

2013 Food Policy Council Convening Background Reading: Literature Review

Purpose

In preparation for the Food Policy Council Convening, ChangeLab Solutions prepared this literature review to provide an overview of published work on Food Policy Councils (FPCs) in the United States. This document identifies key components of an FPC, provides an overview of FPC activities and areas of impact, and highlights common challenges and solutions. We reviewed 36 documents, including journal articles, case studies, graduate dissertations, and organizational reports.

What is a Food Policy Council?

History

In 1982, the Knoxville City Council established the first-ever FPC in reaction to widespread food insecurity among low-income residents.¹ The FPC was designed to take a comprehensive approach to improving the local food system and included members from multiple sectors, such as farmers, consumers, and business leaders.² Today, over 150 FPCs in the U.S. tackle challenges ranging from food access and obesity rates to soil erosion and water contamination.³

Key Components of an FPC

FPCs aim to make local and regional food systems more socially just and environmentally sustainable.⁴ They serve as a forum for discussion of food issues, provide research and recommendations about food policies and programs to governments and community members, and guide coordinated action to improve the food system. Although the structure and goals of FPCs vary from place to place, most FPCs share the following key components.

- **Encourage collaboration across sectors of the food system.** FPCs bring together players that contribute to the food system but may not traditionally work together.⁵ Increased collaboration and institutionalized partnerships expand capabilities of individual groups, allow for more influential lobbying of policy changes,⁶ enable FPCs to address numerous issues simultaneously,⁷ and make it easier for advocates to keep up with extended campaigns.⁸ Members of an FPC might include government officials, nonprofit staff, educators, farmers, food processors and distributors, grocers, food workers, and concerned citizens.⁹
- **Focus on issues of justice, equity, and sustainability.** FPCs address the source of a problem, such as structural inequality¹⁰ or access to land, and push solutions that empower communities and make systems more equitable and sustainable. Through an FPC, members of underserved communities have a say in local food systems policy. Decisions are made through inclusive, participatory, and locally focused processes, and community backing is fundamental to all FPC efforts.¹¹ For example:
 - FPCs monitor grocery store prices within grocery chains to ensure that low-income residents are not paying more.¹²
 - FPCs support the removal of state sales taxes on food, taxes that are regressive, and taxes that target low-income residents.¹³

- The Detroit FPC explicitly targets issues of structural racism and economic inequality within the food system by tackling disparities in food access, retail ownership, food sector jobs, and control over food-production resources.¹⁴
- The Iowa FPC advocates on behalf of small-scale producers and food justice advocates for policy alternatives to the state’s commodity-dominated agricultural framework.¹⁵
- Native American groups use FPCs to develop alternatives to market-driven, charity, and federal food safety net food systems.¹⁶
- **Conduct research, offer advice, and educate policymakers and the public.** FPCs conduct and analyze research, provide guidance and expertise to policymakers,¹⁷ and educate the local community on food systems issues.¹⁸ FPC research findings can be used to inform policymakers and identify solutions that bridge political divisions.¹⁹
- **Develop innovative policy and programmatic solutions.** Policy work is central to advancing FPC goals and should be the focus of FPC activities. However, not all FPCs engage in policy work; some find it easier to develop programmatic solutions to improve a local food system.²⁰

Activities and Areas of Impact across the Food System

This section provides an overview of the issues FPCs tackle and the solutions they have promoted, organized by food system sector. The food system is composed of six sectors: production, processing, distribution, retail, consumption, and disposal.

Production

- Support policies to protect farmland.²¹ For example, the FPC in Missoula, MT, helped secure funds and direct development away from farmland preservation areas.²²
- Minimize food-related activities that degrade the natural environment.²³ For example, FPCs have promoted sustainable agricultural practices,²⁴ educated consumers on the environmental implications of food choices,²⁵ and supported climate action plans adopted by local governments.²⁶ The Oakland (CA) FPC supported a “closed loop” food system structure that reduced energy consumption and protected environmental resources.²⁷
- Support efforts to modernize agricultural zoning laws²⁸ and develop urban agriculture zoning guidelines.²⁹ For example, an FPC might support bee and chicken ordinances, use zoning laws to secure land for urban agriculture, or encourage city and municipal governments to incorporate food impact assessments into planning and zoning decisions.³⁰ This has been done by the Cleveland/Cuyahoga County (OH) FPC and the Fresno (CA) FPC.³¹
- Support efforts to establish community gardens across cities and in schools.³² For example, an FPC can make it easier to access and acquire land for community gardens³³ and lower costs of maintaining community gardens by waiving fees for water, as the Austin-Travis (TX) FPC did.³⁴
- Support policies such as affordable housing and living wages for farm workers.³⁵

Processing

- Support infrastructure projects that strengthen the food system and local food industry, such as encouraging economic development officials to establish food processing facilities. For example, the Connecticut FPC has addressed the lack of infrastructure for slaughtering and processing livestock.³⁶

Distribution

- Encourage local organizations and state agencies to source food locally and promote local food sourcing legislation.³⁷ These programs bring in added “food dollars,” increase local agricultural production, boost the local food industry, and strengthen urban and rural ties.³⁸ One example is Dane County (WI) Food Systems’ local food purchase policy, which explores options for serving locally produced foods in the county’s jail, juvenile detention center, and senior centers.³⁹
- Advocate for farm-to-school programs and support their expansion.⁴⁰

Retail

- Bring EBT machines to farmers’ markets as the Connecticut FPC has done.⁴¹
- Support programs and policies that improve food access and nutrition.⁴² For example, FPCs ensure that food access is considered in community development and land use planning,⁴³ reduce licensing fees to encourage mobile vending,⁴⁴ and support meal delivery programs.⁴⁵
- Support a range of policies and programs aimed at increasing access to supermarkets. For example, the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy expanded public transportation to supermarkets, particularly in low income areas, and blocked supermarket chains from maintaining higher prices and lower coupon availability in different communities.^{46,47} Other FPCs have attracted new supermarkets to low income communities by making state funding available for the development of supermarkets⁴⁸ and supporting worker-owned supermarkets.⁴⁹
- Support increasing healthy food availability at corner stores. For example, FPCs have assisted convenience stores with buying from wholesalers and increasing their selection of healthy foods.⁵⁰
- Support efforts to raise the minimum wage. For example, when a Maryland FPC found that many of the food-insecure families in the community were working poor that did not qualify for food assistance programs under new welfare laws, the FPC supported efforts to raise the minimum wage and backed the union organizing campaigns of food service workers.⁵¹
- Support legislation to require restaurants to label menus with nutrition information as the Lane County (OR) FPC has done.⁵²

Consumption

- Improve the health of entire communities.⁵³ For example, FPCs promote obesity reduction initiatives⁵⁴ and educate consumers on the nutritional implications of food choices.⁵⁵
- Support nutrition education campaigns in schools and low income areas.⁵⁶ For example, the Knoxville-Knox County FPC promotes breakfast programs,⁵⁷ the Connecticut FPC supports policies to remove soda machines, and the Berkeley FPC supported building kitchens where food can be freshly prepared.⁵⁸ Other FPCs promote changes to regulations around school food purchasing and bringing local foods to schools.⁵⁹

Disposal

- Support policies to introduce and expand community composting programs.⁶⁰

<h3>Common Challenges Identified in the Literature</h3>
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This section highlights common problems that FPCs face and recommendations from the literature. It also profiles examples of different ways that FPCs have approached each problem.

Diverse and Representative Membership

- *Problem:* A diverse membership is essential to ensure that a range of ideas and community voices are heard, but it may be difficult to achieve. It is also important to have experts on board because they can offer independent expertise and support evaluation efforts.⁶¹
- *Recommendation:* FPCs can include requirements for members to come from various areas of the food sector and be reflective of the community in founding documents or policies. While including government staff promotes collaboration, the number of government staff should be limited so that the community-driven nature of the FPC is not threatened.⁶²
- *Examples:*
 - Minnesota Food Association:⁶³ Maintains a policy that at least one-third of members must represent rural interests and another third must represent urban interests.
 - Connecticut Food Policy Council:⁶⁴ The statute establishing the FPC requires that members come from specific areas of the food system to ensure that all areas are represented.
 - Detroit Food Policy Council:⁶⁵ The founding document requires the involvement of youth and underserved communities in the FPC.

Committed and Visible Leadership

- *Problem:* High level leaders can be influential and add credibility to an FPC's mission, but may also have less time to participate and can create a void when they leave.⁶⁶
- *Recommendation:* It is helpful to have several active leaders who can motivate members and create opportunities to build prestige.⁶⁷ Staggering membership terms can also ensure smooth transitions.
- *Examples:*
 - Minnesota Food Association:⁶⁸ Members serve staggered 3 year terms.
 - Marin County Food Policy Council:⁶⁹ This FPC dissolved partly because the person who ran the FPC left the area.

Organizational Structure

- *Problem:* Many different organizational arrangements are possible, each with unique strengths and weaknesses. Determining the most suitable structure for an FPC can be difficult.
- *Recommendation:* While organization structure varies, some recommendations are clear. Unambiguous guidelines for decision-making, communication, and evaluation should be established from the beginning,⁷⁰ and initial meetings should focus on finding common ground and drafting a vision, mission, and common definitions.⁷¹ Flexibility and a review process are important to build into an FPC's structure,⁷² and explicit procedures are necessary for preempting confusion and conflict.⁷³ The decision-making processes of FPCs vary and include systems of majority or super-majority vote and consensus. While striving for consensus is widely accepted, relying on consensus can prevent FPCs from addressing issues quickly and can limit the scope of an FPC's work.⁷⁴

Government Affiliation

- *Problem:* Government recognition can help establish legitimacy, assist in building relationships with government officials, and increase stability.⁷⁵ However, government support may disappear, FPC members may not feel comfortable criticizing government policy,⁷⁶ or community members may be apprehensive about working with a government-affiliated group.⁷⁷
- *Recommendation:* FPCs should consider different types of affiliation and make decisions based on local conditions. Any form of recognition should be permanent and not depend on who is in office.⁷⁸
- *Examples:*

- Connecticut Food Policy Council:⁷⁹ Following recommendations of the state legislature's Planning and Development committee, the FPC was established within the Department of Agriculture.
- Dane County (WI) Food Policy Council:⁸⁰ Although established through state statute, this FPC is not tied to any public agency and can propose legislation.
- Iowa Food Policy Council:⁸¹ This FPC dissolved when Governor Tom Vilsack left office. He created the FPC by executive order, but the next governor did not appoint any members or convene it.

Funding

- *Problem:* Limited funds make it hard for many FPCs to hire permanent staff and can limit an FPC's ability to reach underserved groups and manage a broad policy agenda.⁸²
- *Recommendation:* FPCs should take advantage of all available funding and resources, including grants, public funds, and staff support from public agencies, universities, and university-affiliated organizations.⁸³ It may be necessary to concentrate efforts around a few critical areas in order to make the biggest impact with limited resources.⁸⁴

Slow Start

- *Problem:* Some FPCs struggle with a slow start.⁸⁵ It can take 3-4 years for FPCs to get to know their food system.⁸⁶ During this period, many government agencies and community groups may not understand the role of the FPC, and FPCs may find it difficult to engage in policy work.⁸⁷
- *Recommendation:* Starting with smaller projects that bring quick but noteworthy results can help establish the credibility of an FPC, win community and political buy-in, gain momentum for larger endeavors, and build pride among members.⁸⁸ Quick wins can also help FPCs boost momentum throughout the life of an FPC.⁸⁹
- *Examples:*
 - Austin Food Policy Council:⁹⁰ Identified certain regulations in need of change that would make wider reforms and advances possible later on.
 - Oklahoma Food Policy Council:⁹¹ Explored a state farm-to-school program and launched a pilot program with overwhelmingly positive responses.
 - Dane County (WI) Food Systems:⁹² Brought EBT machines to farmers' markets and expanded the number of farmers' markets.
 - Minnesota Food Association:⁹³ When community members did not understand the purpose of uniting urban and rural interests, the FPC sponsored urban-rural dialogues that helped the FPC gain credibility, build its constituency, and define its agenda.

Evaluation

- *Problem:* There is currently a lack of data on FPCs. This makes it difficult to determine what FPCs are doing well and can make it harder to attract funding and political support.⁹⁴
- *Recommendation:* When starting an FPC, it is helpful to establish a baseline understanding of the food system by conducting a food systems assessment that maps existing food resources, provides an assessment of food access and nutrition and hunger issues, identifies problems and gaps in services, and examines the history of community and government action around health concerns.⁹⁵ Regular assessments are important as they help an FPC keep track of shifting local needs, determine best strategies for engaging in policy work,⁹⁶ and highlight successes.⁹⁷
- *Examples:*

- City of Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy:⁹⁸ Writes an annual report and conducts ongoing evaluation projects of the food system, including surveying grocery store prices of 40 basic items and monitoring public transportation to food outlets.
- Knoxville-Knox County FPC:⁹⁹ Supports a community-based food monitoring system that periodically evaluates the food system and the effectiveness of the FPC. This data is used to support policy recommendations.

Community Support

- *Problem:* Developing and maintaining public support can be challenging.¹⁰⁰ Unsupportive community groups or a diverse base with competing priorities may test basic values of the FPC, such as democracy and diversity,¹⁰¹ and may make it difficult to identify new policy objectives¹⁰² and communicate the value of FPC work.¹⁰³
- *Recommendation:* FPCs must proactively ensure that their grassroots base is systematically reinforced, and strategies should be modified regularly based on community input.¹⁰⁴ This starts with the FPC's formation and community meetings to discuss the FPC's founding objectives.¹⁰⁵ FPCs can engage the community with education and outreach activities throughout their work.¹⁰⁶
- *Example:*
 - New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee:¹⁰⁷ Uses a food charter to organize community members and ensure that all have a voice in determining the strategies pursued.

Local Politics

- *Problem:* Local FPCs can run into problems if they do not adequately address local needs.
- *Recommendation:* FPCs are most successful when they focus on issues that have been identified by the community, build off of the momentum of local groups, and develop policies to meet local needs.¹⁰⁸ When designing the structure of an FPC, it is helpful to consider city specific factors, including government structures, community resources,¹⁰⁹ and local values.¹¹⁰ It is important for FPC members to understand the local context and avoid redundant work. A representative taskforce can be created to keep members current on local issues.

Advocacy Techniques and Political Strategy

- *Problem:* Movement building and agitation can lead to actions that, although necessary for pushing policy forward, damage amiable relationships with government officials.
- *Recommendation:* While FPCs should firmly stand with community interests, overly antagonistic advocacy techniques should be avoided. An FPC's work is broader than any one issue, and developing lasting relationships with government officials is essential to other campaigns.

State and National Politics

- *Problem:* FPCs that operate on the state and national level are likely to encounter opposition from corporate interests and other powerful groups. Some regional FPCs, such as the Utah Food Council, work in unsupportive political environments and their advocacy may seem threatening to politicians and government workers.¹¹¹
- *Recommendation:* Bringing food issues into state and national politics is an important role for FPCs.¹¹² For example, FPCs can provide leadership in Farm Bill alternatives.¹¹³ However, large battles such as these, which take on big agriculture and the industrial food chain, should be avoided until an FPC has gathered sufficient strength.¹¹⁴ Shrinking an FPC's public profile, while not usually recommended, can reduce pressure in politically hostile environments and allow members to focus

on direct interactions and networking with government agencies.¹¹⁵ Allowing politicians to take some recognition for FPC successes can encourage political support for FPC work.¹¹⁶

¹ Knoxville-Knoxville County Food Policy Council, December 2012, <http://www.cityofknoxville.org/boards/food/summaryhistory.pdf>

² Id.

³ American Planning Association. 2011. *Food Policy Councils*, <http://www.planning.org/nationalcenters/health/briefingpapers/foodcouncils.htm>.

⁴ Harper, A., Shattuck, A., Holt-Gimenez, E., et. al. 2009. "Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned." *Food First*, Oakland, CA, https://confluence.delhi.edu/download/attachments/307593241/Food_Policy_Councils_Report.pdf?version=1&modificationDate=1313159869000.

⁵ Harper et al, *supra* note 4;

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⁷ Harper et al, *supra* note 4; Winne, *supra* note 5.

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¹⁴ Harper et al, *supra* note 4.

¹⁵ Dean, *supra* note 5.

¹⁶ Scott et al, *supra* note 5;

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¹⁷ Winne, *supra* note 5;

American Planning Association, *supra* note 3;

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Neuner et al, *supra* note 5.

¹⁸ Clancy et al, *supra* note 5.

¹⁹ Harper et al, *supra* note 4;

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- ²⁶ Neuner et al, *supra* note 5.
- ²⁷ Freedgood, J., Royce, A. 2012. *Supporting Agricultural Viability and Community Food Security: A Review of Food Policy Councils and Food System Plans*. American Farmland Trust.
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- ³¹ Winne, *supra* note 5.
- ³² Harper et al, *supra* note 5;
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- ³⁵ Harper et al, *supra* note 5.
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- ³⁷ Boron, *supra* note 12;
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- ³⁸ Joseph et al, *supra* note 25;
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Gottlieb et al, *supra* note 27;
Clancy et al, *supra* note 5.
³⁹ Harper et al, *supra* note 5.
⁴⁰ Winne, *supra* note 5;
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⁴⁴ Hatfield, *supra* note 31;
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⁴⁵ Id.
⁴⁶ Boron, *supra* note 12;
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⁴⁷ Harper et al, *supra* note 5;
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⁵² Harper et al, *supra* note 5;
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⁶¹ Dahlberg, *supra* note 53;
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⁶² Harper et al, *supra* note 5;
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⁶³ Ashman et al, *supra* note 19.
⁶⁴ Freedgood et al, *supra* note 29.
⁶⁵ Harper et al, *supra* note 5.
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⁶⁷ Yeatman, *supra* note 34.
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⁶⁹ Harper et al, *supra* note 5.
⁷⁰ Harper et al, *supra* note 5.
⁷¹ Boron, *supra* note 12;
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⁷² Boron, *supra* note 12.
⁷³ Schiff, *supra* note 6.
⁷⁴ Harper et al, *supra* note 5.
⁷⁵ Harper et al, *supra* note 5;
Clancy et al, *supra* note 3.
⁷⁶ Scott et al, *supra* note 5.
⁷⁷ Schiff, *supra* note 5;
Ventura et al, *supra* note 64.
⁷⁸ Harper et al, *supra* note 5;
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Scott et al, *supra* note 5.
⁷⁹ Boron, *supra* note 12.
⁸⁰ Freedgood et al, *supra* note 29.
⁸¹ Harper et al, *supra* note 5.
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- ⁸³ Hatfield, *supra* note 31.
- ⁸⁴ Hatfield, *supra* note 31;
Ventura et al, *supra* note 64.
- ⁸⁵ Dahlberg, *supra* note 53.
- ⁸⁶ Harper et al, *supra* note 5.
- ⁸⁷ Clancy et al, *supra* note 5.
- ⁸⁸ Harper et al, *supra* note 5;
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Ventura et al, *supra* note 64.
- ⁸⁹ Fox, *supra* note 73.
- ⁹⁰ Harper et al, *supra* note 5.
- ⁹¹ Id.
- ⁹² Id.
- ⁹³ Ashman et al, *supra* note 19.
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- ¹⁰² Harper et al, *supra* note 5;
Boron, *supra* note 12.
- ¹⁰³ Clancy et al, *supra* note 5.
- ¹⁰⁴ Hatfield, *supra* note 31.
- ¹⁰⁵ Scott et al, *supra* note 5.
- ¹⁰⁶ Schiff, *supra* note 6.
- ¹⁰⁷ Harper et al, *supra* note 5.
- ¹⁰⁸ Harper et al, *supra* note 5;
Freedgood et al, *supra* note 31.
- ¹⁰⁹ Schiff, *supra* note 6;
Hatfield, *supra* note 31.
- ¹¹⁰ Schiff, *supra* note 6.
- ¹¹¹ Harper et al, *supra* note 5.
- ¹¹² Harper et al, *supra* note 5;
Boron, *supra* note 12.
- ¹¹³ Pothukuchi et al, *supra* note 34.
- ¹¹⁴ Winne, *supra* note 5.
- ¹¹⁵ Clancy et al, *supra* note 5.

¹¹⁶ Schiff, *supra* note 5.