Food Policy for All: Inclusion of Diverse Community Residents on Food Policy Councils

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Abstract

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) are committees of food system actors that propose policy and programming changes to strengthen a region's economy, environment, and community as they relate to the food system. Nearly 150 FPCs are operating at various capacities in American and Canadian cities, regions, and states. FPCs generally operate within the Community Food Security framework, which emphasizes cross-sector collaboration on community-level and systems-oriented solutions. There has been little research related to how community residents who are most impacted by social inequities or who are most at risk for food insecurity are involved in FPC activities. This research is focused on assessing why and how FPCs include diverse community residents (here defined as low-income consumers, women, mothers, seniors, youth, and people of color) in their policy and programming work. Examples drawn from interviews with a variety of FPCs shed light on current efforts of inclusion and inspire suggestions for improvement.

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Table of Contents

Abstract i

Acknowledgements ii

List of Tables/Figures v

Preface vi

Chapter 1. Introduction 1

Chapter 2. Literature Review 7

I. Food Policy Councils 7

II. Community Food Security 12

III. Food Justice and Food Democracy 15

IV. Empowerment and Inclusion 17

V. Problems/Challenges with the Alternative Food System 21

Chapter 3. Methodology 27

I. Research Question 27

II. Data Collection 27

III. Data Analysis 30

Chapter 4. Research Results 31

I. Mission 32

II. Reasons Food Policy Councils give for including community residents 32

a. On “the right track” 33

b. Community empowerment 36

III. Projects/policies that address food security/diverse community residents 36

IV. Methods for inclusion 38

Council-based techniques 39

a. Language about inclusion written into the Council’s mission statement 40

b. Representation on the Council 40

c. Use of working groups/committees 48

d. Meeting/event location, time, and structure 49

Project-based techniques 52

a. Plan events and projects that intentionally involve community residents 52

b. Attend other organization's meetings 57

c. Establish synergy with existing community processes and organizations 57

d. Use focus groups and open houses 60
e. Engage people by appealing to their self interest and with hands-on projects 62
f. Public education 63
g. Offer incentives 66
V. Challenges 67
Council's structure is not yet conducive for community inclusion 68
Reliance on volunteer Council members 69
Lack of resources 69
Culture and language barriers 70
Meeting times and locations 71
Limited number of seats 71
Challenges of engaging people in "food policy" 72
Motivating others, getting community buy-in and leadership 73
Anti-government sentiments 74
Diversity of the food system sectors, but not in personal demographics 74
Chapter 5. Discussion and Recommendations 75
I. Discussion 75
Meaningful inclusion 75
Culture of the Council 78
II. Recommendations towards inclusion 80
Inclusion throughout the Council's development 81
Knowing your community 84
Council member education and training 86
Relationship building 89
Lessons from community organizing 91
III. Conclusion 94
Appendix 97
I. Survey Questions 97
II. Summary of survey responses 99
References 101

List of Tables/Figures

Table 1. Taxonomy of Food Policy Council membership pg 9

Table 2. Programs and Policies pg 37

Figure 1. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation pg 18

Figure 2. Survey result: Are there seats designated by food system sector on your council? pg 41

Preface

I am interested in both the intersection of the alternative food movement and urban communities and in utilizing anti-racist practice to advance equity in food systems. My interests in this work came about in a somewhat circuitous way. I grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and developed a strong environmental ethic during my early childhood. This was not unusual for an Ann Arborite, but my devotion was more pronounced than any my peers and even others in my family. This ethic manifested in various ways, including carrying a box full of my fifth grade classroom's recyclable paper home each week, but eventually solidified in a deep interest in the environmental impacts of the food system. In college, I gave up eating meat and started volunteering on sustainable agriculture farms. On a trip to New York City the summer before my senior year, I stumbled across the community gardens on the Lower East Side; my curiosity in how communities could use agriculture as a tool for revitalization grew from there. After graduation from college, I moved to Detroit, Michigan, an epicenter for urban agriculture in the United States. In Detroit, I worked for an urban farm program, mainly spending time with youth from our neighborhood in the youth garden. My lessons for them revolved around healthy eating, growing food, and teamwork. On non-farm days, they often stopped by my house and I tutored them in math, how to make apple crisp and stovetop popcorn, and we often took bike rides to the river together. Over my two years there, they taught me about Detroit culture, the challenges of growing up in a city experiencing dramatic disinvestment, and the resilience of their community. I learned a lot from them and

hope that they did from me also, but also felt that I struggled to find a way to make them as excited about the food system as I was. Although our youth were racially and economically diverse, I realized that I was approaching the work through my own lens of environmentalism, which didn't necessarily resonate with their experiences growing up in Detroit. During this time, 'food justice' became part of my awareness as our staff began internal and external conversations about how white privilege and racism impacted the food system, including our own work. Members of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network began rightfully pointing out what I was intuitively feeling: that the impact of my efforts was limited because I hadn't yet divested myself from the viewpoints and motivations that were associated with my white, privileged background.

When I came to grad school for urban planning and agriculture policy, anti-racism, community engagement, and cultural competency continued to be a huge part of my focus, academically and personally. As I became interested in Food Policy Councils as sites for organizing food system change, I started wondering how they engage community residents. I wondered if we see opportunities for meaningful inclusion or if FPC activities mainly restricted to higher-level policy decisions that don't inherently involve community residents. I was curious if community involvement affected the success or failures of FPC activities and how community members could be engaged in policy decisions. These are all important questions that have deep roots in underlying structures of injustice in both the social and food systems. This research is just a small

step towards developing effective, inclusive strategies that also address foundational factors related to privilege and power in the food system. My goals were to identify existing "best practices" in community engagement and suggest additional methods for inclusion, specifically of community members with traditionally low access to both healthy food and political or economic power.

This paper documents multiple strategies to include community residents in Food Policy Councils' work, but is unfortunately limited by a few key factors. Because many Food Policy Councils are relatively new and very little of Food Policy Councils' current activities actively and consistently include diverse community residents, there is incomplete evidence for the potential benefits of such engagement. Additionally, we have much to learn about what types and levels of engagement are adequate to affect substantial change in the food system, especially at the local level, that many in the alternative food movement seek. However, much of the feedback I got from interviews tells me that many others agree that inclusion does matter, despite limited substantiation so far. Therefore, I hope that this can be the beginning of an effort to document and evaluate how inclusion methods impact the outcomes of Food Policy Councils' work in creating more just food systems.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Food has long been a driver of social movements. Patricia Allen writes that conditions in the American food and agricultural systems have been associated with a variety of social movements in the United States, including the populist movement of the 1890s, the food safety movement which began in the early 1900s, and the modern environmental movement of the 1960s (Allen 2004). These movements have focused on different aspects of the food system (the network of farms, distributors, restaurants, retailers, waste haulers, and consumers that collaborate to move food from farms to our tables). Today, food has again become a significant theme in a number of movements that are seeking to reshape what is known as the "conventional food system." Those who advocate for revolutionary changes to the food system can be considered actors in the "alternative food system." Various frameworks have been included under the alternative food system umbrella, including food safety, sustainable agriculture, local food, food justice, anti-hunger, food sovereignty, and community food security.

Of high concern to many environmental advocates, human rights activists, academics, authors, nutritionists, and consumers is the dramatic change in the American food system over the past century. They describe the shift as from a relatively simplistic structure of local small-scale producers to one of global, mass-producing corporations. This global, industrialized agriculture system requires energy-intensive chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and machinery. Additionally, the up-front costs associated with such production methods have favored large farms with ready access to capital and led

to consolidation and increased corporate ownership of the food system (Alkon and Agyeman 2011). And while this shift has improved the availability, reliability, and affordability of many food products, it has also coincided with significant human and ecological health concerns, including obesity, environmental pollution from farm-based runoff, and the decline of farming as a profitable profession for many (Schiff 2007).

Over the past two decades, consumer consciousness about how the current food system impacts our personal diet and health as well as the natural environment seems to have risen at a rapid rate. Authors including Michael Pollan, Eric Schlosser, Barbara Kingsolver, Marion Nestle, Joan Dye Gussow, the filmmakers of *Food, Inc.* and *Fresh*, and organizations such as Slow Food and Farm Aid, have raised alarms related to the conventional American food system and implored readers, viewers, and consumers to think more carefully about how and where the food we eat is grown, distributed, sold, and prepared. These concerns have influenced many to support "local" farmers and to value fresh, whole foods. In addition, these overarching fears about the food system have spread to practitioners in the fields of public health, public policy, and urban planning, who have begun to recognize how their work impacts the food system.

Many authors and activists have pointed out that the negative impacts of the conventional food system have been disproportionately felt in "neighborhoods and constituencies with little political or economic voice" (Harper et al. 2009:6). Issues that often affect community members in such neighborhoods are concerns such as diet-

related diseases (like heart disease and obesity), food security, food access/food deserts, and federal food assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) program. According to the USDA's definition, food security/insecurity is described along a range from no reported limitations on food access to reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake, mostly related to income limitations. The term "food desert" is used to describe neighborhoods with limited access to food retail, specifically healthy food options, and generally higher access to unhealthy food; however, this definition has been criticized as too simplistic (Raja et al. 2008). SNAP and WIC programs were introduced in the 1960s to provide additional assistance in the form to households and individuals facing food insecurity. Recipients receive money that can be used to purchase specific foods; total monetary benefits depend on household income, size, assets, and geographic region. The continued prevalence of hunger, food insecurity, and variable access to healthy food has been used as evidence of the failure of the conventional food system to adequately meet the needs of all.

However, not all alternative food movement projects are geared at addressing the needs of low-income communities or communities of color. Eric Holt- Giménez and Yi Wang point out that the often repeated adage "vote with your fork" (by purchasing the type of food that contributes to a healthy environment and body) assumes that our food system "can be reformed through informed consumer choice, and ignores the ways working-class and people of color have historically brought about social change" (Holt-

Giménez and Wang 2011:85). This reveals that the alternative food system movement includes diverse — and at times competing — organizational forms, strategies and loci of action (Hassanein 2003).

Despite differences in methods and approaches, many community organizations and city leaders who work in the food system understand the role of policy as a tool to improve the food system in their communities. One means of organizing these food system groups and leaders around food policy is through the creation of city, state, or regional Food Policy Councils (FPCs). These Councils are collaborative committees that help coordinate food system-related activities that foster the local economy, protect the environment, and strengthen the community. A key goal of many FPCs is to promote a socially just food system through policy and social change (Harper et al. 2009). Councils meet on a regular basis and function as forums for discussing food issues as well as coordinating policy changes and implementing programs in their local food system. Councils work across sectors; Council members often represent actors in the food system from different sectors such as production, distribution, retail, waste, and policy. Members may be nutrition educators, academics, farmers, city planners, or restaurant owners. In many cases, Councils were established after community food system organizations identified policy barriers to their work and convened a grassroots working group or approached their local government to assemble a Food Policy Council (Harper et al. 2009).

An increasingly common critique of organizers in the alternative food movement - including FPC members - is the overrepresentation of white people in leadership roles as compared to people of color (Alkon and Agyeman 2011, Harris 2007, Slocum 2006a, Winne 2008). This critique is significant as we consider how to create effective and sustainable transformation of the food system, something that many alternative food system advocates are working diligently to achieve. According to demographic predictions, over fifty percent of the United States population will be non-white by the year 2050 (US Census Bureau 2004). This shift is important to reflect on as we think about how alternative food movements can become mainstream and relevant to the majority of Americans. Additionally, some argue that we cannot be effective at transformative change in the food system without the direct consultation or participation of people who are the most negatively impacted by the failures of the current food system - specifically communities of color and low-income communities. This argument informs this research, which seeks to examine how *diverse community residents* (defined for this paper's purpose as low-income consumers, women, mothers, seniors, youth, and people of color) are included in the work of FPCs. Any resident should certainly be welcome to participate in local food system issues, but this research is specifically concerned with how community residents who are usually marginalized in society and the food system can be better included in food system change. Examples drawn from a variety of American and Canadian FPCs shed light on the current efforts towards inclusion and inspire suggestions for improvement.

Outline of chapters to follow

The next chapter of this thesis will introduce from the literature information on themes and concepts relevant to this research, including food justice, food democracy, empowerment, and inclusion.

Chapter 3 will detail the methodology that was used to conduct the research, including the development of the research question as well as survey and interview tools. This chapter will also discuss the process of data collection and analysis that was undertaken.

Chapter 4 will provide an in-depth review of research findings, highlighting evidence directly from interviews and survey responses. This chapter will describe projects and policies that address diverse community residents, reasons interviewees gave for including these residents, and examples of methods and techniques used by FPCs to include them. Additionally, this chapter will detail challenges interviewees expressed in their attempts to be inclusive of diverse community residents.

Chapter 5 will provide several recommendations for how FPCs and their members can improve the inclusion of diverse community residents, drawn from the findings of the research and techniques borrowed from other disciplines.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The following chapter provides relevant information culled from an interdisciplinary literature review. First, the operations of FPCs are discussed, followed by an introduction to the “community food security,” “food justice,” and “food democracy” frameworks, which tend to indirectly guide the work of many Councils. Last, empowerment, within the context of the food system, is introduced as a foundation for understanding key concepts of inclusion.

I. Food Policy Councils

Food Policy Councils are predicted by some to become “the fastest-growing institutional innovation in food governance over the next 25 years,” potentially becoming as common as city departments of public health or recreation (Roberts 2010:173). Since the inception of the first FPCs in the 1980s, they have identified and addressed various policy and programming "gaps" in their local food systems. Anne Bellows and Michael Hamm (2002) discuss how many FPCs developed in relationship to the emergence of the community food security framework (described in detail below). FPCs take on a wide variety of activities that are attuned to the needs of their communities and are relevant to their geographic scope (city, regional, and state). They have supported the creation of markets for locally-produced foods, the preservation of farm land, the alteration of zoning laws to allow food production in cities, the adoption of tools that encourage more informed and healthy food choices, and importantly, the improvement of food security for low-income people. The first Food Policy Council in the United States (in

Knoxville, Tennessee) grew out of a University of Tennessee report that documented the lack of nutritious food available in certain neighborhoods. The Portland Food Policy Council's 2003 activities included a food policy inventory, an institutional purchasing survey, community interviews about food access, and a food access map (Portland-Multnomah Food Policy Council 2003).

While there are often distinctions between the work, funding, staffing, and operation of state-level and local-level Food Policy Councils (Harper et al. 2009), no matter their geographic scope, FPCs bring together people from a variety of food system sectors to collaborate on common issues at regularly occurring meetings. Traditional food system sectors represented include agricultural production, processing/manufacturing, distribution, retail, consumption, and waste management, but FPCs also commonly include research and education components. This multi-sectoral composition contributes to the potential to create "innovative programs, policy and planning approaches that might not have been created" without such synergistic efforts (Schiff 2007:8). Nearly 150 FPCs are operating at various capacities in American and Canadian cities, regions, and states. They are established by state or local governments or by grassroots initiatives. Each Council is different and generally has broadly defined missions which allow them to tackle a variety of the most pressing local needs (Schiff 2007).

The composition of the Council, in terms of food sector representation, professional background, and personal interests, plays an influential role in the specific types of food policies and programs the Council undertakes. Having a variety of unique member perspectives can yield creative solutions that would not exist without the diversity of experiences (Schiff 2008). For the most part, FPCs solicit applications for Council members and appoint members for a certain term, ranging from one year to an unlimited number of years. Berkeley, California, seems to be an aberration, as anyone can become a member at any time after they have attended two Council meetings. However, most Councils have a limited number of seats, often between 10 and 20, and so can only officially accommodate a certain number of members. To reconcile this challenge, some Councils draw on "non-member" representatives to participate on committees or task forces without being appointed as full Council members. Other Councils hold open meetings in which anyone is able to voice their opinion (Schiff 2007). Table 1 outlines some of the main opportunities for involvement on FPCs.

Table 1. Taxonomy of Food Policy Council membership

Category	Explanation
Full member	• 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
Working group/committee member	• 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

Official attendee	• specifically invited to attend one or more Council meetings to offer their professional or personal knowledge • likely does not have voting rights
Meeting attendee	• member of the general public who attends public Council meetings • likely does not have voting rights on the Council

FPCs tend to work on four main areas (Harper et al. 2009). They:

- serve as forums for discussing food issues.
- foster coordination between sectors in the food system.
- evaluate and influence policy.
- launch or support programs and services that address local needs.

Not all FPCs take on all four functions, but often a single initiative integrates more than one of these functions at the same time. Despite "policy" being in their name, many FPCs also engage in "projects" that are more hands-on than policy actions. They have found that by providing opportunities for community members to make tangible connections to their food system, such as by working to create an urban farm, that they are able to keep the public more interested in the Council's work.

While FPCs' operations are often oriented toward improving access to healthy (and often locally-grown) food in their communities, the magnitude of this impact is still unconfirmed and there are few verified examples that demonstrate a direct correlation between Council work and improved food security. This is because FPCs are relatively new (see the Appendix for information on the age of Councils surveyed in this research) and because none are known to have conducted formal evaluations of the impact of

their work. Additionally, FPCs are still figuring out how to best effect change in their communities; Mark Winne stated that FPCs still need more time to demonstrate their impact and to educate themselves on the various policy levers to effect change (personal communication 2/1/2011). Some of the Food Policy Councils that seem to be having the highest impact in their communities have secured funding for paid staff positions and have the direct support of political leaders (such as a mayor). Lack of funding is a significant challenge for Councils and gives rise to concerns about Councils' long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

One of the main appeals of FPCs to some is that they have the potential to encourage change of the conventional food system and expand participation in the alternative food system and in activities that promote social justice. As FPCs operate on a local, county, or state level, they have an opportunity to be more innovative and inclusive of local residents than food policy decisions that occur on a federal level. Local food systems can "create space for reflection, communication, and experimentation with alternative structures" that promote equity and social justice (Allen 2010:305). Because FPCs are situated between the community and the government, they have the potential to amplify the voices of neighborhoods that have limited access to power and improve equity in the community's food system (Harper et al. 2009). Others have noted the value of including diverse community members on FPCs. Rebecca Schiff (2007:245), for example, interviewed an FPC member who noted that including representatives "who

are not employed in the food system" helps to bridge between those Council members who do food work and "the rest of the world."

FPCs do face a number of limitations in their efforts to transform the food system. Their work is usually focused on local or regional policies; therefore FPCs are constrained in rectifying national- or global-level power imbalances (Allen 1999). FPCs may find themselves up against "strong historical forces of injustice…especially those that are focused on market-based initiatives" (Allen 2010:305). Alternatively, in some cases, local deliberations have created less socially just outcomes and have instead reinforced the status quo (Allen 2010). Additionally, Councils generally operate with a low budget and exist in an in-between status; many are aligned with government departments but do not have legislative authority to make policy decisions and rather rely on close relationships with politicians, who then introduce proposals to the government's voting body.

II. Community Food Security

The community food security (CFS) framework, developed in the 1980s and 1990s, is focused on establishing "new economic spaces" that promote alternatives to the current food system (Gottlieb and Fisher 1998:4). CFS advocates explain that the current American food and agriculture system has produced a paradox of both food abundance and food insecurity; while we waste almost 30% of all the food we produce (USDA 2002), almost 15% of Americans experienced days when they couldn't afford to eat sufficient calories (USDA 2011). In addition, the current food system has been criticized

as being environmentally and socially unsustainable, contributing to tremendous contamination of the environment through nutrient run-off, while farmers continue to struggle to make a profit yet low-income consumers are unable to pay for quality, fresh foods. CFS is a condition that is met when "all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice" (Bellows & Hamm 2002:35). CFS emphasizes community-level solutions, rather than only individual-level remedies, as well as strategies for empowerment and food self-reliance, in addressing broader issues that impact local food supply and access such as land use planning, transportation, sustainable food production, employment and public health (Gottlieb and Fischer 1995, Allen 1999). The systems-oriented approach necessitates the "talents and participation of diverse peoples in the community: different ages, cultures and races, job and economic security status, genders, citizenship, and so on" (Bellows & Hamm 2002:37).

CFS principles are not always easy to implement; its systems-oriented approach looks at the connections between all aspects of the food system. The groups that participate most likely do not have prior experience talking or working together, not to mention creating complex, collaborative strategies together (Hassanein 2003). CFS's focus on agricultural production emphasizes local and regional food systems while its focus on consumption emphasizes the needs of low-income people. Finding a solution that encourages environmentally sustainable agricultural production and pays local farmers

a reasonable wage for their work, as well as provides affordable food to low-income people is a central and ongoing challenge in the CFS movement.

CFS is often presented as an alternative to hunger-focused initiatives. During the Reagan administration in the 1980s, federal funding for food and housing assistance declined, pushing more of the responsibility for food assistance onto the private or non-profit sectors – specifically food banks and soup kitchens. Welfare reform of the 1990s also continued to reduce resources available to support the poor, increasing the demands for emergency food assistance programs (Poppendieck 1998). In response to the continual need, CFS sought to find sustainable solutions to addressing food security (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999). While the CFS framework emphasizes using locally-based resources in its solutions (Allen 1999), it still calls for increased funding to federal food assistance programs (Holt- Giménez and Wang 2011). Over the past decade, many communities have conducted Community Food Assessments to track measures of community food security, including household food security, number of community gardens, number of farmers' markets, and use of food banks. While data that shows that farmers' market locations have increased[1] and farm to school programs have increased[2] (USDA 2010), overall food insecurity has also increased[3] (USDA 2011),

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[1] The number of farmers' markets rose to 5,274 in 2009, up from 2,756 in 1998 and 1,755 in 1994.
[2] The number of farm to school programs, which use local farms as food suppliers for school meals
[2] The number of farm to school programs, which use local farms as food suppliers for school meals
programs, increased to 2,095 in 2009, up from 400 in 2004 and 2 in the 1996-97 school year.
[3] In 1998, 13.5 percent of Americans were food insecure; 2004, 13.2 percent of Americans; 2010, 16.1 percent of Americans.

showing that community food security efforts have been successful on some fronts but unable to overcome national economic trends.

III. Food Justice and Food Democracy

This research touches on fundamental concerns related to justice, equity, and democracy in the alternative food movement. It fits within the broader framework of community food security but specifically deals with important food justice and food democracy frameworks. Both food justice and food democracy work towards establishing a more socially just food system, which Patricia Allen (2010:297) defines as "one in which power and material resources are shared equitably so that people and communities can meet their needs, and live with security and dignity, now and into the future." Neither food justice nor food democracy have a universally accepted definition and while the concepts overlap, there are some important distinctions that can be drawn from the literature.

Food democracy "confronts the control that powerful and highly concentrated economic interests exert on food and agriculture today" (Hassanein 2003:79) and offers opportunities for citizens to become involved in making decisions that shape their food system in order to be a system that is "accountable to people, responsible to communities and the environment, and socially just" (Citizen's Network for Michigan Food Democracy 2005). Food democracy calls for overall greater access and collective benefit from the food system (Lang 2000). Food Policy Councils present an opportunity to practice food democracy by participating directly in decisions that shape the food

system (Hassanein 2003). This happens whenever FPC members meet to work on projects or when members of the general public attend focus groups to give feedback that informs policy proposals the Council makes.

Similar to food democracy, food justice emphasizes that eaters are citizens as opposed to just consumers (Levoke 2006) but takes a more systemic and historical approach to understanding the food system and regards "class, race, and gender inequity as core principles" behind injustices in the food system (Giazzoni 2010). Such structural injustices include the concentration of people of color in lower-paying food jobs that have less responsibility as compared to white people (Liu and Apollon 2011) and the higher rates of nearly every diet-related disease affecting people of color as compared to whites (Harper et al. 2009). Additionally, communities of color and poor communities often cannot access the healthy foods advocated by the alternative food movements due to lack of economic buying power and lack of physical availability in their neighborhoods (Alkon and Agyeman 2011). Some in the food justice movement view the lack of healthy food sources in poor communities as a human rights issue. In developing solutions, food justice advocates borrow organizing techniques from the civil rights movement and the environmental justice movement as a means to place "communities in leadership of their own solutions" (Harper et al. 2009:12). Food justice efforts that seek to address the root causes of injustice in the food system include workshops that focus on dismantling racism and campaigns advocating for living wages for food workers or fair farm labor laws.

IV. Empowerment and Inclusion

Empowerment and inclusion are two key terms in addressing the participation of diverse community residents on FPCs. Empowerment is a construct shared by many disciplines and relates to an individual's relationship to "power" in a community; power is often operationalized as the authority to make and implement decisions. Nanette Page and Cheryl Czuba (1999) suggest that empowerment is a "multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives." Through empowerment, power is transferred to others or shared with others. Empowerment is understood by community organizing scholars and practitioners as a process that recognizes "the assets people bring to address their own problems" while building "assets and resources for positive change, such as gaining a sense of personal control or influence, knowledge and skills, social influence, economic resources, political power, and legal rights" (Sutton and Kemp 2011:159). Empowerment processes seek to validate "a person's inherent knowledge and experience" – their "lived experience" (personal life experience) – by analyzing and supporting their individual experience in relation to their community's collective experience (Pardasani 2005:91).

"Inclusion" in the context of this research relates to how those communities which are most affected by food system injustices are given a voice in defining the food-related problems and shaping solutions. Inclusion is sometimes conceptualized along a continuum, such as the eight types of citizen participation, developed by Sherry R. Arnstein, ranging from the lowest level – "Manipulation" – the middle level of

“Consultation” to the higher levels of “Partnership,” “Delegated Power,” and “Citizen Control” (Arnstein 1969). This range represents the difference between informing community members of decisions that have already been made, asking community members for their opinion on a list of pre-defined topics, and giving the community members the authority to define the topics themselves. Food Policy Council activities can be fit along this range and will be discussed in the *Methods for Inclusion* section below.

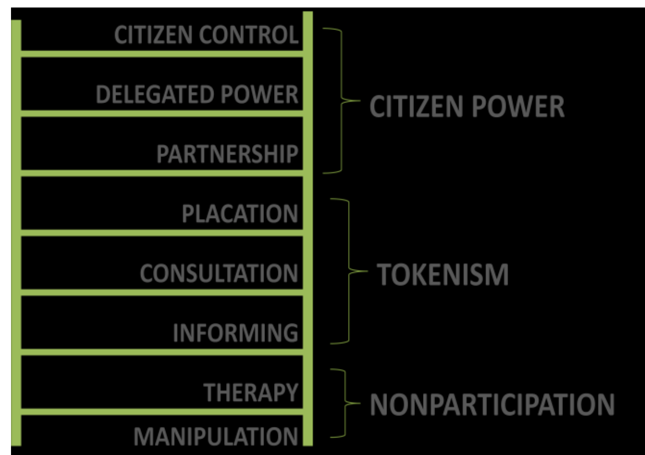


Figure 1. Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation.

The empowerment and inclusion of the community residents who are most affected by social injustices at the forefront of decision-making and programming are necessary in social change movements; "there are few examples in the social movement literature, for instance, of one class of people bringing about substantive changes for another class of people” (Winne 2006:191). This is not to say that "outsiders" with intellectual and political capital were not influential. Aldon Morris and Suzanne Staggenborg (2004) state that “to be successful, social movements require that a myriad of intellectual tasks be performed extremely well” (175) and highlight the importance of the educational capital that leaders from privileged backgrounds in accomplishing these tasks. However, Winne argues that we must not overlook the importance of marginalized and

underprivileged groups in social movements and says that "the victories secured by those movements were due to the leadership of the people most affected by their outcomes" (Winne 2008:191). Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman (2011) claim that in order for the alternative food movements to go “beyond providing alternatives and truly challenge agribusiness’s destructive power, they will need a broad coalition of supporters” (5). The most important source of support could come from low-income communities and communities of color that have been most deeply harmed by the conventional food system, they say. According to Allen (2010), achieving social justice and equity within the food system requires an effective democratic process that requires the inclusion and empowerment of those who are most vulnerable and have been most negatively impacted by the current food system. This practice of inclusion is common already with environmental justice and community organizing groups (Loh and Eng 2010), but it is just beginning to enter into the alternative food system movement.

Empowerment models combine elements of food democracy, food justice, and CFS. The emphasis on locally-based decisions in the CFS movement means that "community food security projects provide people with an opportunity to participate in projects in which they feel they can make a difference" (Allen 1999:120) and places FPCs in a unique position to promote community food security through the engagement of the community in food policy decisions. Providing both consumers and food workers "more opportunities to take leadership in defining what is good for them and their families" is needed to ensure that the entire [food] system sustains its producers, as well as its

consumers" (Liu and Apollon 2011:20). These "opportunities for movement participation are crucial because a high level of mobilization needs to occur if the alternative agro-food movement is going to effect transformational change" on both an individual and systemic level (Hassanein 2003:81). By engaging members in a systems-wide analysis of pressing food system concerns, FPCs can empower members with new critical thinking and problem-solving skills that, according to Wayne Roberts, can transform the everyday functioning of governments that FPCs relate to through increased interdepartmental collaboration (Roberts 2010). In particular, FPCs could work to empower marginalized communities to become active in their food system.

The challenge of many social justice movements, including the alternative food movement, continues to be how to "address social justice issues when, by definition, those who confront the most egregious social justice problems are the least powerful in the community" (Allen 2010:302). These low-power groups suffer from structural inequities that have limited their access to resources, knowledge, or connections that typically lead to participation in decision making processes, both in the general social system and in the food system. Allen (1999:121) cautions that "bringing groups with different interests together in community food security coalitions can be extremely difficult," and "the presumption that everyone can participate (much less equally) is a magician’s illusion…" (Allen 2010:304). Participation is moderated by relationships of power and privilege that have to do with how culture, race, gender, and more, impact "not only who is allowed to be part of the conversation but also shape who has the

authority to speak and whose discursive contributions are considered worthwhile" (Allen 2010:303). Efforts to include "the community," and poor people especially, "does not guarantee that their needs will be met or that they will have control over decision making and institutional accountability; this is the principle of the "illusion of inclusion" (Pope 2007:1). Rights of inclusion are insufficient unless these rights are met by obligations to meet people's needs. Otherwise, they can be purely symbolic and serve to further alienate the powerless (Allen 2010; Arnstein 1969).

V. Problems/Challenges with the Alternative Food System

Alternative food system activists and organizations seek to create just and sustainable alternatives to the current food system. However, some authors and activists have questioned the extent to which the alternative food movement can actually shape such a food system without explicitly attempting to counter the racism, classism, and sexism present in our current system. Their alternatives have been criticized as "reproducing the same political and economic disenfranchisement inherent in the industrial food system" (Harper et al. 2009:12). Of particular concern is that the leadership of alternative food system organizations tends to be majority white staff who often come from well-educated backgrounds; this often separates them from the food insecure communities they serve (Guthman 2008, Harris 2007, Slocum 2006a, Slocum 2006b, Winne 2008). As Karen Washington, a South Bronx food activist, says "right now, we (meaning people of color and low-income communities) are being talked about in terms

of the statistics, but we're not being included in the solutions" (Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative 2009).

Keecha Harris (2007:8), critiques the prevalence of "very well intending individuals and organizations" in the alternative food movement who "plan their work with an intent to 'fix' communities through food." She says that these organizations often overlook the existing assets of food insecure communities and people, placing the lead organization in a role of "helping" the local community (Harris 2007:8). Separating those who plan community food security projects from the food insecure "leads to a great deal of resentment and further distance between the food system's haves and have-nots…[and] drives a deeper wedge into the local food system" (Harris 2007:8). Lila Cabbil offers similar critique when she speaks about the fact that many alternative food organizations that are focused on food security don't actually have a relationship with their major stakeholders, food insecure people. She emphasizes including those stakeholders in designing policies that will bring about sustainable change rather than focusing on service-provision (Cabbil 2010). Hassanein argues that food system actors seeking sustainable solutions cannot rely on experts alone to make decisions about the food system because "those decisions involve choosing among values" (Hassanein 2003:78). In order to make values-based decisions, Cabbil (2010) says we need to involve those with the lived experience. These authors and activists entreat us to reflect on how the work of members of the alternative food system movement is accountable to those they

are "assisting" and how actors in the movement are participating in the empowerment of people.

There is nothing inherently wrong with white people or higher-income people being leaders of alternative food system organizations. But, because food is a cultural commodity (each group has their own cultural understandings and practices of food), the effect of predominantly white leadership of these organizations has meant that food system activism is generally framed within the white culture's understanding of food (Agyeman and Simons 2012). While concepts of healthy food, people, and land "are not intrinsically white, the objectives, tendencies, strategies, the emphases and absences, and the things overlooked in community food make them so" (Slocum 2006b). By dismissing food's placement as a cultural commodity, whites tend to assume "universalism among conceptions of taste, food choice, and methods of social change" (Gordon 2008:5). Ignoring the racialized roots of our current food system can "inhibit the participation of people of color in alternative food systems, and can constrain the ability of those food systems to meaningfully address inequality" (Alkon and McCullen 2011:3).

An underlying challenge in diversifying the alternative food movement is the association of the movement's practices and behaviors with white culture. The "spaces" of the alternative food movement, such as farmers' markets, food co-ops, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and even FPCs, tend to be white-dominated and

“whites continue to define the rhetoric, spaces, and broader projects of agro-food transformation" (Guthman 2008:395). Jackie Gordon cites the example of Alice Waters and Ann Cooper, two white women who are considered leaders in school lunch reform, and says that they have overlooked the historical and cultural roots of food choice, which has resulted in programs that undervalue the experience of people of color.

> *"While these women believe that they are addressing race-based disparities [in health], they do not attempt to understand why historically people of color are more prone to eating unhealthy convenience foods than their affluent, white counterparts. As a result, their programs do not aim to change a historic policy system, based on racial inequality, which has created health and food access disparities between [the] poor, people of color and whites….The historical policies, which have separated people of color to equal access of food, are rendered invisible. Rather people of color are portrayed as being uneducated about food choice." (Gordon 2008:11)*

When the goals of the alternative food organizations are to improve the nutrition status of marginalized groups, Warrix argues that practitioners need an understanding of the cultural background of those communities in order to create an effective opportunity for change (Warrix 2000). Ethnographic interviewing may be useful in assisting practitioners who want to learn more about the cultures of community members. It is important that interviewers “adopt an educational stance” so that they are able to “hear new information without feeling that their self-esteem is being assaulted, their ego is being assaulted, or their own sense of cultural identity is being undermined” (Leigh 1998:17). Culturally competent interviewers will be able to respect the views and experience of others and not impose their own “cultural interpretations on the information” (Leigh 1998:10).

Rachel Slocum (2006a) calls for using an anti-racist lens that recognizes institutionalized racism, inequality, and privilege that exist within the food system and alternative food organizations, including FPCs. Anti-racist practice can impact the culture of the Council and the level of community engagement. According to Malik Yakini of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, addressing structural racism in the food system is especially important given the racial inequities among the leadership in the community food security movement (in Detroit, as well as elsewhere).

> *"Many of the people doing the work are white people, particularly young white women, with golden intentions, but we have a problem because those young white women often come into African American and Latino communities and have not divested themselves of the vestiges of white supremacist thinking…In Detroit, which is a city at least 85% African American, we found that many of the key players in the Good Food Movement in the city are white people… it's not an attack on people, it's an analysis. White people who stand with us against white supremacy, we're with you. But if we can't have an open, honest discussion about white supremacy and white privilege, we don't really have much basis for a relationship." (Yakini 2010)*

A first step in critical thinking about institutional racism and oppression in the food system is to "understand how a regime of white supremacy" was created and has been maintained in America, and then apply it to the food system context (Willis 2008:17). White and/or privileged members of FPCs or other community food security organizations can examine their privilege and understand how they can leverage their positions of privilege to distribute resources more equitably. Many activists in the alternative food system, despite their rhetorical support for social justice, "don't understand how they participate in the continued oppression of people who are poor

and people who are starving" (Cabbil 2010). A Detroit activist describes the potential role of whites in the alternative food movement from her perspective:

> *"The urban ag[riculture] movement [is] predominantly filled with white faces, white voices, white interests. . . . white people don't realize that there is such a thing as white privilege. So when you come into a community and you make decisions about doing good things—these are good and important things—the people that you are affecting are either not equal at the table or are just as integrally involved and invested as the people who got the money. Whites engaged in the movement often have access to philanthropic resources outside the community and are able to leverage their positions of privilege to provide food and gardening resources to the less fortunate." (Ebony, Detroit food justice activist, as quoted in White 2010:205)*

Echoing Julie Guthman, the objective of this research is not to condemn FPCs for not doing enough, but to raise questions that address why inclusion of diverse community residents must go beyond just "inviting others to the table" which Guthman points out is "an increasingly common phrase in considering ways to address diversity in alternative food movements." A critical corollary question is "Who sets the table?" (Guthman 2008:388).

Chapter 3. Methodology

VI. Research Question

This research addresses what tools FPCs can utilize to engage diverse community residents who are not professionals in the food system in creating a just and sustainable food system. Specific attention is paid to community members who have been most affected by social food system inequalities, for example Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients, residents of food deserts, soup kitchen clients, and other diverse community residents (defined as low-income consumers, women, mothers, seniors, youth, and people of color). Specifically, the research sought to answer: "How do Food Policy Councils include diverse community residents in their policy and programming activities?" This included an exploration of existing programs and policies, FPCs' organizational structures, FPCs' decision-making processes, and the views of FPC directors.

VII. Data Collection

Three primary data collection methods were employed in this research: (1) objective review of relevant existing literature and documents; (2) a 16-question online survey distributed directly to FPC directors and through the Food Policy Council listserv as well as the COMFOOD listserv (both coordinated by the Community Food Security Coalition, a coalition organization for North American community food security groups); and (3) semistructured interviews with key informants. Jaclyn DeVore (UEP '12) assisted with transcribing and analyzing the interview data.

Of the 155 North American FPCs listed on the Community Food Security Coalition's website (plus other FPCs we found doing internet searching for additional groups), 87 were deemed "accessible" (with contact information available and accurate e-mail addresses). We received a total of 53 responses to the survey, which represented 43 distinct FPCs (49% of total accessible). The surveys asked for background information about the FPC itself as well as examples of policies and programs the FPC undertook that impacted diverse community residents. The survey included short answer and multiple choice questions. We analyzed qualitative answers by coding them thematically. For example, an open-ended question regarding the level of involvement of diverse community residents in policy-making or programming included answers grouped into emergent categories such as "residents on the steering committee," "our meetings are open to the public," "through indirect/proxy representatives," "through specific outreach," "through listening sessions and information gathering with specific communities," "during specific events," or "through partnerships with community organizations."

In addition, the study involved semi-structured interviews with a directed sample of FPC leaders to explore issues of inclusion more in depth. Informants were chosen from survey respondents who volunteered to be contacted for a follow-up interview. We contacted additional informants who had not completed the survey but had interesting procedures documented elsewhere that were encountered over the course of research (such as newsletters, blog posts, or organization websites) that were related to our

research questions. The selection of interview participants aimed to include representatives of FPCs whose Councils have undertaken food system policy-making and programming that either directly or indirectly involved community residents in general, with specific interest in those that involved diverse community residents. We looked for FPCs that represented a variety of different administrative arrangements, histories, geographic regions and social/cultural contexts, but primarily focused on FPCs with specific methods or activities. We specifically reviewed the survey responses to find FPCs that:

- Mentioned innovative programs that were not replicated by other councils, high levels of community participation, or a unique operational policy in regards to participation from diverse community residents.
- Mentioned challenges in involving diverse community residents.
- Had demonstrated maturity in their FPCs programming and processes by having completed projects with outcomes to discuss or could talk about how the involvement of diverse community residents in policy-making and programming on their Council had changed over time.

We primarily spoke to FPC coordinators (staff persons or chairpersons), although some informants were regular members of a steering committee. FPC coordinators were chosen because they are usually the primary, and sometimes only, contact provided on FPC publications websites. We selected FPCs that represent a range of level of activity (local - 13, county - 4, regional - 1, state - 1) as well as a variety of regions from the

United States and Canada (Northeastern - 3, Midwest - 8, Southern - 2, West Coast - 3, Western Range - 1, Canada - 2).

VIII. Data Analysis

For the purposes of maintaining confidentiality and to facilitate coding and analysis, we assigned each survey respondent a unique identifier: a number between 1 and 53. In some cases we interviewed multiple representatives from a Council, in which case each respondent was assigned a designated letter following their Council's number. To protect confidentiality, survey respondents and interviewees are intentionally not identified by their geopolitical region. Quotations from surveys and interviews are used throughout this paper to describe, in respondents' own words, the experiences, successes, and challenges of involving diverse community residents in FPCs; they have been edited minimally for reading coherence.

Approval for research methods and techniques in accordance with recognized standards was sought and granted from the Tufts University Institutional Review Board.

Chapter 4. Research Results

The background provided in the sections above introduced relevant concepts to understanding participation of diverse community residents on FPCs. The following sections provide evidence of tools and approaches FPCs are using to engage diverse community residents in their work. The underlying premise of this paper, restated, is that in order to be effective at addressing inequalities in the food system, those who experience the inequalities must be directly engaged in defining the problems and identifying solutions. Sections I and II below share results from the survey and interviews, which reveal that many FPCs' missions directly address issues of food system disparities and that they often undertake projects that are aimed at improving community food security measures for diverse community residents. Section III below introduces methods that FPCs are currently using or have used in the past to directly or indirectly engage diverse community residents in their work and section IV provides an overview of the challenges FPCs face in doing so. Examples are case-specific, but may provide inspiration for other Councils in thinking about common approaches for inclusivity that may be incorporated into their work. Because of the differences in scope and structure between state-level and local-level Councils, this research most strongly applies to local-level activities.

I. Mission

Throughout the mission statements of the Councils we surveyed are frequently used phrases that give a sense of FPCs' common methods and goals; almost every mission statement included a combination of the following words and phases:

> *coordinate, collaborate, network, stakeholders, discussion, research, influence policy, human health, local economies, sustainable, awareness, access, agriculture, healthy food, affordable, equitable, community, residents, food security*

Most frequently, FPCs stated their goals as a acting as a forum for coordinating the action of a diverse array of stakeholders, improving the food system for the benefit of their region's residents, and enhancing the environmental sustainability of the food system, and supporting local economies. Most interviewees indicated that improving food security was a central goal of their Council, supported either through specific policies and programs or through an "unstated mandate to consider issues through the lens of those with limited incomes" (7b) that engenders their Council's mission and decisions.

II. Reasons Food Policy Councils give for including community residents

The FPCs we interviewed gave many reasons for why they felt inclusion of general community residents was important to their work. For many Councils, involving community residents was important because "everyone on the Council wants the Council to be representative of the city so that it can be effective" (26). For this Council,

“effective” means that their Council’s actions have positive outcomes on their stated goals. Councils interviewed gave two main reasons for inclusion: so that they could check to make sure their thinking was in line with the community’s needs and to encourage the empowerment of community residents to make changes in the food system.

a. On “the right track”

Multiple FPCs gave examples of how involving community residents helped their Council pursue a community-oriented goal that would be effective at food system transformation. Specifically, involving people with the lived experience in whatever issue the Council was focusing on added "a breadth of knowledge to the research" (24a) and helped the FPC make sure that they were on the "right track" (8). Some FPCs were concerned about advancing a "'build it and they will come' perspective" (18) and so felt that community engagement from the start of their projects was crucial to developing projects that were effective. For example, when promoting healthy corner stores (convenience stores that stock fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables), one FPC felt that engaging the community more would give them the "information to say that there is demand from people who actually live in this neighborhood that want to buy healthy food” (9). Involving community representatives on issues that specifically relate to their lives has been used to draw support for various policies that FPCs undertake, especially when suggesting changes to community garden rules or backyard chicken zoning changes. However, FPCs usually gather inspiration and input from community residents

while maintaining the role of conducting background research and developing the language of the actual proposals themselves, as one interviewee notes below.

> *"When it comes to advocating in the dialogue with public officials, that's when we really see residents become engaged. Not necessarily doing the research and … the negotiations and the actual language drafting. But when it comes to actually reviewing policy…we had a lot of community input on that. When it came to the actual series of committee meetings and planning commission, people showed up. We had 10, 20, 30, 40 people show up to the committee hearings and share their perspectives on the changes and why they were important." (8)*

Some interviewees expressed that engagement with the community yielded unexpected information and connections that aided the Council's work and helped them better understand their community. In one case, conducting door-to-door surveys in the community helped an FPC realize that their efforts to support neighborhood gardening were best directed at backyard gardeners rather than establishing community gardens. In another case, focus group feedback improved the Council's understanding of challenges facing a food-insecure community.

> *"...it allows us to consider a lot of the neighborhood dynamics...one thing that came up in their group that was interesting was that they only visit the corner stores within a block or two of their house. They won't cross streets, they won't go anywhere else because there's a lot of gang-related tension in that particular community." (8)*

In another example, a resident contacted during public outreach challenged the Council's assumptions about their community members. Members thought that a mother they approached would say, "I don't have the time" or interest to participate, but instead she revealed that she thinks "about this stuff all the time" and demonstrated desire to serve organic food to her family and cook at home (15).

Even if making connections with diverse community residents has not led to sustained engagement or involvement of those residents on the Council itself, in some cases those consultations have at the very least informed the future work of the Council. One Council that consulted with people staying at a homeless shelter and food bank users said that these consultations made their "policy seem real" and “really pushed the direction of some of the work that we’ve taken on” (8).

One FPC chair felt that lack of community engagement may have directly contributed to the failure of a new grocery store that city agencies had helped develop in a specific food desert neighborhood. The interviewee felt that the development decision was more of “an intellectual process of ‘Well, there's no food there and the people who live there need food therefore we should put a grocery store in’” and that “people in that community were really never engaged in making that decision. Maybe they already had a store that they shopped at or, who knows, but they didn't shop there in the end” (22).

Even though many of the FPCs' members work with community members on a daily basis - as WIC administrators or food bank personnel - keeping in touch with the larger community voices was seen as important to make sure that the issues they are taking up are the ones that are seen as most important by the community.

> *"A lot of times we’ll sit in these meeting rooms and say, “This seems to be a big issue,” but it’s important to make sure that it is. It’s not just an academic exercise. This really is a community concern that needs to be addressed.” (8)*

A fundamental challenge is how to determine if the “community” is being adequately represented. If the “community” in question is all WIC users, is one WIC participant able to adequately represent the experience of all other users? Similarly, is one farmer able to represent the “production” sector of the food system fairly? What are the mechanisms for how these representatives collect information about their communities and use that information for the benefit of the Council? This challenge may be addressed through a variety of techniques that survey a broader cross section of the community, but the question of representation is important to keep in mind.

b. Community empowerment

Less frequently mentioned, but equally important, is the desire of FPCs to empower community residents to "feel like 'I do have a place in this community and I can make change, positive change in the community'” (9). In some cases, diverse community residents shared that they had never had a formal venue in which to voice their opinion before; "...the majority of folks are low/limited-income and the kids were like, oh my gosh, I can’t believe you’re asking us what we think. Nobody ever asks us anything. They were excited about the opportunity to share about their community" (8).

III. Projects/policies that address food security/diverse community residents

FPCs undertake projects that are suited to their specific cities and regions. Some indicated that food security projects are a main focus of their work because of their community's demographics: "In a city like [ours] it has to be!” (26). The specific types of programs and policies that FPCs undertake that directly affect diverse community

residents related to a number of categories. However, the most common responses were around food retail, food access, school meal programs, and urban agriculture. Table 2 shows the categories and examples given by respondents.

Table 2. Programs and Policies

Category	**Specific examples given by survey respondents**
Food Retail and Food Access	• Promote an initiative for healthy corner stores • Establish farmers' markets in low-income areas • Enable farmers' market vendors to use electronic benefits transfer (EBT) machines and accept WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) coupons • Improve access to fresh foods through: grocery delivery at libraries, new grocery stores in food deserts, produce stands at transit centers, mobile markets, and community kitchens • Develop a local food guide that provides information about nutrition and which farmers' markets accept EBT, WIC, and Senior FMNP vouchers
Community Food Assessments	• Community-based mapping project in low-income neighborhoods and food desert areas • Publish a report that identifies and discusses the different interventions to address rural and urban food gaps • Support a PhotoVoice project (using participatory photography as a tool to enable positive social change) targeted to specific cultural or immigrant groups
Transportation	• Work with public transportation department to prioritize bus routes that improve access from low-income neighborhoods to healthy food outlets and emergency food providers
Urban Agriculture	• Establish or advocate for gardens in low-income or food desert areas

	• Challenge high fees for zoning variances or vendor permits for small-scale urban agriculture
Emergency Food Programs	• Support emergency food program efforts to procure and supply more healthy food choices from local sources
Workshops/education	• Nutrition education in low-income neighborhoods or to food bank populations
School meal programs	• Establish or advocate for school gardens, farm-to-school initiatives, healthy vending machines • Change state law to remove competitive foods from schools • Advocate for the federal Farm to School grant program in the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill
Local food purchasing	• Recommend that their city/county/region adopt an institutional food purchasing policy for government agencies, schools, and prisons

IV. Methods for inclusion

Through activities related to food retail, food access, school meal programs, or urban agriculture, FPCs are involved in programming and setting policies that impact diverse community residents in many ways. What are the ways in which they "invite others to the table" to plan for these policies and programs? Specifically, how are community members whose lives are directly affected by these policies and programs included in setting the agenda and making decisions? Through in-depth interviews, a collection of common practices as well as some insightful lessons and challenges emerged. They divide generally into “council-based techniques” and “project-based techniques,” offering a variety of valuable options for inclusion at many levels, from direct inclusion on the Council to consultation on specific projects. Council-based techniques include

writing language about inclusion into the FPC's mission statement, specifically including diverse representatives on the council, organizing into working groups and committees, being strategic about meeting times and locations, and presenting at meetings at organizations or city agencies. Project-based techniques include planning events that intentionally involve community residents, tying into existing community processes, conducting focus groups, offering public education about the food system, engaging people in projects, and offering incentives for the community's participation on the Council or in the Council's work. Many of these techniques may be considered "best practices" for any organization involved in community engagement, but they will be explored through an FPC lens.

Food Policy Councils might benefit from thinking about how their techniques align along Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (Figure 1). Practices such as open houses that serve to primarily notify the public of upcoming activities would fit closely within the "informing" level, while Community Food Assessments, if done with community-based researchers, could fit within the "partnership" level. Future research could assess the degree to which the actual practice of these techniques are promoting high levels of citizen power.

Council-based techniques

Council-based techniques are methods that relate to the organization of the Council or activities that happen during regular Council meetings.

a. Language about inclusion written into the Council's mission statement

Many FPCs expressed interest in improving the racial, economic, age, or gender diversity of representatives on their Councils, but felt that this was a vague goal that they kept in mind when considering new Council members. One FPC explicitly addressed the Council's diversity in their mission statement, stating that "The [Council's] membership should reflect [the region's] diverse population, including, but not limited to, race, rural/urban residency, gender, and socioeconomic status" (43). However, this interviewee went on to note that despite this clear directive, the Council had not treated this policy with high priority and their Council members do not yet reflect the community's full diversity. Additionally, Councils may set inclusion parameters to be equal to the overall diversity of their geographic community, which may be different than the demographics of underserved populations on which many of their policies are focused. This could lead to a lack of representation of important groups because they make up a small percentage of the overall population.

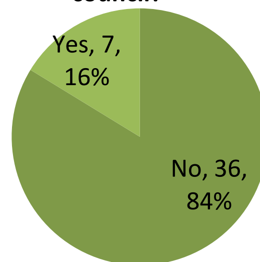
b. Representation on the Council

The following section will discuss how FPCs engage or propose to engage diverse community residents as council members. This ranges from setting aside designated seats specifically for diverse community residents (often youth) to indirectly representing them via advocates, including specific questions in applications about demographic backgrounds, to directly recruiting diverse Council members, or using official attendees who are invited to present on a specific topic during a Council meeting.

Designated seats

Because wide representation of food system sectors is a crucial component of FPCs, many Councils designate the desired sectors and number of representatives in their organizational documents (Schiff 2007). Such designations may include seats reserved for: "agricultural producers," "retail food outlet managers/owners," "institutional food purchaser," "County Extension Service agents," "person employed by a non-governmental organization working in the area of local food systems," "Chamber of Commerce representative," and "waste management representative." Of the Councils surveyed, 16% have specific seats designated on their Councils for specific food system sectors. Seats that might include diverse community residents might be: "person working in the area of food security," "at large members," "consumption," and "anti-hunger advocates." FPCs that chose not to include "consumers" or community members may have done so because they felt there was "no broad-based consumer group concerned about food system issues (as distinct from groups concerned about labeling, food safety, nutrition, etc.)" (Dahlberg 1994:5). Consumers are also often overlooked because each member of an FPC is also a consumer of food and so is considered to be in a position to address any general consumer concerns.

Figure 2. Survey result: Are there seats designated by food system sector on your council?



Designated seats: direct representation

At times, these designated seats are filled by diverse community members, such as those currently experiencing food insecurity or who are low-income.

> *"We do have two low-income people who serve on [the FPC] on a regular basis and have continued for several years. One of the things that [the FPC] as a whole really emphasizes is that we do need a lot of perspectives to have a robust conversation." (24a)*

Designated seats: indirect representation

Some FPCs expressed difficulty in retaining non-professional members on their Councils for more than a year. Instead, they have turned to professionals, such as food security advocates, to act as indirect representatives of or advocates for diverse community residents. These individuals are often paid by their organizations to attend Council meetings or otherwise volunteer their time. These indirect representatives include food bank staff members, community organizers, WIC nutrition educators, and soup kitchen directors. In one case, an FPC member who is the Executive Director of a Latino community organization represents his community's perspectives on the council.

Interviewee 26 discussed how some of these indirect representatives have once been low-income or homeless and are still "grounded" in the community.

> *"There's not anyone [on the Council] who is currently on food stamps or WIC, but we have someone who was homeless and now runs the soup kitchen. So we do have people who are grounded in various parts of the community." (26)*

While interviewees emphasized the importance of direct representation, they also felt advocates can also play an important role in bridging between one person's experience and the experience of a broader population, and that representative voices can come from unexpected places.

> *"I think that it's important to have people directly from the community, not just advocates from the social service agency. I will say that people who work on the front lines, who work directly with clients… do get a real breadth of information and can represent a large population and integrate multiple stories whereas one individual represents themselves. I think there are advantages to having both, especially people who work directly on providing services at an agency on behalf of clients." (24a)*

> *"What we find often in community work is that other people become the voices for those low-income populations…although they might not identify with some parts of that label. So, our farmers say 'We are low-income.' Our emergency food bank [staff] participants really feel that they have a good insight into situations for their constituency. So, [the Council does] get that information somewhat but through different channels." (7b)*

Additionally, having indirect representation was favored by some FPCs as a way to avoid making a food-insecure person feel uncomfortable or asking them for too much commitment. Interviewee 26 underscored the need for high levels of sensitivity when asking people to share their personal experiences with food insecurity or discrimination as well as the need to connect the information of the community member directly with the action of the FPC.

> *"It would be hard to say, "Hey, you're on food stamps! Want to come to the Food Policy Council?" If there's a way to make that more comfortable for that person, I think that would be helpful. For people who are in very stressed situations financially and in their home it can be hard to step out of that and think about "Why should I be talking at a meeting and what are the larger issues and how is this going to help change all that?" (26)*

Council member application questions

Very few Councils designate seats for non-professionals and very few Councils explicitly or systematically take personal demographics into account when selecting Council members. One interviewee admitted that "without trying we've had some non-white people on the council, but probably not in the same numbers as the population" (43). Instead, demographic diversity occurs unsystematically and is usually a lower priority than other membership qualifications, such as representing a specific sector of the food system or skills and contacts that would be useful to a coalition of this sort. One FPC expressed that they keep diversity in mind when accepting new members, but also try to "meet the other requirements and needs that we felt that building this organization would demand" (18).

Direct recruitment of Council members

Some interviewees discussed ways that the existing Council members could assist in diversifying the membership of FPCs by using personal and professional relationships to bring more people "to the table." One FPC used personal invitations to invite specific people to participate in planning for the Council's formation, while others imagine future collaboration with a community health center to bring their most articulate, thoughtful, and passionate clients to meetings.

Use of official attendees/non-voting capacity

Some Councils struggle with balancing the relatively small number of Council seats available with the number of dedicated food system actors whose experiences and voices they want to include. One FPC creates a list of "official attendees" at each meeting, which allows the Council to “expand [their] base of people who are providing information, feedback, and assistance in the work that we’re doing” (26). These official attendees include officials from the local health department, sustainable food system consultants, and community service agency staff, as well as people active in the city’s food system but who don’t meet the Council’s residency requirement so cannot be actual members. Official attendees in this instance lack voting rights.

Other examples of utilizing community members in non-voting capacities include inviting members of the general public to present on a specific topic. However, the examples given generally included community members who are professionals in the food system. For example, one FPC invited a researcher from a university-based food system program to talk about their work with Native Americans, and another has invited professionals to provide information on composting, transportation, school food, or health care.

Youth on the Council

Six of the FPCs surveyed either currently include youth on their Council or have taken steps to include youth in the near future. In general, FPCs define "youth"

to mean individuals from high school age all the way up to 30 years old. Councils working with youth chose "youth centered topics" such as farm internships, school food, and cooking competitions; all topics were suggested by the youth members and youth whom the FPCs had surveyed in focus groups. For FPCs interviewed that have included youth on their general Council, only two have a youth seat written into their designated seats, suggesting 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.

One FPC that holds separate youth meetings felt that the separation between the youth and adult Council was important. Youth who had attended the adult meetings felt intimidated by the presence of veteran food systems actors who populated the Councils. Interestingly, high school students attending the youth-only FPC also expressed that they felt intimidated by the presence of members in their 20s, many of whom had completed college or graduate school or who had been working in the food system field for awhile. To counteract this, the Council began including more icebreakers at the start of meetings to give everyone a chance to participate, regardless of previous experience.

Despite this change to accommodate high school students, major challenges to their participation remains. The FPC meeting schedule and the high schoolers'

eventual departure to college in another community are particularly difficult barriers to overcome. One interviewee explained,

> *"There have been lots of situations where we've engaged with high school students who we think are going to come, and then they don't come. The only thing we can figure at this point is that when we have our meetings doesn't work for high school students. We have our meetings the first Monday of the month from six to eight p.m. and we think that maybe because it's over dinner time and they're still living at home that maybe their parents aren't keen on them going…Unfortunately the two high school students that were coming have moved on to university, so we've lost them already." (42b)*

FPCs often reach out to existing youth programs to invite their members to participate. Some youth groups were invited to present about their work at the FPC in the hopes that they would continue to be involved with the Council's work or become Council members. One Council plans to form a partnership with some of the high schools in their community that offer agricultural or food training classes and feel that it is a natural step for their youth to be involved on the Council as part of those programs. At times, engagement of youth on the Council has required some participation from their adult leaders or teachers. For example, one Council member recounted,

> *"We have a group of students [planning to come to Council meetings] who have an adult from a school who has volunteered to make sure students actually can get to our meetings…There are a bunch of schools here that deal with food (agricultural programs or farms) so it can be part of their schooling…." (26)*

Another Council also reached out to existing youth groups that were engaged in food system work (such as in youth agriculture programs) and found out that

they were very interested in being involved in the FPC and wanted a seat at the general table, not on a separate youth Council.

> *“I brought people together from [the youth organizations in the city] and talked about "are youth interested in being involved?" 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." (34)*

One general Council with youth members has planned to meet with them in advance of each general Council meeting and prepare the youth.

> *“What our plan has been is to always have a youth meeting 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] want to talk about and what they want to say.” (34)*

c. Use of working groups/committees

Many FPCs use working groups or committees to organize a large general Council into more manageable groups that focus on a particular issue. Engaging people in working groups may encourage them to later become part of the official Council membership. Committees or working groups are useful because they enable people to gain experience with the organization’s purpose and culture as well as spend time working directly on topics that are more relevant to a person’s experience or interest. One Council member related,

> *“We direct those people who have specific areas of interest toward the workgroups so that their time is well spent. If they’re really specific and they want to see the ability to compost or something like that, they are less likely to come to the larger food Council meetings.” (23)*

Many interviewees recognized that asking diverse community residents to be involved regularly on an FPC wouldn't be successful because of the time demands that pressure many working families and individuals but suggested that there might be other ways to involve interested individuals. Many are still working to figure out “what are the structures and ways to involve members” who either want to be involved in monthly meetings or want to “hop in there for a short-term project” (24b). One solution to accommodating members with varying levels of commitment is to create distinct levels for community members to engage with the FPC: as a "Council member," as a "committee member," and as a "community member,” as one council did:

> *“There are Council members, committee members, and community members. Council members have the most responsibility. There’s a max of 12 of us and we have all applied and been selected. We have four committees...Committee members are not Council members. They haven’t applied and they don’t have set obligations, but they’re people who want to engage further in an issue…Committee members have the option to be as involved as they want without having any sort of restrictions put on them. Then we have community members who are basically anyone who wants to come to meetings or come to an event or anyone who feels that they’d like to align themselves with us in any way.” (42b)*

d. Meeting/event location, time, and structure

As councils working with youth demonstrated above, meeting times and locations are particularly important to involving people who aren’t able to attend meetings during the work day. Many FPCs struggle to find a meeting time that works for all of their diverse stakeholders, including diverse community residents, both for their Council meetings as well as public events.

In some cases, the Councils held separate meetings for each interest group, such as during a campaign related to school food.

> *"We mostly did separate meetings because our meetings are at eight in the morning and that's not real conducive for people. We've talked about changing the meetings to night, but because it is part of a lot of people's work, it always has worked out to have a day time meeting for the actual Council. We've had other meetings, which are for the general public, which are in the evenings." (26)*

Another FPC found that their film nights attracted many youth, which they attributed to the location at a centrally located coffee shop.

> *"… we always had about a dozen to 20 young people, under 18, which was nice to see. I think part of that was the fact that we had it at this coffee shop and advertised heavily there. It's kind of a hotspot for young people." (39)*

Two interviewees suggested that hosting their Council meetings in communities they want to draw more representation from would be one effective way of including more diverse community residents on their Councils. However, as one FPC explained, the meeting location alone will not attract diverse participants in their community; despite moving their meetings to an African American community, the demographics of their meeting attendees did not change at all.

> *"The last three meetings [were in] the African American community because we were developing partnerships over there and there was somebody who wanted to take the lead from that African American community in terms of engaging with them. But the three meetings that we had over there were still just the white people." (12)*

Lastly, FPCs have altered their meeting structures to allow for more public participation. These alterations might include a standard public comment section after each topic of

discussion. However they may go beyond just allowing comments and work towards ensuring that people feel comfortable and respected and that their voices are being adequately integrated into the Council's discussions. Interviewee 24a described the importance of smaller group discussions and shared leadership that allows everyone's voice to be heard - especially community residents who "haven't been given a voice in the past" and didn't feel "like they have the right to speak up and say what they think." That interviewee went on to add,

> *"Throughout all of that project we often broke into smaller groups and then brought the larger group back. We shared leadership of that group so that everyone participated in facilitation, note-taking, scribing on the board, or reporting back from the smaller group. We really have found that smaller discussions - so that people feel more comfortable and more compelled to actually voice their opinions - are a great way to be sure all the perspectives are actually given." (24a)*

The Council also incorporated time to share stories, which they felt was important to the functioning of their Council.

> *"People have stories to tell and it is through that telling of that story that new ideas are formed. But sometimes they can be kind of negative, like "I went to this agency and blah blah blah" and everyone jumps on that. But one of the things that we crafted into the meetings was that sometimes people just need to get their story out and then you can move forward. So we would say, "Ok, we're going to have a two-and-a-half-hour meeting and we're going to spend the whole first hour just letting people check in and tell their story of the week" and then we would move into the logistics. It really gets the team together and it provided that space for people to really tell their story and feel like they were being heard and to learn from those experiences as well." (24a)*

Project-based techniques

Project-based techniques are activities that happen outside of regular Council meetings but affect the participation of diverse community residents in shaping the community's food system policies.

a. Plan events and projects that intentionally involve community residents

In a few cases, FPCs have planned projects and events that are directed at understanding the condition of the food system in their communities and have intentionally involved diverse community residents in those events or projects.

Community Food Assessments

Community Food Assessments (CFAs) can be undertaken by any group of researchers, but they are often the first activities that FPCs undertake and offer opportunities to survey their community's food system as well as engage community residents who are directly affected by food insecurity. A CFA can be a "collaborative and participatory process that systematically examines a broad range of community food issues and assets, so as to inform change actions to make the community more food secure" (Pothukuchi et al. 2002:11). CFAs are often used as tools to gather citizen input; however, they can also be limited to simply collecting and reporting secondary data without engaging citizens. Researchers combine data from food outlets with poverty and health data as well as data about infrastructure, like transportation routes, to highlight the impact of food access on the community's health. Interviewees described that one step in their CFA includes conducting focus groups with residents in areas

designated as food deserts and with other community groups, such as Hmong farmers.

> *"We didn't want to leave with just "Where are the food deserts?" We really wanted to involve the community, the food desert community. Phase 2 was: we knew that we had food deserts and that living in one is dangerous to your health, but what do people in the community want to do about it?...[it] includes focus groups from the food desert neighborhoods." (6b)*

Community food assessments help to highlight inequities in both resource control and access. They can help to catalyze further community participation by making food system issues that were once abstract more tangible and immediate, which can translate to committed efforts to solve such problems (Allen 2004). Community food assessments are great opportunities to directly involve diverse community residents in actively mapping their community resources and analyzing health indicators; FPCs have hired members of food desert communities to conduct surveys that contribute to CFAs.

Mark Winne, Food Policy Council Program Director for the Community Food Security Coalition, described how investigating the community's food environment can be instructive to FPC members even without direct participation from diverse community residents. FPC members conducted a price survey in grocery stores in the city and surrounding communities. It served as a team-building exercise while also giving the members an informed foundation to their work related to affordable food access and food policy.

> *"I can say there was a connection from the experience to people better understanding the larger challenge of the lack of supermarkets in the city in the food deserts...We found that a [major grocery chain] in the city and one in the suburbs had different prices. That became a rallying cry to politicize people, to look a bit more closely at how could we use policy to address that imbalance." (personal communication 2/1/2011)*

Research projects

One FPC sponsored a research report on food insecurity that specifically recruited food-insecure people to design and oversee the project. Those participants helped design the research and participated in collecting the data, and coming up with important questions that the researchers would not have thought to ask.

> *"The [food insecurity report] was a research project with community participants that was specifically set up to have low-income people, people who used social services for accessing food. We specifically recruited people that met that criteria…We really didn't go in with specific ideas of how the project would be concluded other than recruiting specific people from a low-income demographic." (24a)*

Food summits

Another FPC hosted a regional food summit and secured a $1,000 grant that enabled them to subsidize food-insecure residents to attend at $25 per person. They estimated that 30% of the participants who attended identified as having experienced food insecurity in their lives. Many of those residents were recruited through months of effort of the summit planning partners, such as food banks and poverty organizations, who each were tasked with recruiting 5-10 people from their client base. This diverse participation of people who had the lived experience of food insecurity, but may not have been as versed in food

policy, impacted the pace and tone of the summit. Facilitators felt challenged to "figure out ways to include people, explain things to people who haven't necessarily read as much, who aren't as formally educated as most of the people around the table" (43). But overall, the inclusion of these new voices made the summit a success in the eyes of the organizers. At the end of the summit, participants all signed a joint declaration with the goals developed during the summit, which has directed the work of the FPC since. A follow-up event to the summit is upcoming, but the planning partners were not sure that they had the same time and resources to devote to recruiting and subsidizing diverse participants as before.

Community food system tours

Interviewee 24b described how their FPC engaged Hmong farmers in their community by planning a tour of farms that brought food system stakeholders (including elected officials) to Hmong farms on the outskirts of their community to help them understand the impact of residential sprawl on farms. Because of the language barriers, "it was a really big deal that [the Hmong grower] stepped up…to explain in broken English to these 75 people from the county" (24b). This event led to additional projects that involved the FPC and Hmong growers acting together to improve the farmers' market access.

Participatory budgeting activities

One FPC suggested that a way to meaningfully engage any community residents might be through a participatory budgeting activity around public spending in the food system, for example at food banks or school food. Participatory budgeting is more frequently used in developing world contexts where communities, such as Kerala, India, have turned over a percentage of public spending to community participants who democratically determine which projects to fund with the money (Franke 2008). Allowing the public to direct the funding around a particular issue enables them to exercise direct control over public funding but also educates participants around the real challenges in current food system policies that are more difficult to convey in a single education event. Interviewee 12 described the potential to implement a participatory budgeting process for school lunches.

> *"For example, the one I really want to do is at the high school. Everybody is always screaming about school lunches saying, "They're so terrible, can't you do any better?" Most people don't understand how affected by federal policy it is. So the poor food service directors are constantly having to explain how their hands are tied. If I could find $25,000 of discretionary money in the school lunch program in the high school [to]…create a participatory budgeting process, [I'd] set up a six month process where at the end of the day, that $25,000 will be spent on what the group of people who spend the time and come to the meetings. The high school would have to agree that the money would get spent the way the public wants. It's a learning process. People get very educated about the policies very fast by doing that." (12)*

b. Attend other organization's meetings

A number of FPCs found it necessary to engage other organizations by attending their meetings rather than asking their staff, clients, or members to attend the FPC meetings. They used these opportunities as a way to either gather stakeholder opinions without requiring long-term FPC participation as well as a method to recruit more FPC members. Other organizations and city agencies sometimes requested that FPC members attend their meetings to present information about the food system or the FPC's work and host discussions. FPC members "go and talk to [various city offices and community organizations] and get contacts, information, and feedback regarding food policy" (26).

Interviewees 6b and 34 felt strongly that attending meetings in the community was required when seeking the input of specific communities and in working with people of color who may be distrustful of white leaders working in communities of color.

> *"I don't think you ever ask low-income people to come to the FPC. I think the FPC goes to the low-income neighborhood…We are the people who go and sit in the back of the room and listen and come forward when we are asked. I don't know if it's the African American culture or because we're in the South, but there is a different way that you want to approach low-income African American communities. They've had so many white people barge in, 'We're here to help you.' We can be perceived as doing that even when we don't." (6b)*

> *"Trying to get people of color to our meetings hasn't been effective... [even though] I know these issues are important to them. I've been trying things like I go to their meetings and I go to their organizations." (34)*

c. Establish synergy with existing community processes and organizations

FPCs often utilize the organizations their members represent, such as food banks or community nutrition education programs, to gather input from community members on

specific efforts or the general work of the Council. At times, FPCs choose to work in communities that their members already have ties to.

> *"What we have done is try to engage and get people appointed to our board who are doing [community engagement] work as part of their jobs. So, we have one of our board members who is the Executive Director of a Latino service organization. What he's doing is community organizing in the Latino community...and hopefully that can translate into improving the work that we do on the FPC." (22)*

> *"Luckily, members of the FPC and the steering committee already work in the neighborhood and so we already had those channels in place. For example, [a university] has a nutrition education program and they have a lot of folks out in the field and they work with single moms and different demographic groups to teach nutritious cooking on a lower budget. And then we also had a [Council member] that helps [women] who need assistance with things like signing up for food stamps or WIC. They do a lot of lobbying and legislation. They have people in the community who go door to door and knocked for the event." (32)*

FPCs also have made strategic partnerships with current planning efforts that are active within a certain community of interest for the Council. One FPC was focusing their efforts on a farmers' market that happened to be near a community that was in the process of an official revitalization effort. The FPC was able to reach their intended audience by taking advantage of the community gatherings and festivals that were part of the separate effort. This helped the FPC gain a better understanding of the community and realize that the Farmers' Market "didn't feel like 'theirs' even though they were close enough to be able to access it" (18). This FPC also made specific relationships with community organizations that helped to inform their farmers' market coupon program for low-income shoppers.

> *"… we thought about how do we reach out to this community and there were several things, from the musical acts that we booked to perform there to*

> *advertising in areas where they were living so that they knew they could come here. And of course the [food coupon for farmers' market] program, which is of course the distribution of funds to get them to come." (18)*

One FPC recognized that because their Council's policy work is more driven by "the folks who have this as part of their work" (8), meaning professionals in the food system, they need to utilize partnerships with organizations that are in touch with their local communities. Their solution is to work with a local organization that does "a lot of work on social inclusion and lots of opportunities for local residents to take advantage of learning opportunities and putting power into the neighborhood residents" to engage residents in food policy.

A particularly inspiring example of an FPC being responsive to a community need warrants a more in-depth retelling. A neighborhood community organizer attended a Council meeting and announced that "a national fried chicken chain wanted to come in and the neighborhood didn't want it." The neighborhood, a classic food desert, already had two other fried chicken restaurants, as well as ten fast food establishments, but no full-service supermarkets. The FPC wondered what they could do to support the community and decided to stage a peaceful protest. They "picked a day and a time where we would all gather on that corner and we put it out so that the media knew that we were going to be there. And they were. TV, print, radio all picked up on the story and were there and broadcasted this. The decision was coming up before the board of zoning appeals in the next week or two after that, so it was well timed" (23). While the board of zoning appeals did approve the restaurant, it only granted a one year permit.

Because of this barrier, combined with widespread community opposition, the chain decided to not pursue that location. This example is inspiring and shows true potential for a Food Policy Council to use their resources and skills to be responsive to community needs. However, it is unclear how many other Councils feel prepared to take on a similar campaign, considering overall time capacity or comfort of Council members in taking a more activist stance.

d. Use focus groups and open houses

In addition to tying in with ongoing, community-driven processes, many of the Councils commented on how they solicit community input through focus groups on specific topics that the FPCs defined themselves. Focus groups allow FPCs to be in touch with diverse communities, in spite of not having direct representation from those communities on their Councils, and may consist of existing organized networks, such as a seniors group or a recreational center, or may be recruited only for the purpose of the focus group.

When starting out, one FPC convened public focus groups to comment on the strategies they proposed in order to structure the Council's priorities. The Council members walked focus group participants through the initial summary research on the region's food system and then asked "What do you think of the proposed strategies? Do you see yourself being involved in some of these?" (43). Answers were recorded and analyzed and used by the Council in determining the final proposal, which were then endorsed during a follow-up meeting with 40 of the original focus group participants.

Another FPC is considering starting a mobile food truck and plans to conduct focus groups with members of the target community.

> *"We are busily putting together focus groups to include more [community members, specifically African Americans]. In fact we're working on one for the produce truck now. We're working with people who actually live there." (6b)*

One FPC conducted "community conversations" over two summers with a variety of community groups on healthy food access in their region. They asked questions about barriers, the challenges of gaining access to healthy food, as well as solutions for improving access, and used the responses to inform the work of the Council.

> *"We met with groups of residents and the groups probably varied in size from about 10 to 20 people in eight different communities throughout the county. We included suburban communities as well…So we try to get at [policy changes on] lots of different levels so people aren't restricted. What can a neighborhood do, what can an organization do, what can happen to the built environment? We also use a lot of that information to sort of feed into the policy work that we do take on." (8)*

Public conversations and focus groups about challenges to obtaining healthy food can be a way to gather information, publicize the Council, and build a relationship between the Council and the community, "to let it be known that we're working on these issues" and that if "people have concerns they can come to us" (26). These conversations could happen at a variety of places, such as farmers' markets or grocery stores.

> *"If it were the farmers' market, it could be like "Come and talk with members of the FPC about issues that will impact local agriculture and farmers markets" and then we'd go to another neighborhood where food access is an issue and say, "Come talk with members of the FPC to share your concerns about food in your neighborhood and obtaining better access to food." (26)*

Other FPCs use focus groups and community meetings as a way to "check themselves" and vet their proposed policies with the community.

> *"The way we're going to vet our policy recommendations is to do a series of public presentations. We're going to try to go in front of neighborhood associations and rotary clubs and all of those community groups…to talk about a menu of policy choices and vet those ideas with the community. Our process has been: get the data, use the small groups to generate the policy proposals (because they're willing to dig in and find the best practices and make context appropriate policy recommendations) and then go out and get public input on them." (11)*

e. Engage people by appealing to their self interest and with hands-on projects

Many interviewees expressed satisfaction with efforts to engage community residents by appealing to the residents' self interest and taking advantage of "crisis moments" to mobilize people to be politically engaged. Interviewees discussed how community gardeners were mobilized when the City Council announced a change to zoning regulations that could impact urban agriculture and how discussing school lunch naturally attracts parent involvement. "When it comes to action," those with the most personally at stake are "the ones who showed up and advocated for those changes" (8).

One interviewee described how they hope to involve food insecure community residents by working on questions on the FPC that are relevant to residents' lived experiences:

> *"…we'll be working in our region to address food security. We have 25% of our population that's food-insecure. We have to figure out what we need to do about this, so come and add your voice to this. That was our pitch...Our six priorities now are how we're going to pitch the next [regional summit includes one called 'access to healthy food,' which talks about people not being able to afford*

enough food, as well as other aspects of food access. So hopefully that theme will attract people who are concerned about or have experienced that issue." (43)

Additionally, many people enter policy work indirectly, such as through hands-on projects like gardens.

"We don't wake up one morning and say 'Oh, I want to do policy work...' It doesn't happen that way. You get there by putting your hands – literally - in the soil for a long period of time. Then realize, "Ah ha, I can do more of this, or I can do it better, or I can protect it, if I begin to engage in local policy work and sometimes state work as well." (Mark Winne, personal communication 2/1/2011)

f. Public education

FPCs often sponsor community education events such as film nights and workshops. Some interviewees mentioned strategies they used to achieve high levels of community participation that sometimes carry over into more long-term engagement with the FPC.

Film nights

Capitalizing on the recent production of a number of food systems-related films (such as Food, Inc., Two Angry Moms, Fresh, etc.), FPCs have sponsored community film screenings, often combining them with a panel that helped facilitate discussion afterward. Some Councils have had success reaching new audiences by specifically partnering with another organization or community. These events have often resulted in new members joining the steering committee or working group.

"We showed Food, Inc., and hundreds of people came to that and people signed up to get more information about [the FPC] and subsequent to that people have come to serve on the board." (24a)

One Council made a deliberate decision to screen Food, Inc. in a low-income African American community that their Council already does a lot of work in. This ability to draw on partners to reach out to the community drew many "new faces" to the event, beyond standard food system advocates that are already active on food system issues.

> *"A lot of times around issues with food you get the same people, the foodies or the same activists, and especially [our city] is kind of a small town so you tend to see the same people around the same topics all the time. I thought that we had about 80% of folks that were definitely from the neighborhood and not part of the professional world. It felt really successful." (32a)*

The planning committee included several people and organizations from the neighborhood, and they were careful to choose panelists who had ties to the community where the film was screened, such as a politician who represented the district and a nutritionist who works with lower-income populations, and also recruited a moderator from a neighborhood community group. They made a deliberate effort to not have a feeling of "We are the experts and we're coming here to tell you this" (32a).

Besides acting as a consciousness-raising activity, one FPC in particular found that film nights have also catalyzed engagement with local food policy among participants. One FPC screened "Mad City Chickens," a film about raising backyard poultry, which they used to launch their campaign to alter the city's

zoning to allow for backyard chickens. "You could draw the dots" between the film screening and participation in the campaign, the interviewee said.

> *"In 2009, we showed Mad City Chickens which is about backyard chickens. We had our largest audience. We had standing room only. We couldn't have fit more than the 120 people who came to that film. We were ready, knowing that there were already people in [the city] who wanted to create a backyard chicken ordinance. So that evening, after the film was done, I introduced the person who agreed to be the chair-person of the committee for the backyard chicken ordinance. Out of that event we created a backyard chicken committee and a year later we finally passed an ordinance." (12)*

Workshops

Another FPC coordinator mentioned that they felt a huge part of their ability to draw participants from beyond the already-engaged food system advocates in their community was their decision to find leaders from the community who had personal experience in topics related to the food system to teach the workshops… These leaders directed workshops on corner store improvements, beekeeping, healthy soul food cooking, food preservation, school gardening, starting neighborhood farmers' markets, social media, and video documentation.

> *"…I would estimate that maybe 60% of the folks [who came to the workshops], I had never met or seen before, which is so encouraging. A lot of new faces, new people, and that was terrific. Our goal was to have as many neighborhood residents teach those sessions as possible. Instead of having the community garden coordinator teach about community gardening, have it taught by people who do community gardening in their neighborhood, how they do it. We knew them; we knew they were capable presenters who were enthusiastic." (8)*

Using community residents as facilitators helped this Council achieve their goal of sharing food system knowledge that had been evolving in separate pockets of

the city and empowering residents to take action, rather than waiting for a non-profit or government intervention.

g. *Offer incentives*

Multiple FPCs described the incentives that they used to compensate community members for their participation in Council activities. Focus group participants often received gift certificates while many meeting coordinators made sure that food (either snacks or a full meal) was a part of the meeting or community focus group. The most innovative example of incentives involved accessing funding from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in their state to pay low-income participants (who were eligible for TANF funding) to attend Council meetings and for their time spent creating a report on food insecurity in their community. The FPC also obtained additional grant funding to supplement the TANF funding and collaborated with their food co-op to also offer gift certificates to the food co-op in exchange for participation on the Council.

> *"Basically we appealed by writing a letter to the state [TANF] office to request that all the hours put into the research project by the participants would be counted towards their work, much like going in to interview for a job….This was our rationale: if it was a professional representing an organization, the organization pays for their time to go to meetings and that is part of a lot of people's jobs who work in social services - to go to meetings and participate in or advocate for projects. So our thought was that was also true of anyone who goes to meetings and carries out the parts of the project. So we got a grant to fund their time [at $10 per hour] or people could get a discount at the food co-op." (24a)*

This subsidy succeeded in incentivizing residents who might not have otherwise participated. Unfortunately, the TANF funding did not continue after the report was released; the grant to subsidize Council participation was not accessible for another year, and the low-income community members did not continue their participation.

V. Challenges

Depending on their structure, funding, government support, and public support, FPCs face a variety of challenges. These may be significant barriers or may be easily overcome. Many of the challenges experienced by FPCs have already been addressed by other authors (Harper et al. 2009, Schiff 2007, Hamilton 2002, Gottlieb and Fisher 1995), including:

- overall challenge of working with diverse membership and constituencies
- designing an effective organizational structure
- balancing focus between policy and program work and between structural and narrow focus
- measuring and evaluating a Council's impact
- financial and political challenges
- lack of institutional support
- complex local political environments
- lack of staff or sharing staff with governmental departments
- lack of data on a variety of issues relevant to a local food system

Many interviewees reiterated these challenges but also discussed others, specifically related to the inclusion of diverse community residents, including:

- Council's structure is not yet conducive for community inclusion

- Reliance on volunteer Council members
- Lack of resources
- Culture and language barriers
- Meeting times and locations
- Limited number of seats
- Challenges of engaging people in "food policy"
- Motivating others, getting community buy-in and leadership
- Anti-government sentiments
- Diversity of the food system sectors, but not in personal demographics

Council's structure is not yet conducive for community inclusion

Some FPCs have conducted community outreach or held public events which then attracted interested members of the public to inquire about joining the Council. However, the Council members realized that they were still relatively "unstable" or in need of greater structure that would enable them to better support new Council members. In those cases, Councils are waiting until they are more formalized and have moved beyond discussing the Council's organization to actually focus on programming or policy making before they're able to include diverse community residents and take up matters that relate directly to their lives.

> *"After the film series of last winter, we were actually victims of our own success. We had a lot of people - our meetings typically have 10 people and it varied quite a bit because a lot of people are farmers and producers. After the film series, we started having 15 new people, 20 new people… I think our February meeting had 25 people and we didn't have anything to say to these people! We had no real plan for how to make them feel included in our group and make them feel like we're accomplishing things and so on." (39)*

> *"Right now I can't see the benefit of having a SNAP participant or a WIC participant come into a Council meeting because the types of discussions are not*

related to them yet. Discussions have to do with building infrastructure and leadership capacity of the Council and are not yet focused on anything that's program or policy related that would directly affect participants in these programs. So we're not there yet." (19)

"We actually had a person on our Council for the first year or so who had disabilities and was recruited through a public housing Council. I don't know personally if it was difficult for her to attend but she was very irregular in her attendance. Even though we tried to nurture and support and encourage her she didn't engage. And we haven't really actively tried that approach again. I think that her contributions were pretty limited. That was during our formation, the first year when basically all you're doing is putting together your framework." (7b)

"This is the thing that we keep struggling with: education is great, but unless you have a targeted 'ask' it seems preachy and not useful. So because we don't have a set of policy recommendations yet that we want voters to be informed about, what are we educating the public on?" (11)

Reliance on volunteer Council members

A few FPCs mentioned that their ability to engage community residents was hindered by their reliance on an all-volunteer Council or minimal staff time donated from member organizations. Community engagement is time consuming work, and one FPC expressed that it wasn't a lack of recognition of the value of the community voice, but rather the busy lives of the community members; "people don't [volunteer] because they don't have time!" (22). FPCs are just "not set up to be able to do [community organizing] because they're often a group of volunteers who have other full time jobs" (22).

Lack of resources

In addition to limited time available for members to contribute to FPC-related work, lack of financial resources hinders FPCs ability to initiate and maintain community engagement. This lack of resources, both time and financial, limits the Council's ability

to go beyond e-mail communication to reach communities that do not have regular internet access with printed flyers or door-to-door recruitment, for example.

> *"We've been talking for months about how to follow up on [the food summit]. We don't have the resources, so we're not going to have the ability to do the targeted recruiting that we did last time, so I'm pretty sure that we won't get...the same representation of low-income people." (43)*

> *"A lot of the people who came to our Community Conversations groups don't have reliable access to the internet. So we try to post stuff to the website and we started this blog to keep people up to date and let people know what's going on. But there's still this digital divide." (8)*

Additionally, lack of time to recruit volunteers prevented one Council from involving community members on a project in their own neighborhood; instead they relied on their existing pool of volunteers.

> *"We could have probably reached out more and involved probably a more diverse group of people to volunteer for that, but we kind of just pulled from our resources that we had available to our coalition." (9)*

Culture and language barriers

One FPC expressed that they were interested in increasing the diversity of their Council members, but that the Hmong community in particular is a very insular community; both differences in culture and language were barriers to their involvement on the Council.

> *"It would be wonderful to have a Hmong person, but their [society is] …not inclusive. There are huge language barriers. Most Hmong people are first generation living in the States, they are refugees, and don't know English very well and there's always a very big language barrier to overcome." (39)*

In addition to language, communication style was mentioned as a potential challenge if Councils attempted to include more diverse voices.

Meeting times and locations

Many FPCs hold their meetings during the day, which is conducive to members whose involvement on the Council is part of their work responsibilities, but this would exclude potential members who work during the day in jobs that don't allow for their participation.

> *"Right now we're open to everybody, but I think structurally some of the ways that we do our work makes it tough for people to become involved simply because of the time, meeting dates, and those kinds of things make it kind of a barrier if you're working during the day." (8)*

Limited number of seats

Additionally, FPCs struggle with balancing their desire to be inclusive with the need to be efficient by incorporating representatives from select food system sectors or keeping the number of Council members at a manageable level. One interviewee described the challenge:

> *"There's such a careful juggling act of representing various aspects of the food system and people who are different stakeholders in the food system as well as having racial diversity and economic diversity as well as various components of our city and there's only 11 people, so each person is responsible for a significant portion of that diversity." (26)*

One interviewee cautioned that while it's important that low-income residents' concerns are addressed by the FPC, "it's important that we don't pack the board with low-income people because that's not all we do" (6b).

Challenges of engaging people in "food policy"

The newness of the FPC phenomenon makes the work less easily understood or communicated to non-professionals. Some FPCs mentioned that a challenge of their work is their focus on food policy and food systems thinking, which can be difficult concepts to grasp and connect with initially. The policy process for changing a zoning ordinance to allow for a community garden can be much less engaging than the process of actually starting a community garden; policy is "less tangible and in some ways less accessible" than projects (8). Naturally, the "people who know the most about this nascent food economy are the ones who are actually in it…probably the average consumer going to a big box for their groceries is not likely to resonate with the values behind the policies or not likely to be like 'Oh, I see this major problem and I want to address it with this policy'….The policies are...not likely to come from the folks who don't see a problem" (11). Interviewees described the differences in food systems perspectives and understanding between Council members who have been "immersed in [food system work] for five, 10, or 30 years" and community members who "aren't in the food system, and don't work within the food system, or they do but they're scrambling to make ends meet day to day" (30). Some FPC members described instances where community members without a policy background who participate on FPCs "haven't been able to 'get' policy" despite honest attempts by other members to frame food policy in an understandable way and drop out within a year (15). Understanding the complexity of many local policy processes has challenged even the food systems

professionals on the Councils, many of whom have not worked with local governments before.

> *"I get how the federal government works when you're passing policy, but on the local level it's like it goes through this committee and that committee and four different departments have to weigh in on it…So we're going to have a teaching session for the Food Policy Council on how all of that stuff works in the city." (26)*

Additionally, because policy change is not an instant process, it requires what one interviewee described as a "long-term commitment to the process. One policy change can take 12 to 18 months" (8). This drawn-out process can make it difficult to keep even the most passionate people "motivated to push, work, research, inform, advocate for that entire time for one thing." In thinking about reaching non-professionals, or "residents who are pressed for all sorts of other demands on their time," in policy work, FPCs expressed feeling challenged to find strategies that will be engaging (8).

An additional challenge to policy work is that, FPCs must be careful on how much money they spend on political activities that could be construed as lobbying.

Motivating others, getting community buy-in and leadership

Some FPCs mentioned that they struggle with how to get community buy-in and motivate community members to take on leadership roles in the Council.

> *"We just don't know how to get that continuity, that buy-in, that feeling as if it's yours. If we felt like we had more long-term buy in, we might be able to step back from [running] the farmers' market all together. For example, one of the people on the advisory committee said, 'We've really got to get youth in here. I know there are people at my church who will do it' so we said, 'We'll support you to get that started, but it's not our community, we don't have the ability to go to your church.' And he just basically didn't do it." (15)*

Anti-government sentiments

Some FPC members felt their association with the government made them appear less welcoming to community members, especially community members who may have previously felt ignored due to structural discrimination. Additionally, many farmers and community residents just

> *"...want government out of their business. Out of their projects and what they're doing in their neighborhood and don't really care what city hall or county government really thinks about that." (8)*

Diversity of the food system sectors, but not in personal demographics

Many FPCs indicated that having Council members who were racially and economically diverse was important, but that they primarily prioritize diversity of food sectors.

> *"The first thing we look at is what their experience is and then what sector they're from. And the last part is the demographics - age, ethnicity, etc. … but it is experience and background in the system - that's the first priority." (30)*

Chapter 5. Discussion and Recommendations

The results of this research help to highlight the techniques that FPCs are currently using to engage diverse community residents and the challenges they face in doing so. Findings from this research will be useful to Council members as material for reflection on their own practice. This chapter highlights the areas that Council members should focus on further and identifies some lessons and themes that emerged during the interviews and research, as well as lessons borrowed from other disciplines that regularly engage diverse community residents.

VI. Discussion

Certainly the alternative food movement as a whole is beginning to recognize and embrace issues of justice in the food system, and, as shown in the analysis of interviews above, many FPC members are thinking about how their policies, programs, and organizational structures are supporting a more just food systems. They mentioned concerns about finding meeting times and locations that worked for a wide variety of members, setting aside seats on the Council for youth, and involving low-income residents on projects that relate to food security. There are, however, two inter-related area of concern emerged during the interviews: meaningful inclusion and the culture of the Council. Recommendations for increased inclusion follow this discussion section.

Meaningful inclusion

Earlier in this paper, the concept of inclusion was introduced as the ways in which communities which are most affected by food system injustices are given a voice in

defining the food-related problems and shaping solutions. Arnstein's ladder of inclusion offers us a scale to review if different methods of citizen participation either promote empowerment or are actually "empty rituals" that don't offer people "the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process" (214). High levels of empowerment reach what Clare Hinrichs and Kathy Kremer call "social inclusion," the practice "premised on respectful interactions between different groups and a focus on mutual empowerment" (Hinrichs and Kremer 2002:68). Applied to FPCs, this suggests that "meaningful inclusion" of diverse community residents is not simply an invitation to participate, but a practice that ensures that all participants feel comfortable and supported in making contributions and that their opinions are listened to and respected.

While FPCs may hold meetings that are open to the public, they should be careful not to confuse lack of participation of community members with disinterest. Leo Vazquez (2009) identifies the tendency for white urban planners to say "If they don't show up at the [meeting], they don't care," which he says highlights a lack of cultural competence. Most planners have a personal or professional frame of reference that says: "If you care about your place, you participate in civic life." But this attitude ignores that some stakeholders may feel intimidated or uncomfortable expressing themselves among professionals (Vazquez 2009). While Vazquez focuses on land use planning and design, this sentiment can apply to many other fields, including food policy. To some extent, FPCs interviewed recognized the factors of inclusion and exclusion; one interviewee recognized that although they are welcoming of all community members, the fact that

they did not specifically seek out representatives from communities or sectors that are not traditionally represented on their Council created a condition where those representatives did not choose to participate.

> *"While there wasn't an effort to exclude, there wasn't an effort to purposefully make sure they were there...You can't just say, "Oh, everybody's welcome…" They won't show up…You need to make an effort, and we…didn't." (43)*

Despite bringing people together from diverse food system sectors, many of the Councils we surveyed suggested that their Councils experienced very little conflict, but attributed this to their focus on "smaller, feel-good projects" such as a county fair and to the genuine rapport the Council members felt for each other. However it is likely that as Councils begin to address more complex or controversial topics or seek to be more inclusive, conflict will result. Hassanein (2003) cautions that when making choices, conflict is inevitable, and rather than something to avoid is actually a measure of change. It is within the context of active, participatory local political and planning processes that she believes participants have the most opportunity to work out their differences and find workable solutions.

Finding ways for marginalized communities to participate in spaces created by the alternative food movement, including FPCs, will be important in disrupting the exclusive features of these spaces. Alison Alkon and Christie McCullen (2011:28) believe that interrupting the "elite, liberal whiteness in these spaces" may help to "broaden the movement's collective work" to achieve meaningful transformation of the food system.

Culture of the Council

The culture of the Council and attitude of the chair can have a direct impact on the Council's appearance as an inclusive or non-inclusive space. The attitude toward diversity represented on the Council from the start often shapes the types of members it includes in the future. Many FPCs interviewed developed from an informal network, choosing members for their first generation from a short list developed from members already active in the food system. Reliance on existing networks may limit who feels welcome to join the FPC in the future. Kim Bobo warns that "if you want racial, ethnic, gender, and class integration, the leadership must reflect this from the very start. Once the leaders are established as being one kind of person, other kinds of people will stay away" (Bobo 2001:120). Interviewee 11 stated that their first-round members were selected primarily from their existing network but acknowledged that the reliance on selecting people from their network could potentially lead to a Council "who looks just like you and thinks just like you" (11). Another FPC mentioned that the lack of diversity on their Council was already impacting their ability to attract people of color because of historical experiences of communities of color being "helped" or "served" by all-white organizations. Despite hearing directly from people of color who staff food systems-related programs in their city that the issues the Council discusses are important to them, the Council chair “can’t even get them to come to meetings” because of these underlying tensions (34).

Although some FPCs have included language about reflecting the representation of the community or working on projects that address food security and inclusion of diverse community residents in their missions or guiding documents, for the most part members who were interviewed expressed that most efforts to be inclusive of diverse community residents occurred because of the personal orientation of their chair and Council members. One FPC chair said that as long as she was chair "we'll probably emphasize low-income because that's my passion" but "after a year, when there's a new leadership, we may have a new emphasis" (6b). An added concern regarding the role of the chairperson is the need for strong leadership and political savvy; without this, there is potential for a member organization or individual member to dominate the Council.

Kate Clancy comments that effective FPC leaders embody a number of key qualities such as "vision, personalities that encourage sharing and community building, major management skills, significant time commitment, and incredible patience" (1988). Beyond these skills, leaders also bring their personal backgrounds and professional interests to the position. Leaders or chairs who have no personal predilection towards including diverse community members or discussing racism in the food system will not prioritize such activities.

> *"A lot depends on who is the leader, who is the chair, how much time and effort and energy they have to devote to the FPC, what is their interest, what are their capacities as a leader to be able to engage and lead a meeting and provide direction…You can have bylaws that spell out exactly what the purpose and direction of a community group is, whether it is an FPC or any other type of*

community group but what actually happens is often dependent on the leadership skills of the people who are sitting around the table." (22)

Having certain people with a strong food justice perspective has helped maintain that focus for the Council as a whole. At times Councils have sought out particular members because of their professional experience and personal framework, such as one person who is both a producer and a food justice advocate, or others who on Council chair described as "reality check" type of people (15).

"There were three different people [at the Council meeting] who said 'No, this is actually the most important piece of the work and it needs to be included because our work is centered around justice.' It was the director of our food bank, someone else that runs a men's shelter, and someone else that runs a community action Council." (34)

The following section offers specific recommendations for thinking about broadening participation and engagement.

VII. Recommendations towards inclusion

In order to achieve higher levels of meaningful inclusion, Councils should consider the opportunities for involvement throughout their development, make an effort to "know their community" by conducting in-depth research in the communities they operate in, provide more education and training of Council members on both food policy and cultural competency, focus on relationship building among Council members, adopt techniques of community organizers, and work to build inclusive Councils.

Inclusion throughout the Council's development

Offering a variety of ways for communities to be involved in food system activities can be an important way to engage people of differing incomes and cultures (Hinrichs and Kremer 2002). However, FPCs need to consider what opportunities for participation they offer throughout their Council's development, and not wait to invite people after the Council's priorities and culture has been established.

Meaningful inclusion can begin with making clear statements about the importance of diverse representation on the Council. As described earlier, one FPC explicitly addressed the Council's diversity in their mission statement. However, as noted, despite this directive, this FPC had not yet diversified their Council membership, so questions remain as to how far language alone can go in ensuring actual representation.

Meaningful inclusion of diverse community residents is also important when shaping the Council's priorities and structure. Harris (2007) suggests that "including people of color and other disenfranchised groups defined in the membership in the strategic planning process helps to diminish" some of the difficulty of managing a diversity of people, perspectives and positions when broad inclusion is sought (19). Thus, meaningful inclusion of vulnerable groups would require their participation in every stage of the Council's work, from setting priorities and goals (as discussed in the *Meaningful Inclusion* section above) to initiating and then later evaluating the projects. This practice is more common with environmental justice and food sovereignty groups, who have argued for the inclusion of historically marginalized people in developing long-term

solutions to inequity (Loh and Eng 2010). When setting Council priorities, most FPCs shaped their general goals and strategies internally, debating among the Council members and working group members who were at the table, but not doing specific outreach to their broader community until they considered specific projects or policies. When selecting neighborhoods to focus their work on, FPCs often chose to focus on food desert neighborhoods because of the obvious opportunities to address inequities in the food system. However, members of those communities were not always directly involved in collecting data to support the research. One FPC suggested that while they didn't involve community members, it would have benefited their project and the Council's general work.

> *"I do think we would have more of a benefit to include a more diverse group of volunteers just because then it empowers people to feel like 'I do have a place in this community and I can make change, positive change in the community.' Maybe some of these people, it would be nice to know if they really wanted access to produce nearby. It would be nice to have that information to say that there is demand from people who actually live in this neighborhood that want to buy healthy food." (9)*

In a few cases, FPCs began their process of setting priorities by inviting the community to comment on a series of initial findings and choose the priorities from the list that they felt were most important for their region. But one FPC acknowledged that "it was good for once in a blue moon, [but] there's no way to do that regularly" (8).

> *"We walked [community residents] through the initial report for the community food system of the region, which had a summary of research on the food system in the region and also proposed a goal of a healthier food system and strategies to get there. We were asking people, 'What do you think of the proposed strategies?' 'Do you see yourself being involved in some of these?' etc. We recorded them, did transcripts, and we analyzed it. We came up with a proposal*

based on what we heard and we called people for a follow-up meeting in June 2006…We asked people, 'Ok, what is the priority now? What needs to happen first?' And these are the things that people identified." (43)

Council membership requires not only the time to participate, but also the ability to participate; Council members ideally understand the dynamics of collaborative decision making and have food system or policy experience. When working to include non-traditional Council members, Councils need to consider either altering their structures and/or offering training to ensure that all members can "participate pro-actively and effectively on their own terms" (Hinrichs and Kremer 2002:68). Although many of the activities and processes discussed in the interviews show that FPCs are actively engaging residents for honest reasons, there is a threat that efforts to include diverse community residents on Councils are simply for the sake of diversity or that "inviting them to the table" doesn't go far enough to ensure equitable outcomes. FPCs should deeply consider how their structure, policies, culture, and frames of reference impact who participates and how they participate. Issues of meaningful inclusion apply to all of the Council's work; Council inception and projects are examined below briefly.

Last, meaningful inclusion during projects entails involving community members in every stage of a project, with training and support where needed. Only a few FPCs demonstrated this level of inclusion, such as in the case of a food insecurity report project that involved food-insecure community members in forming the questions, conducting the surveys, and creating recommendations. The Council members partnered with researchers and students at a local university to initiate the project but

let the community members make the important decisions that determined the course of the project (once they had been recruited).

In addition to actively seeking broad participation from the whole food system, projects that promote meaningful social inclusion typically need to devote resources to developing the capacities of the disadvantaged groups and individuals. Developing these skills helps enable participants to be able to move beyond just token levels of inclusion. In some situations, unequal treatment can arise due to speech and communication styles. Certain styles of speaking are privileged over others in most institutions; white supremacy culture dominates the norms of many of our institutions, privileging reasoned argumentations over storytelling (Allen 1999). Meetings should allow for a variety of methods for sharing information (storytelling, written communication, presentations, time-limited sharing), but can also challenge members to try out a method that is less familiar or comfortable to them.

Knowing your community

Understanding a community's specific sociodemographics, cultural habits, and history (specifically around food and agriculture) should be foundational work for any FPC. This is important because of food's place as a cultural commodity that is meaningful to different groups in different ways. Additionally, community members may associate agriculture with past injustices, such as slavery or the appropriation of Native American land for farming. Understanding these associations, connections, and pre-existing

relationships is important for appreciating how community members interact with the food system today.

Tom Hemingway (1995) suggests using census data to "expand [food system actors'] thinking about food in relation to your community's social organization and economics" and begin to answer some of the big picture questions about the community's food system such as: what are the local resources, what are the local needs, what are the major social problems in the area, and how do these problems relate to food system problems? Data about population demographics, major economic activities, economic indicators, and government budgets can be combined with other food system data for a community food assessment. Resources such as the local Chamber of Commerce and census data available from federal and state sources are possible places to start.
For an even richer picture of the community, the FPC should consider conducting ethnographic research in specific communities. In many cases, communities that have been historically marginalized from policy decisions are distrustful of "outsiders," and so it is very important that FPCs demonstrate at least a historical understanding of those communities. Allen (2010:296) points out that "food system localization efforts do not, of course, start with a blank slate….historical configurations have created great inequalities among regions and within regions themselves." Hearing from community members, local activists, and even national activists, can help to uncover some of the "historical configurations" that have contributed to the current "differences in wealth,

power and privilege that exist both among and within localities" and which deeply impact the food system (Allen 2010:296).

Many FPCs consistently invite community members and professionals (in the food system or related health or academic fields) to their meetings to share their knowledge and experience in an effort to increase the memberships' knowledge of specific aspects of the food system. At other times, FPCs have organized tours of the community's farms, farmers' markets, community gardens, or food deserts in their area. The New York State Council on Food Policy not only held listening sessions in the Harlem community but engaged community members in leading a walking tour so that participants could understand firsthand the real conditions of the East Harlem food environment (New York State Council on Food Policy 2008). Such opportunities should be offered to improve the Council members' understanding of their community's demographics, specific food insecurity concerns experienced by community members, or understand structural discrimination present in their local food system.

Council member education and training

Continuous education and training for Council members on a variety of topics and skills related to the food system is essential to maintaining members' interest in participating and helps the Council make better-informed decisions (Schiff 2007:123). Training can also focus on building members' cultural competency skills or enable them to better engage with diverse group members. FPCs have used training sessions as opportunities to improve specific skills, come to a common understanding about food system terms or

phenomena, or develop vision or mission statements that guide the organization's work. Some FPCs interviewed for this research have offered training for their members on the political process and the food system perspective. A few Council members spoke of the importance of attending conferences and learning from other FPCs processes and activities.

Interviewee 8 spoke of the importance of training not only for policy work, but also facilitation skills, which they see as important in the Council's ability in aiding good communication among diverse members; "…the way that we communicate and the way we talk with each other…falls on a good facilitator" (8). Many other FPCs cited the need for a highly skilled facilitator to lead the group through meetings on more challenging topics, such as institutional racism. Trainings around leading effective meetings could help prepare Council members to take on more responsibility in conducting meetings or prepare new members to participate more effectively. FPCs may also consider holding trainings for their members relating to improving skills of cultural competency or anti-racist practice, especially when they are preparing to engage with diverse community residents and establish meaningful and equitable partnerships or relationships.

In some cases, members themselves can be the educators to other Council members about food justice or food democracy. Having members on the Council whose professional work or personal framework fits within "food justice" has helped other Council members to understand how their food system work is impacted by local and

national power dynamics. FPCs have at times sought out Council members who specifically bring that perspective.

> *"There's a need for a lot of education around how power issues play into food policy work…I think most people once they hear it think "Ok, yeah that makes sense" but they just haven't thought about these issues in terms of justice - especially when they're coming at it from an anti-obesity standpoint or a health care standpoint or physical activity standpoint - so I think they haven't had the time to connect those dots yet." (34)*

In some instances, FPCs have asked their members to participate in specific activities that raise the awareness around food security in their community. The Durham Food Policy Council members participated in a "Do the Math" challenge wherein their five-day food intake was limited to distribution from the local food bank in "an effort to bring attention to the struggles faced by local residents who live on a limited income or social assistance" and raise awareness of food security issues (Follert 2010). Members described the powerlessness and upset they felt when someone else had "decided what I'm going to eat for a week and it doesn't matter if I don't like this food or I can't eat this food" (Follert 2010).

To improve engagement with diverse community residents, education and training for Council members should include both cultural competency and anti-oppression skills. Dealing with issues of institutional racism and historic disinvestment in communities is difficult, but necessary, work in creating a just and equitable food system. Interviewees reinforced the importance of good facilitation of group discussions about these

challenging topics. A few councils interviewed mentioned that they are planning to incorporate anti-racism training into their regular Council training.

Relationship building

Alethea Harper and her co-authors (2009) explain that "policy work is not just about laws, regulations, budgets, and politics," but rather policy change is more often the "result of one very important human activity, namely relationship building" (14). Relationship building includes variables such as "investment, commitment, trust, involvement and openness" (Bruning 2002:41). In patient/caretaker relationships, relationship building has been defined as "valuing and treating the client with respect, using self-disclosure, maintaining accountability and confidentiality, advocating on the part of clients, enabling patients to have meaningful control over their care, and listening to and believing in the client" (Gantert et al. 2008:25). Relationship building can also include generating an understanding of the other person's lived experience (Leigh 1998:11). Grassroots community organizers distinguish between "public relationships," which are built through community organizing, and "private relationships" and "professional relationships." Public relationships are civil relationships based on accountability, trust, and respect that serve converging self-interests (Christens 2010). FPCs should devote time to developing public relationships, especially among Council members coming from different socioeconomic, racial, or cultural backgrounds, because forming public relationships with others allows participants to "gain an understanding of how they and others fit into and interact with

local government, the marketplace, organizations, and various social systems" (Christens 2010:892). Developing this public self can certainly transform the private self, but the main goal of fostering public relationships on FPCs would be to enhance members' understanding of how to make effective policy changes.

One Council member stated that "developing relationships is key to moving the work forward" (22). Relationships between the Council and local policy-makers, between Council members and community organization leaders, and among Council members are all important. Building relationships and developing mutual trust allows food system representatives to step outside of their "silos" – or specific areas of expertise - and turn their attention to areas of the food system that need strengthening (Winne 2008). Relationships are "the vehicle through which reflective dialogue can occur" and they facilitate "the transformation of consciousness necessary for individuals to embrace active involvement" in a group environment (Anderson n.d.:11). These particular attributes are what make relationships a critical part of a Council's ability to effectively include diverse community members.

Building trust is crucial for mediating relationships between different groups and especially between groups where oppression has been the historical precedent. Leigh argues that "the formation of a relationship is the base from which all professional and nonprofessional helpers must begin if they want to be successful in their cross-cultural" endeavors (Leigh 1998: xii). Allocating time at each meeting for members to share

stories helps build relationships between members and connects people who might have seemingly dissimilar backgrounds. One Council rotates meeting sites among the different represented food system sectors to garner a more complete understanding of each member's perspective.

> *"…over the past 12 months we've met in 12 different places. They've always been in the conference room at the grocery store, in the conference room at the Chamber of Commerce, we went out to the brewery bottling facility, we went out to the feedlot and ate steak from their farm. We decided to visit all of the stakeholders' homes and we always had a meal over it." (11)*

Lessons from community organizing

FPCs can learn a tremendous amount from community organizing methods and techniques that specifically seek to engage and empower community residents in solving problems that directly affect their lives. None of the Councils interviewed for this research are consistently using community organizing techniques in their work, although a few engage community organizers as Council members. Council members who are professional community organizers bring food system topics from the Council to their community in the process of their organization's primary mission. This might be an appropriate technique given how labor-intensive building membership-based community organizations can be, especially among the poor. At times, FPCs do partner with community-based organizations to support a specific event or policy agenda that the constituents may be interested in.

"Organizing is about understanding a community's resources and working on issues that people care about and that are easily understood and communicated" (Hassanein

2003:81), as well as valuing the lived experience of the community residents as a specific type of expertise. Developing mutual trust and performing critical dialogue around shared problems is essential in developing a successful organizing campaign (Carroll 2000). For FPCs, taking a community organizing perspective would involve working directly with people who have the most at stake and whose self-interest is the focus of the Council's work in bringing about change for their own lives. Community organizing methods use empowerment models and seek to validate "a person's inherent knowledge and experience" by analyzing and supporting their individual experience in relation to their community's collective experience (Pardasani 2005:91). Anti-racism and cultural competency are at the core of effective community organizing; removing "sexism, classism, and racism from the ranks of movement leaders" is not simply a moral imperative, but also a strategic one because community organizing campaigns "find it difficult to win their fights if the people most affected by negative policies and trends are not at the forefront, making strategic, as well as technical, decisions" (Sen 2003). Therefore, by incorporating more diverse people in making strategic decisions, FPCs can strengthen their efforts. Likewise, community-based organizations should think of FPCs as allies that enable them to connect with leaders and agents of change in the food system to coordinate policy changes that may be beyond the capacity of a single community organization.

However, interviews for this research revealed that when choosing what topics or projects to work on, Councils often prioritize issues that relate to the work of their

members, not necessarily issues that related directly to a community-prioritized need. In a few cases, Councils looked at the demographics of their communities and picked projects that directly affected certain populations. For example, one Council started working with Hmong growers after it recognized that they were being discriminated against at the farmers' market. It is rare, however, for Councils to hold open meetings with the community and ask: "What do you want us to work on?" However, Council members could do so and use their professional expertise and political connections to work on a problem defined by the community, alongside diverse community residents.

Many FPCs are already poised to engage in a community organizing approach because the spaces that they often help to create, such as farmers' markets, can serve as community organizing "hubs" that attract potential participants (Alkon 2008). FPCs that use working groups are already structured in a way that mimics good community organizing techniques. Working groups, because of their smaller size and narrow focus on a particular topic, provide "the ideal environment for exploring the social and political aspects of personal problems and developing strategies for work toward social change" (Gutierrez 1997:246). Community organizing can also support food system policy work by engaging and strengthening things at the grassroots community level, enabling communities to then force changes at the policy level (Wekerle 2004).

Corollary techniques to community organizing include Participatory Action Research and Popular Education. FPCs can also engage in Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR

combines research with action by recognizing the expertise that local people possess about their own lives and environments by allowing communities to research their own problems, analyze them, and propose solutions (Reardon 1998). PAR uses relationship building between stakeholders and fundamentally supports the empowerment of communities (Rimkus 2003). Similarly, popular education recognizes the expertise of community members and engages them as "learner-teachers," replacing traditional "teachers" with "teacher-learners," signifying that we all have the capacity to share and learn together. The People's Movement Assembly on Food Sovereignty (2010) lists popular education as a key method to engage communities in nutrition and public health education.

Participatory democracy perspective often aligns with the community organizing perspective and believes "that regular people should be empowered to identify what is of utmost importance to their communities and set the agenda for their lives" (Pyles 2009:35). Allen (2004) writes that efforts that include both community organizing and FPC activities represent a deep kind of democratization by increasing self-determination in food issues and building connections between people that extend to civic and political life beyond the food system.

VIII. Conclusion

The demographic shifts underway in U.S. communities suggest that people of color will soon be the majority in many states. Because food is universal in its reach, the transformation and democratization of the food system cannot be achieved without the

participation and leadership of people of color (Harper et al. 2009). FPCs are not the only location for citizen involvement in the food system. Other great opportunities exist at farmers' markets and grocery stores, in community gardens, at shared dinner tables, on online forums, or at protests, for example. And while FPCs may not be the most accessible location for citizen involvement, the work that they take on is often deeply relevant to communities of color and low income communities. In fact, FPCs are one of the only locations within a local community for impacting policies that affect a resident's food access or food environment. Councils all have different missions or project goals, but, in the instances where they are concerned with issues that impact the community directly, empowering diverse community residents as participants in defining the food system problems they face and creating plausible solutions is a vital role of FPCs. FPCs, then, have a real opportunity and imperative to both embody justice and improve their effectiveness by meaningfully including diverse community residents.

While many leaders in the alternative food movement may agree with the sentiment of citizen engagement, operationalizing meaningful inclusion may be a challenge for some. The lessons of past citizen participation efforts reveal that those who hold power may prove resistant to truly sharing power with marginalized communities. Page and Czuba (1999) state that "to create change we must change individually to enable us to become partners in solving the complex issues facing us." As FPCs continue to work within the alternative food system, they should prioritize engaging diverse community residents wherever possible while also reflecting on approaches that support the empowerment

of currently marginalized groups within the food system. Council members must reflecting on their position in existing racial and power hierarchies that exist in society, the food system, and on the Council.

Unfortunately, because FPCs are relatively new, there is a lack of evidence that directly links the inclusion of diverse community residents to more effective programming. Much more documentation and evaluation of FPCs' methods is needed in order to understand if or how the engagement strategies are helping Councils achieve their goals of increasing food security in their communities. This research follows from the perspective that citizen inclusion is a value in and of itself and a value to FPCs specifically. While this perspective has been informed by theoretically-based literature from various disciplines, it nonetheless has lessons of value to FPCs. Additionally, while diverse community residents are at the heart of this research, interviews were conducted only with existing Council members. Further research could seek to evaluate how engagement of diverse community residents affects FPC policy or project outcomes and to gather perspectives from diverse community residents on how they would like to be involved in the work of FPCs.

Appendix

I. Survey Questions

Good practices for diversity on Food Policy Councils

We're looking for examples of Food Policy Councils that have successfully included diverse* residents in their outreach, committees and the decision-making process regarding policy recommendations and programming. (*Diversity here means economic, racial, gender, and age diversity that reflects the demographics of your community (the city or region that your Food Policy Council represents)). In the questions below, please answer based on your experience with your Food Policy Council. You can leave any question blank that you do not feel comfortable answering or do not have an answer for. Your survey responses may be used in a future academic paper about good practices for encouraging diversity on Food Policy Councils. Responses will be presented without listing your name or Food Policy Council name/location. You will receive a copy of the final paper electronically. To contact the authors with questions or comments, please e-mail Molly McCullagh at molly.mccullagh@tufts.edu.
* Required

Name: *

Food Policy Council representing: *

City or Region, State location *

Website:

When was your Food Policy Council established? *

- 0-1 year ago
- 1-2 years ago
- 2-5 years ago
- 5+ years ago

Please provide the Food Policy Council's mission statement. You may also paste the link of the website with the mission statement. If there is no mission statement, please leave blank.

To date, what do you consider the major accomplishment(s) of your Food Policy Council? *

Steering Committee

**Are there designated seats/slots on your Food Policy Council's steering committee? ***If no, please type 'no.' If yes, please list the seats/slots or provide a URL to an online listing.

Do you consider the steering committee/board members to be reflective of the community's demographics? Please select the categories that you feel are accurately represented on the steering committee.

- Economic background
- Racial/ethnic background
- Age
- Gender
- Other:

Meetings

**Does the Food Policy Council hold public meetings? ***If the answer is no, please skip the following 2 questions and proceed to "Policies and Programs."

- Yes
- No

If yes, where and how are meetings publicized or announced?

If yes, are meeting attendees (not including steering committee members) generally reflective of the community's demographics? Please select the categories you feel are represented in public meetings.

- Economic background
- Racial/ethnic background
- Age
- Gender
- Other:

Policies and Programs

Are any of the Food Policy Council's policies or programs focused on low-income residents, people of color, seniors, youth, or women? Please list examples.

Does your Food Policy Council solicit opinions from diverse residents when appropriate? (For example, speaking with seniors when planning a program aimed at the elderly. These residents may or may not already be steering committee members.) Please give example.

Does your Food Policy Council involve diverse residents in the decision-making process? Please give an example.

Any other comments?

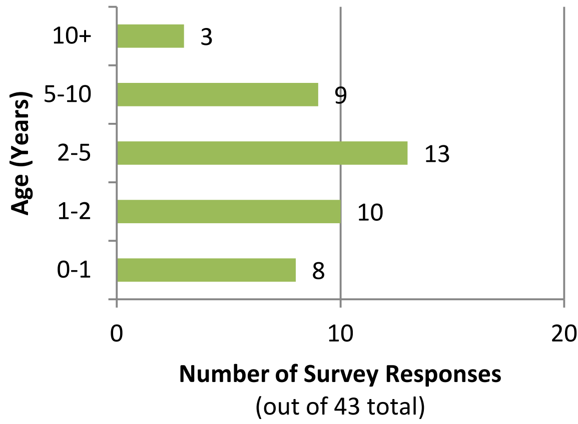
Would you be willing to be contacted for a further interview? *

- Yes
- No

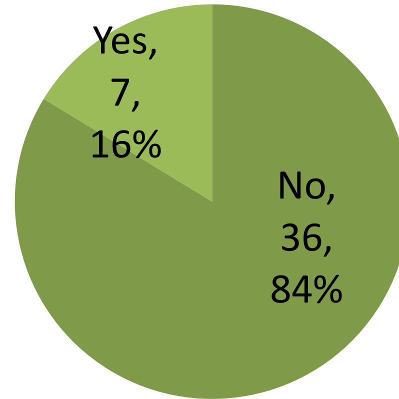
If yes, what is the best way and time to contact you?

II. Summary of survey responses

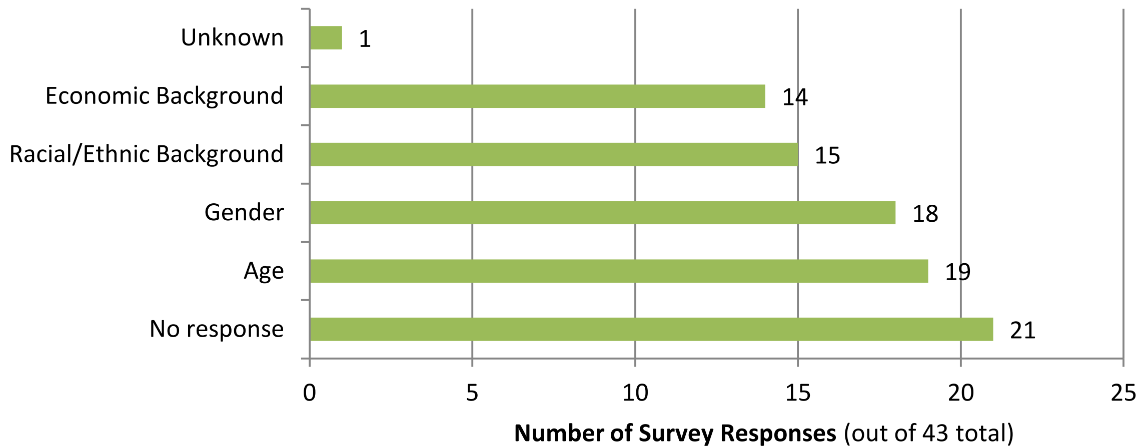
Age of FPCs



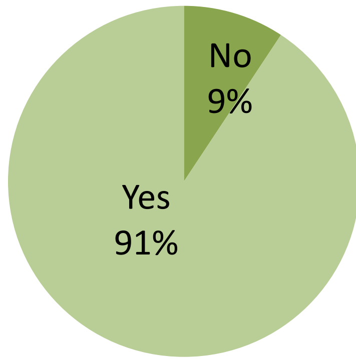
Are there seats designated by food system sector on your council?

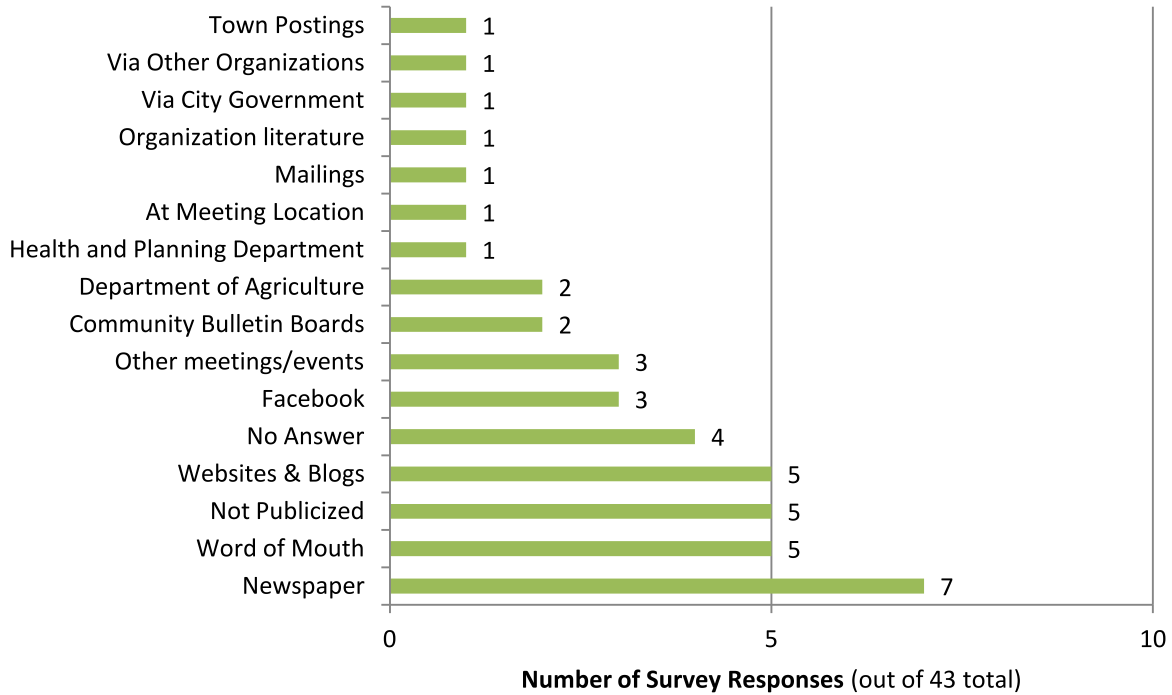


In what ways is the FPC steering committee reflective of the community's demographics?



*** 5 respondents wrote in that they were diverse in terms of food system sect a fact the researchers assumed of all FPCs.**


Does your FPC hold meetings that are open to the general public?
No
9%
Yes
91%


How are your meetings publicized?
Town Postings
Via Other Organizations
Via City Government
Organization literature
Mailings
At Meeting Location
Health and Planning Department
Department of Agriculture
Community Bulletin Boards
Other meetings/events
Facebook
No Answer
Websites & Blogs
Not Publicized
Word of Mouth
Newspaper
1
1
1
1
1
1
1
2
2
3
3
4
5
5
5
7
0
5
10
Number of Survey Responses (out of 43 total)

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