid organizations (such as CitySeed and Common Ground High School) were involved in the Youth Coalition, they are spread thinly and have many other work responsibilities outside of the Council. Recognizing the need for a full-time paid staff member dedicated to the coalition, the NHFPC and CitySeed will jointly begin hosting one of five Americorps VISTA volunteers in CT dedicated to youth and food justice issues. The New Haven VISTA will focus on developing youth leadership around food justice in New Haven, and will help get the Youth Coalition up and running again. This way, noted NHFPC1, “there is a person that is really dedicated to getting this movement in motion.”

Of the four FPCs examined in this research, only the Worcester FPC has a youth program that is operating at present. This may be largely due to the presence of a paid FPC coordinator, who focuses part of her energies on the Youth Council.

II. Importance of Preparing Youth for Meetings

The necessity of preparing youth for meetings is another common thread woven throughout the majority of case examples. While the organizers of La Semilla had

originally planned to jump right into the Council, they quickly realized that they had to “take some major steps backwards” to help youth get up to speed on food related issues (LSFPC1). As a result, the Council spent many months walking youth through the different elements of the food system, and connecting them with local growers and retailers in order to learn from community members. Similarly, Flip the Table Youth Food Council helped expand its member’s knowledge of food systems through visiting and learning from local food justice organizations, urban farms, policy makers, and from networking with peers. Council members also gained enrichment through working with a mentor in a food systems related profession of their choice.

The Worcester FPC attributes part of its success to the “pre-meetings” for youth participants. WAFPC1 noted:

Before our larger quarterly meetings we’ve held a “pre-meeting” for youth so that we can review what’s on the agenda, make sure they understand what we’re talking about, go over the background necessary, and prep them for ways they can participate (WAFPC1).

Providing opportunities for Council members to increase their knowledge of local and regional food systems issues and key players is not unique to youth Councils or youth components of FPCs. Often, newly formed FPCs will start off by conducting a Community Food Assessment (CFA), a systematic way of determining what is happening with local food systems in a community. By going through the process of a CFA, Council members enhance their knowledge of local or regional food issues, and also build relationships with community partners. As noted in Chapter 4, La Semilla YFPC grew out of a youth-led CFA conducted by the Colonias Development

Council. Once the YFPC was formed, the Council members spent the first year sharing knowledge and learning together about the various aspects of the food system. Extolling the positive impact a diverse Council can have on knowledge sharing, LSFPC3 noted that the Council members “came from different backgrounds, which brings different views to the table.”

Ensuring that youth are equipped with some basic knowledge of food systems is an important aspect of helping them feel comfortable participating in Council affairs. While many young people may join the Council equipped with valuable skills relating to gardening, nutrition, or school food issues, a general overview of food systems, as provided by La Semilla FPC, may help those new to food system concepts feel more empowered to participate and share knowledge. McCullagh (2012) reported that one FPC she surveyed held separate meetings for youth because youth on the Council had felt intimidated by the presence of veteran food systems participants. Another Council surveyed by McCullagh noted that youth wanted a seat at the general table, not on a separate youth Council:

The youth said ‘Yeah, we’d love to be involved and we want more knowledge about how these things work and we want the skills to be able to participate in things like this and we want to affect policy.’...What we decided was that the youth didn’t want to be separate from the FPC, they wanted to be integrated into it” (anonymous, in McCullagh, 2012).

As adult members of FPCs may have much to learn from younger participants, it is likely in their best interest to ensure that youth members feel at ease participating in Council affairs. Providing youth with a general knowledge of food systems reform

may help them feel more comfortable with concepts being discussed at meetings and therefore more likely to be active participants.

III. Common Reasons for Including Youth Members

Interviewees and survey participants stated similar reasons for including youth members in Council affairs. These reasons include the energy that youth bring to food systems work, the importance of diversity and inclusiveness in FPCs, and the opportunity to empower young people to realize their capacity to create change.

In an article published in the blog *Civil Eats* Rebecca Wiggins-Reinhard wrote:

When my colleagues and I came together to establish La Semilla, we did so because we share a passion and commitment to engaging and empowering youth. We have witnessed the power that comes when spaces are created for youth to participate in issues that directly affect them and their communities, and the transformation that occurs when they have opportunities to realize their own capacities to create change.

This reasoning reflects the positive youth development model highlighted in Chapter 2, which emphasizes focusing on the assets of young people and the ways in which they can contribute to beneficial change in their communities. The positive youth development model also plays a significant role in the New Haven FPC's desire to include youth members. Rather than forming the youth component as a way to keep young people off the streets or to teach them something, (characteristics of the "youth deficit" model) the New Haven FPC looks to attract youth because "they have lots of energy and are able to create excitement among other New Haven residents...they have a powerful voice in the food movement, so it is very important to include them" (NHFPC1).

In another *Civil Eats* article, food justice leader and activist Brahm Ahmadi discusses the need for organizations to build up leadership from within communities. Too often, Ahmadi argues, organizations focus on staff recruitment that relegates status quo professional experiences, such as grant-writing or the ability to write a technical report. However, an equally important skill may be having cultural competency to relate to other community members, or “being able to gain access to inner social and familial circles in a community of color, and speaking their language” (Ahmadi, 2013). Youth are often uniquely equipped with a number of these frequently under-valued skills. Recognizing the benefits of a diverse and inclusive FPC, interviewee WAFPC1 stated that members of the Worcester FPC “recognize that it’s important to involve anyone and everyone in food system change, from youth to elders and everyone in between. It’s also important to us that our work reflect many aspects of our community so we strive to be diverse and inclusive in a variety of ways - age, gender, profession/sector, race, etc.” WAFPC1 further noted that the Council was interested in including youth because youth voices are “often missed or mis-represented” in policy making, and that the adult Council members have been very impressed and enriched by youth involvement.

While interviewee FTYFC1 of NYC’s Flip the Table Youth Food Council also noted the themes mentioned above, it is clear that the motivations for forming a Youth Council were more reactionary than the motivations of the other three FPCs. As highlighted in Chapter 4, Interviewee FTYFC1 argues that youth are granted little agency in the current political system, and are tokenized in both non-profit organizations and

government programs. Further, youth and community representation are lacking in food policy Councils sprouting up in cities nationwide. Here, FTYFC1 touches on a number of themes outlined in Chapter 2. As noted in the Food Project's "State of the Field" report, the majority of organizations doing food work describe themselves as "youth centered" rather than "youth led," and therefore, youth are granted little agency or chances for leadership within such organizations. Watts (2007) further notes that in many cases, "the decision-making youth assume takes place within boundaries set by adults." Flip the Table emerged as a solution to this lack of agency within organizations... "instead of waiting for a food policy Council to form from the top down in New York City and then fighting for a seat at the table, we decided to create our own table, with youth as the leaders" (FTYFC1).

IV. Goals of Youth Involvement

Many of the interviewees emphasized goals for the youth members that extend beyond addressing local food systems issues. Rebecca Wiggins-Reinhard of La Semilla notes that "whether young participants in the YFPC become farmers or food systems advocates is secondary to understanding that each has a unique contribution to make to the world" (Wiggins-Reinhard, 2013). LSFPC2, an initial member of the La Semilla YFPC, shared that the Council helped her recognize her life goals of becoming a nutritionist and a graphic designer. On a personal note, she added, the Council "helped me break out of my shell and become less shy." More generally, she noted, the Council "helps youth learn to use their voice and speak out on what they think is wrong." LSFPC3 also stated that the Council opened new doors for her, and helped her decide to pursue a bachelor's degree in Dietetic Sciences.

While the organizers of La Semilla YFPC had hoped to begin influencing policy change in their initial year, they ended up spending the majority of their time walking youth through the various stages of the food system. But while the Council may not have impacted policy changes in its pilot year in the way some may have hoped, immediate policy changes were not the primary goal. As Wiggins-Reinhard noted, the foremost objective was to help youth discover that they each have a unique contribution to make in the world (Wiggins-Reinhard, 2013). A number of these Council members, such as LSFPC2 and LSFPC3 were inspired by participating in the Council and have decided to pursue higher education and careers relating to food systems and nutrition. LSFPC3 noted that, she believed “food/health related issues will always be a part of my life.”

Similarly to the objectives of La Semilla, the goals of Flip the Table were centered around “amplifying the skills and voices of future leaders (FTYFC1).” Flip the Table also focused on building coalitions and networks of youth to influence change. While Food systems reform was clearly a major objective of the Council members, inspiring future leaders and providing youth with opportunities for civic engagement were also key goals of the Youth Council. These findings from the case examples reinforce Michael Pollan’s argument that the goals of the food movement extend far beyond just food (Pollan, 2012), - - they encompass objectives such as community and economic development, and, as demonstrated by the case examples, a means through which young people can participate in policy making and other forms of civic engagement.

V. Role of Community Partners

Community partners seem to play a crucial role in youth involvement in FPCs, either as resources for workshops, demonstrations, networking or other sources of enrichment, or as sources of interested young people from which FPC's can recruit members. In all four case examples, interviewees spoke of organizations that have played pivotal roles in Council affairs. The youth component of the New Haven FPC is a cooperative effort of the NHFPC and CitySeed. CitySeed is a fiscal sponsor of the NHFPC, and a staff member at CitySeed helped form the Council. Another key player is Common Ground High School, which provides farm-based educational opportunities for high school students, and encourages many to get involved in local food policy affairs, such as the NHFPC.

The youth component of the Worcester FPC is also strongly connected to other local organizations. When asked about the reason for deciding to seek out youth participants for the Council, WAFPC1 noted that they wanted to expand opportunities around food systems reform for youth participating in YouthGROW (Youth Growing Organics in Worcester) an urban agriculture-focused youth development and employment program for low-income teens. WAFPC1 also highlighted the HOPE (Healthy Options for Prevention and Education) Coalition as a source of young people interested in public policy work. HOPE is a youth-adult partnership coalition created to reduce substance abuse, youth violence, and promote mental health in Worcester. Both YouthGROW and HOPE emphasize the importance of youth leadership and engagement with pressing community issues -

key ingredients for attracting young participants of these programs to the Worcester FPC.

Interviewees from La Semilla YFPC highlighted the importance of community organizations and members for program enrichment. During Council meetings, youth from La Semilla were able to meet with local farmers, food retailers, and the local food bank. The Youth Council itself is the result of a partnership between two organizations: La Semilla and the Colonias Development Council. Flip the Table interviewee FTYFC1 also extolled the importance of building relationships within the community - - “we developed a unique structure, whereby well-established community organizations nominate a youth to be on the Council, positioning YFC as a capacity-building and organizing tool to connect the many powerful yet disparate food justice, social justice, and environmental justice organizations in the city” (FTYFC1).

VI. Sustainability of Different Models of Youth Involvement in Food Policy Councils

At the beginning of the research process, all four case examples had fully functioning youth Councils or youth components of FPCs. However, by the end of the process, only one case example still demonstrates a fully functioning youth contingent. This finding raises an important question regarding the sustainability of the different models of youth involvement in FPCs outlined in Chapter 4, that is, which elements of the models make them more or less sustainable?

The case examples highlighted in this research represent three distinct models of youth involvement in FPCs. New York City's Flip the Table Youth Food Council represents an independent youth led Council. La Semilla's Youth Food Policy Council represents a youth Council operating within a larger organizational structure (La Semilla Food Center). Though the Councils have a number of structural differences, both the New Haven Food Policy Council and the Worcester Food Policy Council represent adult-led FPCs with integrated youth coalitions. Each of the models highlighted have characteristics that make them more or less sustainable, with some models exhibiting more sustainable components than others.

Flip the Table Youth Food Council - - the independent youth-led Council- - was unable to continue operating after its pilot year because the organizers were volunteers, and eventually gained full time employment that prohibited them from being able to continue organizing the Council. It is likely that the youth members were unable to continue the Council without the support of a coordinator, as all are still in school, and many have jobs and household responsibilities outside of the classroom. While it might seem like a simple solution for youth to take control of organizing the Council, young people, particularly high school age youth, are often constrained by economic forces. Thus, while the Council provided its pilot year participants with a rich and inspiring foray into food systems and food policy, it seems as if it was not well positioned to continue beyond the departure of the coordinators.

The La Semilla YFPC was also constrained by limited resources, as La Semilla Food Center did not have enough staff to continue the Youth Food Policy Council while simultaneously developing a Youth Farm. Yet unlike Flip the Table, which has no current plans or means to continue the Council, La Semilla is committed to continuing the Youth Food Policy Council as soon as the new Youth Farm is up and running, and to use the farm as a teaching tool for future Council members. There are a number of elements of La Semilla's YFPC that help secure its success and continuation in the future. First, La Semilla is situated within a larger organization - La Semilla Food Center- - and the staff members, including those who coordinate the YFPC, are paid, full-time employees. Second, the organization was able to offer Council members a small stipend in return for their participation, thus increasing the diversity of young people able to participate, and demonstrating the organization's genuine interests in the ideas and opinions of local youth. Interviews with two previous participants of the youth Council revealed that the Council provided a transformative opportunity for these young people and their peers, as both reported being inspired to pursue Bachelor's degrees in nutrition related fields. Therefore, not only is the Council a sustainable model in its ability to continue operating in the future, but in its ability to inspire alumni to continue working in the field of food systems reform.

Similarly to La Semilla, the youth component of the New Haven Food Policy Council is also in transition. In 2012, CitySeed and the Chair of the New Haven FPC worked collaboratively to create the Youth Coalition, which met both outside the general

meetings and as part of general meetings. However, after attendance dwindled, the organizers realized that they did not have the time to engage youth effectively, and put the Council on hold for the time being. However, the organizations plans to remedy this problem by hiring a three-year Americorps VISTA volunteer in August of 2013 to coordinate the youth component of the New Haven FPC, as well as other youth and food justice initiatives in the area. By having a point person dedicated to youth and food justice issues within New Haven, the Council is helping to ensure the sustainability of the Youth Coalition going forward. The New Haven model clearly demonstrates the need for a full time staff coordinator. Even though the Youth Coalition had support from both CitySeed staff and the Chair of the New Haven FPC, the lack of a staff member present to help young people engage with the adult members of the Council and with the material was crippling to the continued sustainability of the New Haven model.

The Worcester FPC is the only FPC of the four case examples that currently has an active youth component. The Worcester model exhibits a number of characteristics that have contributed to the sustainability of the Council. First, the Council has a full time coordinator who is actively involved in organizing and supporting the youth members. Second, the Council works closely with local youth development organization to recruit interested and engaged young people to participate in the FPC. Third, in order to ensure that youth members feel comfortable with the material being discussed and thus empowered to contribute to discussions and decision-making, the Worcester FPC has held pre-meetings for young people to

review the agenda and background information for the topics being discussed at general meetings. All of these strategies help to ensure that youth continue to attend and actively participate in meetings, thus contributing to the continued sustainability of youth involvement in the Council.

Of the three Councils that currently do not have an active youth component, only one - NYC's Flip the Table Youth Food Council - has no current plans to continue. This highlights the difficulty of forming a youth Council independent of a host or supporting organization, such as CitySeed or La Semilla Food Center. Flip the Table had clear reasons for not operating as part of an adult-led organization - the young people were tired of waiting for a seat at the table, and were reacting against the "tokenization of youth within both nonprofit organizations and government programs" (FTYFC1). These are real concerns, as even in organizations created to "develop youth," young people often experience ambivalence from adults regarding their ability to participate in real world decision-making (Costello et al., 2000). Yet, as demonstrated by the three other case examples, adult organizers or allies may have key roles to play in the sustainability of a youth-led or youth-centered initiative, including providing space, administrative support, equipment, skills training, and paying staff or even youth participants, as La Semilla has.

Moreover, if an important objective of FPCs is to bring all stakeholders to the table, which is often the case, the way to move forward is for young people and adults to work towards creating supportive and mutually beneficial intergenerational

coalitions rather than siloed groups. Undoubtedly, this is not a simple task. As noted by McCullagh (2012) one youth component of an adult-led FPC shared that they were hesitant to participate because they felt intimidated by the presence of slightly senior members. The Worcester FPC works towards alleviating these feelings by helping young people prepare for general meetings. Similarly, the staff at La Semilla Food Center created a program that walked youth participants through the stages of the food system so that they would be well prepared to engage with local politicians and community leaders. While Flip the Table's reasoning for attempting a youth-led model independent of a host organization is understandable, it proved to be unsustainable, and did not address the need for increased collaboration between adults and youth.

VII. Challenges to Youth Involvement in Food Policy Councils

While interviewees were most interested in discussing the opportunities and benefits associated with youth involvement in FPCs, a few considerable challenges emerged as themes from both the interviews and initial survey. Echoing McCullagh's (2012) findings, key barriers to youth participation include finding a meeting schedule that works well for young people, recruiting youth members, losing youth members annually to college or the workforce, and balancing participation in the Council with school, family, and after-school jobs and activities. Another challenge that was brought up less frequently was the difficulty of maintaining youth interest in Council activities.

While these findings demonstrate considerable challenges, they are certainly not insurmountable. Though there is no one-size-fits-all solution for overcoming these barriers, the recommendations presented in Chapter 6 may help alleviate a number of these obstacles to youth participation.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Noguera and Cannella (2006) note that the reasons for involving youth in policy making is twofold: 1) to provide young people with substantive opportunities for civic engagement, and 2) to increase the likelihood that adopted policies will succeed by drawing upon knowledge, insights and experiences of young people who are often both impacted by and familiar with the problem being addressed. As evidence from the Civil Rights Movement suggests, young people are critical actors in social change movements. Food Policy Councils have much to gain from involving local youth. First, involving young people in FPCs can provide youth with opportunities for civic engagement in the field of food systems reform, and inspire a new generation of leaders in the movement. Second, young people have unique perspectives and ideas that can help create better policies and programs aimed at strengthening food systems.

The following is a set of recommendations aimed at FPCs that may help facilitate effective and long-lasting youth involvement in Councils. The recommendations can be adapted to fit a variety of FPCs with different organizational structures and/or models of youth inclusion.

I. Recommendations

Advance the Positive Youth Development Model

Too often, young people are viewed as “inert vessels” to be filled with knowledge, norms, and attitudes by adults, rather than agents of change with the capacity to

produce knowledge and tackle complex social issues (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2006: xviii). In fact, a key reason why Flip the Table decided to form independently was to avoid the “tokenization of youth within both non-profit organizations and government programs, and the constant use of a deficit model that lays blame on the youth instead of on institutional power structures” (FTYFC1). Adult members of FPCs should work to advance the *positive* youth development model, which views young people as agents of change and valuable civic actors, rather than subjects of change.

If adult members of FPCs are serious about creating policies and programs that strengthen food systems, youth need not only to be at the table, but to be actively involved in substantive decision making processes. Adult members of FPCs can help advance the positive youth development model through ensuring that young people have a voice in decision-making, are listened to, and are viewed as assets to the Council. Local organizations that operate within the positive youth development model may provide support to Council members who have little experience working with young people, and can help facilitate trust building and community building between younger and older members of an FPC. Giving young people the opportunity to lead and be equal partners in decision-making will help ensure that they continue to stay engaged and involved in Council activities.

Prepare Youth for Meetings

One key element to sustaining a youth FPC or a youth component of an FPC is to help prepare youth for meetings. The Worcester FPC holds “pre-meetings” for its

youth members in order to get young people up to speed on some of the issues they may be less familiar with, and to ensure that they are able to participate at general meetings in meaningful ways. La Semilla helped provide its YFPC members with a comprehensive overview of the food system so that members felt empowered to engage with local politicians and organizations. These steps can help avoid a situation in which young people do not feel they have enough background knowledge to participate in Council discussions and decision-making.

In addition to providing benefits for youth members, training and education is also crucial for adult members of FPCs. Schiff argues that continuous education, training, and preparation for meetings is critical to maintaining members' interest and participation in Council discussions and decision making (Schiff, 2007). As FPCs are made up of diverse stakeholders with different areas of expertise, trainings are essential for all members, not just youth participants.

Recognize Youth Assets

It is more likely that adults will succeed in creating effective policies that support and benefit young people if they are willing to allow for substantive youth input (Torre and Fine, 2006). Young people often have insight into complex problems and unique perspectives regarding issues that directly affect them, such as school food reform. Engaging young people in dialogue and being able to recognize the unique assets that young people bring to the table is essential for developing successful policies and programs.

The case examples reveal multiple ways in which adult members of FPCs can recognize the assets of its youngest members. The New Haven FPC affirmed its confidence in youth participants through offering a voting seat on the Council dedicated to a youth member. This gesture shows that beyond offering young New Haven residents the opportunity to attend meetings, the adult FPC members are interested in giving young people the opportunity to influence substantive decisions.

La Semilla was able to demonstrate its genuine interest in amplifying youth voices through offering participants a stipend for their time and input. This not only signaled to young people that the adult organizers of the Council were serious about their concerns and ideas, but allowed organizers to recruit members from a more diverse group of young people.

There is an essential difference between inviting youth to the table and making sure they have the opportunity to speak, be listened to, and contribute to decision-making (Noguera and Cannella, 2006). When young people see that adults are serious about their concerns and ideas, they will be more likely to participate meaningfully in Council affairs. Providing youth with the opportunity to vote in the decision making process or providing them with a small stipend are two examples of actions adults can take that signify recognition of youth assets.

Equip Councils with a Paid Coordinator

The results of the case examples, as well as the literature on FPCs, strongly suggest that a full or part time paid coordinator is a key component of any successful FPC. While the volunteer coordinators helped make the pilot year of the Flip the Table Youth Food Council successful, their departure marked the end of the Council's ability to continue. A paid staff member at CitySeed helps to coordinate youth involved in the New Haven FPC, and a paid coordinator also helps maintain the youth component of the Worcester FPC. Coordinating meeting times, arranging trainings and workshops, applying for grants, and other administrative duties are key components of a successful FPC.

Build Community Partnerships

Community partnerships appear to be a key element in sustaining a youth Council or youth component of an FPC. In the four case examples, community organizations played crucial roles in identifying potential youth participants, enriching the experiences of young Council members, and providing administrative support.

As many FPCs are strapped for resources, forming partnerships with local school gardening organizations, youth development programs, after-school programs or other community groups can provide mutually beneficial opportunities for knowledge and resource sharing. Community organizations focused on youth development can play a particularly important role for youth components of intergenerational FPCs, as staff may be able to provide training and support regarding creating effective spaces for youth participation. The relationship

between the New Haven FPC and the local organization CitySeed is a good example of such a mutually beneficial relationship.

II. Limitations and Future Directions

As many FPC coordinators and participants are volunteers with other full time jobs, it was difficult to find available interviewees for this research project. While many people contacted were excited about the study and interested in contributing, only a handful were ultimately able to participate in interviews or return surveys.

Therefore, the information provided here reflects data and opinions from a small group of participants. More interviews and surveys might have strengthened the findings and recommendations, or revealed further themes to explore. However, this research provides a solid foundation for further research in the field regarding youth participation in FPCs. Hopefully, researchers can draw on the data and recommendations presented here to aid or strengthen future investigations.

As little research has been conducted in this field, there are many areas of inquiry regarding youth involvement in FPCs to be explored. Some topics for future investigations might include an assessment of policies and programs that have been directly affected by youth participants, or a quantitative assessment of how many FPCs are involving local youth. Hopefully, an increase in the literature on youth involvement in FPCs will influence Councils to involve younger members in a way that is sustainable and allows for young people to actively participate in the problem solving and decision making processes.

III. Conclusions

This past July, the Rooted in Community (RIC) National Network hosted their 15th national youth summit for youth food justice leaders in South Los Angeles. At the summit, youth leaders and adult allies from across the United States gathered to share strategies for youth leadership in food justice and community organizing. Rooted in Community has trained hundreds of young people in the field of youth leadership and food justice - - and its just one of many networks and organizations doing similar transformative work across the county. Young people's interest in building more just and sustainable food systems is growing. Tracking this trend, as Harper (2009) notes, is the need for broad, multidisciplinary, multisectoral and intergenerational approaches to feeding a population. Food Policy Councils have the potential to provide spaces for intergenerational and comprehensive action for strengthening food systems, but young people must be active participants at the table.

The four case examples demonstrate different models of ways young people can be involved in FPCs. While the NYC Flip the Table Youth Food Council provides an interesting model of an independent, youth-led Council, it appears to be the least sustainable of the models. The La Semilla model, which involved a youth-led Council within the context of larger organization, and the two FPCs with youth contingents, are likely more sustainable examples of ways youth can be involved in FPCs. The later models of youth involvement in FPCs require collaboration and effective communication between adult members and youth participants. While this is no

simple task, the more opportunities for collaboration FPCs are able to create between adult and youth members, the more likely the policies and programs created will better serve community members of all ages.

The contribution of this thesis to the academic literature is a baseline for further research in the field of youth involvement in FPCs. Beyond the academic contribution, the case examples and recommendations presented in this research can be adapted to inform a variety of FPCs with differing organizational structures and/or models of youth inclusion. In order to create a more just and sustainable food system for all, we need both scholars and practitioners in the field to recognize the necessity of engaging young people.

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APPENDIX

1. Survey Questions for Food Policy Councils

The following survey questions were successfully emailed to 75 FPCs in the format of a Google Survey. Responses were recorded in Google Drive and downloaded to an Excel file.

- 1) Please state the name and location of your organization
- 2) In what year did your Council first assemble?
- 3) Please state the total number of members on the Council
- 4) Are youth involved on the Council? If so, how many?
- 5) If No, please skip to the 4th question from the bottom which begins “if there are no youth participants...”
- 6) Do youth members actively participate in dialogue? Please give examples
- 7) In what ways are specific youth interests represented on the Council?
- 8) Have the youth members influenced the Councils’ policy recommendations?
If so, please give examples
- 9) Have youth-influenced FPC policy recommendations been implemented by external decision making bodies? If so, please give examples
- 10) Please provide your definition of a youth participant.
- 11) What are the challenges and opportunities of having youth on the Council?
- 12) If there are no youth participants on the Council, are you actively considering this?
- 13) Would you like to receive a copy of the results of this study?
- 14) If yes, please provide contact information
- 15) We may wish to conduct a phone or skype interview concerning your survey responses. Would this be ok with you?
- 16) Is there anything else you would like to add?

2. Questions for Youth Participants

Name of Food Policy Council _____

- 1) How old were you when you joined the Council?
- 2) What were your motivations for joining the Youth Council
- 3) What policy or community issues are you most concerned about?
- 4) What unique perspectives do you and your peers bring to the table?
- 5) Are you still involved with food/health related issues? If not, do you plan to be in the future?
- 6) Was the YFPC a positive experience that you would recommend to other young people in your community?
- 7) Has it influenced your life in any unexpected ways?
- 8) Anything else you would like to add?