

Food Policy Networks FAQs

Inclusivity in FPCs

FPN Listserv Question: Has anybody developed outreach and evaluation plans to ensure your FPC is actively involving a broad base of people from diverse economic, gender, age, racial/ethnic etc. backgrounds? i.e. How do you know your group is truly representative of the population your FPC is meant to serve, and has a truly diverse group involved?

Resources on this topic:

- [Food Policy For All: Inclusion of Diverse Community Residents on Food Policy Councils](#). Molly McCullagh. Tufts University, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, 2014. The report is based on interviews conducted with FPC council members to capture methods they have used to diversify their council or include more diverse voices in their policy and action processes. There is some great work that has happened since the interviews - including examples highlighted by listserv members on this thread.
- [Achieving Diversity in the Nonprofit Workplace: A Step-by-Step Guide](#). Third Sector New England.
- [Race Forward](#) (formerly the Applied Research Center) has helpful resources for policy impact analysis around racial equity.
- [“Changing the Text”: Modeling Council Capacity to Produce Institutionalized Change](#). Nicole E. Allen, Shabnam Jaydani, Amy L. Lehmer, Angela L. Walden. American Journal of Community Psychology, 2012, 49 (3-4): 317-331.
- [King County Equity and Social Justice Tools and Resources](#).
- [The Creative Forces of Self Organization](#). John A. Buck and Gerard Endenburg. Sociocratic Center, Rotterdam, Netherlands.

Abbreviated Responses on the Thread Describing Individual Council Efforts

Worcester Food & Active Living Policy Council, Liz Sheehan Castro

We've made inclusivity and eliminating inequity explicit goals of our Policy Council but even still it's tough for us to keep an eye on it. We don't have an evaluation plan component, but our outreach strategy includes partnering with youth-serving agencies and organizations run by people of color as well as those that represent people of color.

We had a youth caucus off and on over the past few years. Working closely with youth workers and youth has been helpful in understanding that to involve people outside of the obvious and "comfortable" circle you have to bring your work to them and give them authentic voice. We had a group of youth give a presentation to our Policy Council on "how to work with youth" which was so helpful. We also just had our Policy Council members go through a diversity/cultural competency training which was a good starting point for many folks. We hope our next step is more like an anti-racism training.

Also, as the staff person for the Policy Council my outreach strategy is to act like a community organizer and go out and meet with people at their meetings, at their organizations, in their neighborhoods because I quickly realized that just inviting folks to our meetings and events wasn't working. For the first couple years in my position I just worked on building trust with people and communities that I knew had been ignored or underrepresented in our city. I attended their coalition meetings, their events, helped out on projects and grants wherever I could so that they knew I was invested and wanted to really build connections. That's made all the difference. We still struggle with being truly representative and reflecting the diversity of our city, and one reason for that is that the people of color that are leaders in the community are tapped for so many things. So those are just my thoughts and some of our outreach strategies. I would love to hear about what others are doing.

Pittsburgh Food Policy Council, Heather Mikulas

It remains a challenge in the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council, too. We are hiring a new Director, and part of their prioritized task is to relationship build with diverse stakeholders that the Council has nascent communication with, but has lacked the human resource and fiscal capacity to fully engage. Our council takes a systems level view of community needs and engagement, and this has resulted in applied projects very specific to one piece of the food system, and a degree of opportunism in those applied projects. We hope to substantially address these issues moving forward in the short term.

Philadelphia, Amy Laura Cahn

In Philadelphia, we went through a very conscious process of stepping back to be able to move forward. Through our membership and governance subcommittee, we developed a values statement that was adopted as part of our [bylaws](#). Then, we revamped our recruitment process and developed a matrix that was aimed at understanding the diversity of the council – in terms of demographics, as well as sector. We did a mandatory confidential survey through which we ask members to tell us about themselves, so we could understand who was missing. Since then the council has engaged in strategic recruitment to fill the gaps. There are still obvious gaps – e.g. no seniors, no representatives of the disability communities. However, our last meeting was our largest and most diverse. And the work and accountability of the council has expanded and deepened as a result of this work. We've also talked about engaging a youth caucus (I think Toronto has one), but started by focusing on recruiting members to the council who are in their early 20s, which was a definite gap. Alison Hastings, from Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, chairs our membership and governance subcommittee and really took leadership on this process. She is a great resource!

Georgia Food Policy Council, Kwabena Nkromo

We are wrestling with these thorny issues in my state as well with the Georgia Food Policy Council, for which I serve as Secretary. There was a recent decision making process that revealed some stark weaknesses in our diversity and tolerance in terms of cultural perspectives and activism temperance. I reached out to Mark Winne for guidance in a process of addressing this, after being appointed to lead a task force on the issue by our Chair. Having yet to completely follow through, the values statement document you shared

Amy was inspiring as I think it reflects the kind of supplemental tool we need to compliment our official bylaws.

North Carolina, Christy Shi (Engagement Strategist - Community Food Strategies, Center for Environmental Farming Systems, North Carolina State University)

I am working with about two dozen councils across North Carolina, in different degrees, each council at varying stages in its development. What follows may seem a little theoretical compared to some of the more hands-on examples, but I'll share it nonetheless, in the hopes it is helpful in some way.

I have attached a summary of work by Allen (2012) which has really helped shape how we approach issues such as this. Specifically, we are looking at the *culture of inclusivity* and the *breadth of membership*. The desire for diversity intersects both of these.

This thread seems to speak to the breadth of membership - ("Are we engaging all types of voices across the system?") The underlying rationale being that people support what they help create...and to allow people autonomy in decisions that affect them.

But there is another *vital benefit to diversity*. When a creative tension can be held between differing world views, innovation is sparked.

Unfortunately, most of our ways of working together do not include a setting for 'creative tension.' In fact, we often don't even know how to hear each other, let alone foster a climate in which opposing ideas can be held as equally vital to the solution.

An example: City staff were working with grassroots leaders to form a food council in an urban area. The grassroots leader spoke at a public meeting about the food council being developed and mentioned the involvement of city staff.

At the next food council organizing meeting, tempers flared. City staff were outraged that the grassroots leader was speaking for the group - no one had agreed to what could be communicated or couldn't. The grassroots leader was shocked at what he perceived as a lack of transparency on the part of city staff.

The room started to get heated. People began to mentally check out of the meeting. We were in the throes of either/or thinking - the default setting for most groups. Here's what happened next - we shifted to both/and thinking.

As an outside observer, I raised the question of cultural values. The group discovered several differences that they didn't realize existed between their cultures.

They learned that city staff are cautious about what they say because of the invisible power that comes with it - they don't want to be held to account in the media for something they didn't themselves say. They also learned that grassroots leaders take advantage of any opportunity to get their message out - because they typically don't have a lot of power to make the media or others listen.

The group left with a better understanding of each others' perspective - which built social capital. In addition, they weathered a difficult situation and BOTH sides came out being right and heard. This developed more trust, which further developed social capital. And this...this social capital...this IS what makes it possible for these groups to work through future difficulties in a way that builds momentum, that is infinitely positive and healthy. *The more deliberate about bringing together diversity, the more important it is for us to cultivate an inclusive climate within the structure where these diverse individuals interact.*

In NC, we have been looking at dynamic self-governance as a model for *inclusive, consent-based decision-making* in our food councils. In this way, we build a structure that expects everyone to speak, and ensures that everyone is behind the decisions that are made; no decision goes forward without 100% buy-in. It has at its core the premise of 'both/and' thinking. I've attached the resource we've been using to guide our thinking.

Yes, this means we expect to toss out Robert's Rules of Order. Shocking! But from what we've seen in our testing of the waters, this approach really seems to resonate with people. The councils are really getting excited about hearing from the quiet voices - the people who don't 'take the floor' without this type of infrastructure to support their being heard. AND, the power of group genius begins to emerge when everyone commits to answering the needs of the whole in any decision they make.

Yavapai Food Council, Arizona, Harvey Grady

The Yavapai Food Council views "inclusivity" as related to our mission and goals. In the first year, we focused on mobilizing community resources to build public awareness about the prevalence of hunger. We built relationships with local community leaders and media reporters and added a few to our board and most to our resource list.

In the second year, we focused more on increasing the capacity of emergency food providers (food banks, etc.) so we built relationships with them and with organizations that could help them serve the rising number of hungry folks. We created a Voice of the Hungry Action Plan by engaging 10 hungry and homeless persons and 10 front-line food bank, hot meal, and senior center workers. They identified hunger relief resources, service gaps, and action steps to improve the hunger-relief network.

In the third year, we focused on identifying and promoting sustainable agriculture resources, including school and community gardens, farmers markets, CSAs, coalitions, etc.

In the fourth year, we focused on identifying meal gaps in schools and childcare centers, then assisting them to apply for federal meals programs.

We're now in the fifth year and still mobilizing community resources in all those areas. Our board members represent various sectors of our food system. We want people who are knowledgeable about at least one sector, and each member educates the other members.

All along we've included our county health department so we can engage in food-related health policies and safe food requirements in different settings.

We use different ways to include stakeholders – project groups, planning groups, resource list, community education classes, and board membership. We give priority to knowledge and commitment of those we include. In our rural county, it isn't feasible to give priority to age, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.

Interaction Institute for Social Change, Curtis Ogden, Senior Associate

We are on our own journey at the regional level in New England to develop a deeper commitment and skill set around food justice and racial equity. [Food Solutions New England](#) (FSNE) is in the process of intentionally weaving a network of local food and food justice advocates to realize a more just and sustainable vision for our region.

Very eager to learn from and about the success of others, including those working in domains beyond food systems, including the good work of [King County](#), [Idaho Community Action Networks](#), and [Education Equity Organizing Collaborative](#) in Minnesota.

Jeffrey Piestrak, Community Outreach & Engagement Specialist, Mann Library, Cornell University

What a great thread! This gets at the heart of many challenges I see and face. Many thanks to those who've shared their useful insights.

Something I think about more and more in relation to this topic is how I frame my work from the get go. And I find what I practice in my garden increasingly relevant. In order for it to be productive and resilient, I need to cultivate health founded on diversity and interdependence. This is based largely on an unseen web of mutually beneficial relationships both above and below ground, supporting the emergent potential of each plant and the garden as a whole. Building/restoring the soil is a critical step -one theme of a [Foundations of Food in Community programming series](#) I organized last year.

I increasingly see healthy community food systems in this same light, and that Community Food Policy Councils and their like should be as much (or more so) something that emerges from a web of relationships built on trust and mutual understanding. So it becomes less about inclusivity (trying to pull people in to something not created by or of them), and more about relationship and capacity building.

In looking through what folks have shared, I see several great examples of that. Where I work, cultivating diverse, networked leadership, where a greater number of community members are informed and committed to bring about the change they want to see in their food system is key. [The Six Steps of Nonviolent Change](#) developed by the King Center are particularly relevant, as well as programs like the [Extension Natural Leaders Initiative](#).

Mark had a nice [blog post](#) about the poetry of community food systems assessment, and I see evaluating inclusivity in a similar light. As a compliment to analysis and objectivity, how can we also create a tapestry of subjectivity that truly reflects diversity, and difference? What are the stories wanting to emerge, and how can we help? When people feel their story is being told, and heard, they'll be much more likely to participate in collective sense-making and governing.