CITY FOOD POLICY AND PROGRAMS:

LESSONS HARVESTED FROM AN EMERGING FIELD

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City of Portland, Oregon Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

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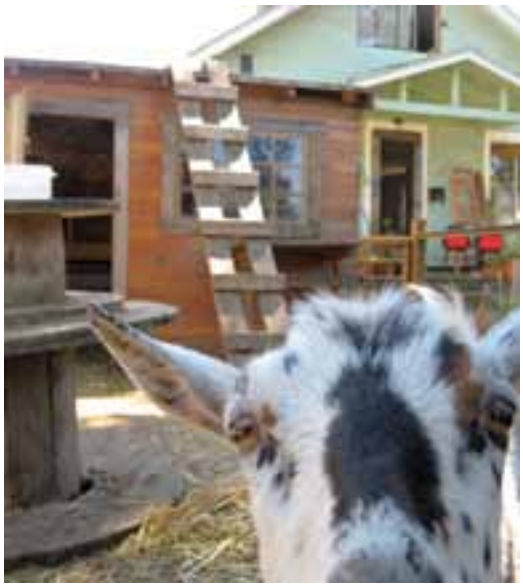

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> "Food democracy is the new agenda for democracy and human rights. It is the new agenda for ecological sustainability and social justice."

Vandana Shiva in
Stolen Harvest

Executive Summary

As recently as a decade ago, food remained all but ignored at the city level in North America. Unlike systems such as transportation, water, housing, and health, cities and their residents generally considered food as an issue outside the municipal agenda. Since the early 2000s, however, food policy has established itself as an important consideration for local government. Food systems are fundamentally linked to issues such as health, equity, environmental sustainability, and economic development, and the emergence of food policy programs over recent years reflect their value at the municipal level.

Despite the growing acceptance of food systems as a city concern, few resources are available to local governments interested in developing a food policy program: best practices for organizing, funding, and supporting food systems work have been neither established nor publicized. This report draws on interviews with municipal food policy professionals in an effort to address this gap. The report compiles and analyzes the experiences of 15 individuals from 13 North American cities (see Appendix A for city details), identifying common challenges for municipal food programs as well as avenues for addressing them.

TABLE 1: RESEARCH PARTNERS

CITY
Baltimore MD
Boston MA
Los Angeles CA
Louisville KY
Minneapolis MN
New York NY
Newark NJ
Philadelphia PA
Portland OR
San Francisco CA
Seattle WA
Toronto ON
Vancouver BC

AREAS OF FOCUS FOR URBAN FOOD POLICY PROGRAMS

City food policy programs address a broad range of issues, and priorities and opportunities vary significantly among cities. Common areas of focus are emerging, however, and issues that are currently addressed by more than one municipal food program include:

- Access and equity (e.g., healthy retail initiatives, food desert mapping, senior food assistance programs).
- Economic development (e.g., small business marketing assistance/financing, food hubs, food employment training programs).
- Environmental sustainability (e.g., sustainable food sourcing, food system environmental footprinting, climate change planning).
- Food education (e.g., urban homesteading classes, healthy cooking demonstrations, school gardens).
- Local and regional food (e.g., farm-to-table programs, institutional purchasing programs/legislation).
- Mobile vending (e.g., enabling mobile food carts, licensing fee reductions)
- Nutrition and public health (e.g., electronic benefit transfer (EBT) at farmers markets, menu labeling, early childhood nutrition programs).
- Policy advocacy (e.g., Farm Bill advocacy, municipal food charters).
- Urban agriculture (e.g., zoning code revisions, community garden programs).
- Waste management (e.g., food composting programs, curbside collection of food waste).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interviews revealed many shared experiences among food policy programs, as well as several potential strategies for addressing common obstacles and concerns.

Funding

Funding is an ongoing challenge for most municipal food policy programs. While some do enjoy dedicated financial support from city government, others rely more heavily on outside resources. Public-private partnerships could be a particularly compelling option for funding and appear to be a relatively unexplored strategy for many food policy programs.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Take advantage of all sources of funding and resources available to the food policy program, including both general fund and grant support; the budgets, staff, and programs of other agencies; and public-private partnerships.

Organization

The location of a food policy program within a city's organizational structure has a material impact on a program's priorities and its effectiveness. While an increasing number of programs operate under the umbrella of sustainability departments, many also benefit from close ties with the Mayor's Office: such ties can increase the authority behind a program and facilitate interactions with other city departments. Also important is the ease of communication with other offices and agencies.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Pay careful attention to the location of food programs within the bureaucracy, as institutional structure can influence food policy priorities.
- House any new food policy program in a manner that promotes frequent cross-agency collaboration.

Priorities and metrics

Food policy programs have experienced challenges in both crafting priorities and, subsequently, identifying appropriate metrics with which to gauge success. One problem stems from the sheer magnitude of the topic: with so many potential avenues for city action, narrowing down program priorities can be challenging.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Determine the mix of time, staffing, and resources to be dedicated to policy work versus project work[1].
- Identify and take into account the city-specific factors—including local governance structures and community resources—that will shape the program.

Once programs define their priorities, determining the metrics that will measure progress becomes key. However, many metrics that would effectively gauge the success of programs (those that reflect behavioral change, for example) are prohibitively difficult or expensive to track at the city level. For other statistics (such as changes in the rates of chronic disease), it can be challenging to establish causality with the food policy work being done.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Identify those metrics that are already tracked—or that can begin to be tracked in the short term—to establish a rough baseline for food policy initiatives.
- Explore non-numerical methods for measuring success.

TABLE 2: COMMONLY TRACKED FOOD METRICS
Distance of households from full-service grocery stores
Number of corner stores converted to healthy retail
Number of new or revised institutional procurement policies
Number of new food truck businesses
Number of food manufacturing jobs
Number of new hoop houses, farmers markets, community kitchens, market gardens, CSAs, etc.
Dollars spent at farmers markets, CSAs, food-buying clubs, etc.
Dollars spent on fruits and vegetables
Percent of population eating five servings of fruits and vegetables per day
Rates of SNAP participation
Rates of school meal participation (including Free and Reduced Lunch)
Rates of chronic disease and obesity

1 **Policy work:** Identifying, engaging with, and setting direction for those areas in which local government influences the city food system.

Project work: Developing and implementing specific initiatives.

Interdepartmental coordination

Inter-agency coordination is an important strategy for expanding the resources available to a food policy program, as well as for gaining a wider pool of skill sets and perspectives for the development and implementation of food policy. It can be challenging, however, to prioritize food among different agencies: many programs struggle to find a place on already-overloaded department agendas.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Enlist support from high-ranking city actors, such as the mayor or city council.
- Take time to understand the priorities of other departments and consider how food can fit into their existing agendas.
- If possible, start with projects that will garner some easy and visible 'wins.'

Once food is established as an inter-agency priority, the challenge becomes coordinating between the food-related activities among departments and crafting an overarching vision to guide the various initiatives. By facilitating communication among agencies, programs can better prioritize projects, manage scarce resources, and clearly define the role of different departments within a comprehensive food strategy.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Establish an inter-agency steering team to facilitate communication and strategic planning among city departments that connect to food issues.

Community involvement

Like interdepartmental coordination, engaging community groups and members can provide valuable perspective, connections, and resources for municipal food policy programs. There is no one-size-fits-all avenue for drawing out community participation, however: there are as many models of engagement as there are urban food policy programs.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Understand program needs regarding community involvement in food policy, and structure formal interactions with these needs in mind.
- Ensure that the mission of any city-convened body is well understood by its membership, and take care to select participants with appropriate types and levels of expertise.

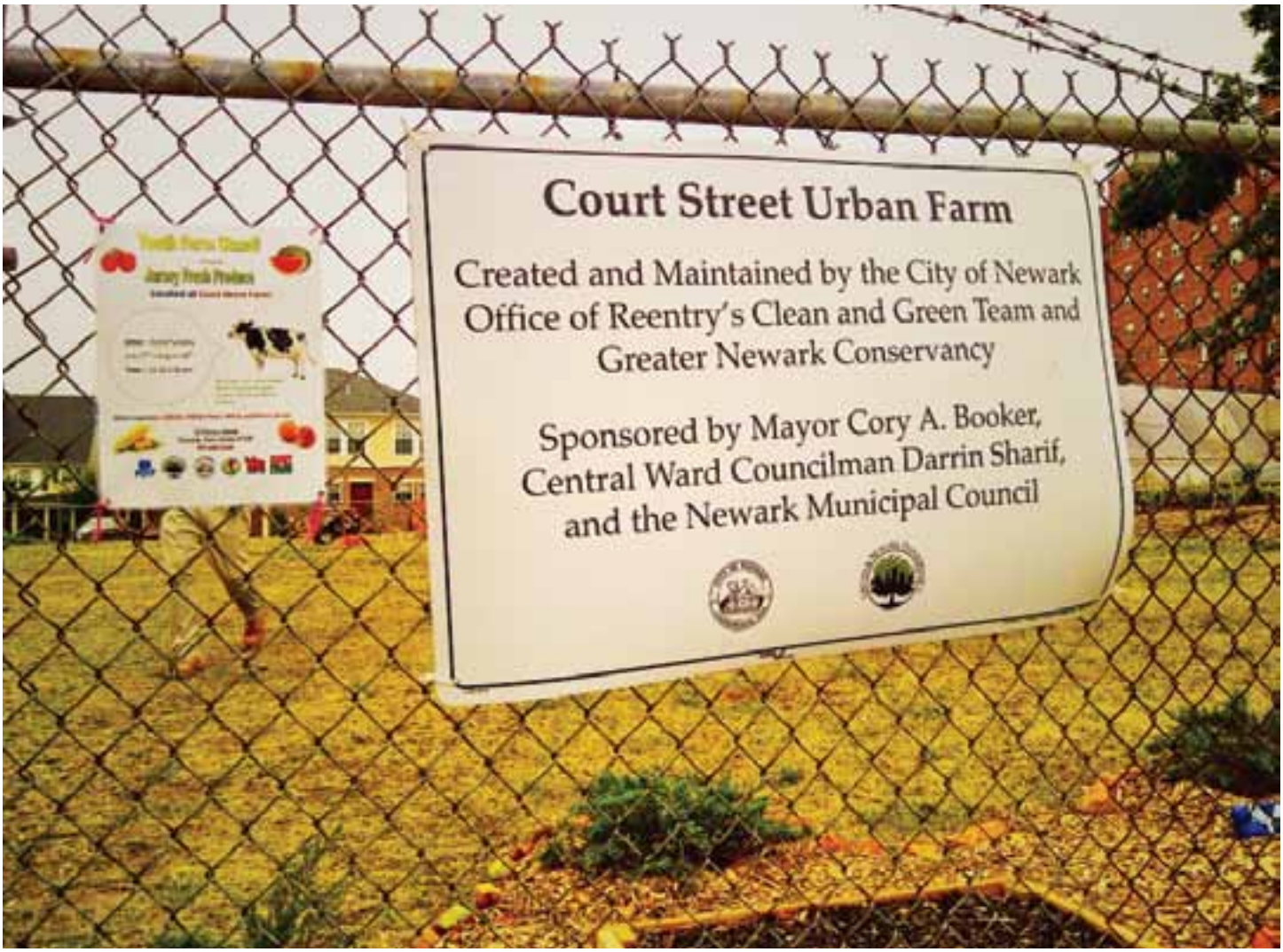
NEXT STEPS

One reality that became apparent over the course of this research is the lack of awareness among many food policy directors regarding the activities and experiences of other municipal food programs—this despite the two regularly-scheduled conference calls among food policy professionals that were initiated in the past year. Nearly all research partners saw the value of collaboration, problem-solving, and dialogue among their peers, and there is broadly shared interest in strengthening opportunities for food policy directors to connect with one another. An ideal platform would allow for:

- Problem solving and idea generation
- Discussion of current projects
- Collective action
- Dissemination of best practices
- Easy access to informational resources
- Professional development
- One-one-one dialogues and occasional in-person meetings

With these priorities in mind, it appears that the current conference calls could either be expanded to facilitate more in-depth interactions among participants, or a parallel platform could be established to enhance the current format. A more ambitious step is the facilitation of face-to-face meetings. Funding must be secured and logistics sorted; these are material barriers that will only grow as the number of food policy directors across the US and Canada increase. However, these barriers are surmountable: indeed, meetings of food policy directors have already taken place (sponsored by the nonprofit Wholesome Wave and the Surdna Foundation).

More meaningful interaction among food policy directors would go a long way toward spreading best practices, building coalitions, and advancing the overall field of urban food policy. Time and resources will always prove barriers, but this research has highlighted some potential avenues for easy inroads toward a more dynamic system that better serves the needs of food policy directors and their programs.


Court Street Urban Farm
Created and Maintained by the City of Newark
Office of Reentry's Clean and Green Team and
Greater Newark Conservancy
Sponsored by Mayor Cory A. Booker,
Central Ward Councilman Darrin Sharif,
and the Newark Municipal Council

Cabbage

INTRODUCTION

As recently as a decade ago, food remained all but ignored at the city level in North America. Unlike other municipal systems (e.g., transportation, water, housing, health) cities and their residents generally considered food as an issue outside the urban agenda [1]. Food systems were a rural concern, they were a private-sector concern, or they were a federal concern—they were not a city concern. However, the past several years have seen a marked surge in public and municipal consciousness of both food systems and their importance in the urban context [2]. This new awareness can be linked to several interconnected phenomena:

- The rise of obesity and other food-related chronic disease [2].
- Increased understanding of the impact of food systems on the natural environment [3].
- The decreasing affordability of healthful food (arguably attributable to fluctuating energy costs and changing agricultural practices) [2], [3].
- The popularization of media—e.g., Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*, documentary films such as *King Corn* and *Food, Inc.*—spotlighting various facets of the North American food system [2].
- The success of first-wave Food Policy Councils in marshalling different sectors, groups, and individuals into a cohesive voice for food issues [4], [5].

The 1990s and early 2000s saw the very first municipal food policy directors begin work in Toronto, Ontario (1990)[2]; San Francisco, California (2002); Vancouver, British Columbia (2004); and Portland, Oregon (2005) [6], [9–11]. In the years since—as the links between food systems and traditional city concerns became more and more definitive—nine additional programs came into being:

- New York, New York (2007)
- Minneapolis, Minnesota (2008)
- Baltimore, Maryland (2010)
- Boston, Massachusetts (2010)
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2010)
- Los Angeles, California (2011)
- Louisville, Kentucky (2011)
- Newark, New Jersey (2012)
- Seattle, Washington (2012)

[12–18]

These municipalities recognized the very real impact that food systems have on the lives of city dwellers, impacting areas such as equity and environmental, economic, and personal health (see Table 3).

2 The Toronto food policy program is unique both in its age and in that its Food Policy Council is an official part of the city bureaucracy: "it was created as a subcommittee of the Board of Health," explains Toronto's Lauren Baker, "and staff support was given to the Food Policy Council by Toronto Public Health [6]." In 2010, a five-member Food Strategy Team, comprised of paid city staff, was assembled in order to implement Toronto's food strategy (as defined by its Cultivating Food Connections report [7]), at which point the FPC expanded into the "community reference group" in order to support this process. The work of the Toronto FPC and the Food Strategy Team are heavily linked, sharing staff, mission, and office space [6].

(While Los Angeles's relationship with its Food Policy Council is comparable to the Toronto system in its interconnectedness, the LA FPC was purposefully designed by Los Angeles as an independent nonprofit organization, rather than an official branch of local government [8].)

TABLE 3: COMMON AREAS OF FOCUS FOR URBAN FOOD POLICY PROGRAMS

Access and Equity	*e.g.,*	healthy retail initiatives, food desert mapping, senior food assistance programs
Economic Development	*e.g.,*	small business marketing assistance/financing, food hubs, food employment training programs
Environmental Sustainability	*e.g.,*	sustainable food sourcing, food system environmental footprinting, climate change planning
Food Education	*e.g.,*	urban homesteading classes, healthy cooking demonstrations, school gardens
Local and Regional Food	*e.g.,*	farm-to-table programs, institutional purchasing programs/ legislation
Mobile Vending	*e.g.,*	enabling mobile food carts, licensing fee reductions
Nutrition and Public Health	*e.g.,*	electronic benefit transfer (EBT) at farmers markets, menu labeling, early childhood nutrition programs
Policy Advocacy	*e.g.,*	Farm Bill advocacy, municipal food charters
Urban Agriculture	*e.g.,*	zoning code revisions, community garden programs
Waste Management	*e.g.,*	food composting programs, curbside food waste collection

Despite the growing focus on food systems by city agencies, however, few resources are available to help nascent programs establish themselves. While areas such as public safety and land use have been managed on the municipal level for decades, food is still relatively unexplored territory: best practices for structuring, planning, budgeting, and otherwise supporting these programs have yet to be institutionalized. This report draws on the experiences of existing food programs, both to pinpoint common problem areas and to outline strategies for coping with them. Its ultimate goal is to provide guidance and perspective to any municipalities interested in establishing their own food policy program.

DEFINITIONS AND METHODOLOGY

DEFINITIONS

Food system: "The chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management, as well as all the associated regulatory institutions and activities [19]."

Food policy program: A municipal program that utilizes the mechanisms of city government to monitor, assess, and manage urban food systems.

Food policy program director: An individual charged with managing or coordinating food policy and programs within city government[3].

3 Because of the great disparity in titles among those interviewed (see Table 4), a separate, common term is needed to refer to the group. For the purposes of this report, 'director' will serve as this umbrella term. References to specific individuals, however, use proper titles.

METHODOLOGY

This research relies on the collective experiences of 15 city actors representing 13 municipal food policy programs. The 13 cities represented within the analysis volunteered as partners through the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN), which provided funding for this project.

TABLE 4: RESEARCH PARTNERS

CITY	CONTACT	TITLE
Baltimore MD	Holly Freishtat	Food Policy Director
Boston MA	Edith Murnane	Director of Food Initiatives
Los Angeles CA	Paula Daniels	Senior Advisor on Food Policy, Special Projects in Water
Louisville KY	Theresa Zawacki	Food Policy Coordinator and Brownfields Program Manager
Minneapolis MN	Gayle Prest Jane Shey	Sustainability Director Homegrown Minneapolis Coordinator
New York NY	Kim Kessler	Food Policy Coordinator
Newark NJ	Elizabeth Reynoso	Food Policy Director
Philadelphia PA	Amanda Wagner Sarah Wu	Food Policy Coordinator Policy and Outreach Manager
Portland OR	Steve Cohen	Food Policy and Program Manager
San Francisco CA	Paula Jones	Director of Food Systems
Seattle WA	Sharon Lerman	Food Policy Advisor
Toronto ON	Lauren Baker	Coordinator, Food Policy Council
Vancouver BC	Wendy Mendes	Social Planner

Data collection involved multiple techniques.

Questionnaires: A short questionnaire (see Appendix B) was circulated to all program directors. The questionnaire covered basic background details—program start date, bureaucratic location, number of staff, funding sources, etc.—and was designed to inform subsequent interviews.

Personal interviews: Interviews with research partners took place over a four-month period between June and September 2012. Conversations were semi-structured, based on a predetermined framework (see Appendix C) but with ample opportunity to diverge from scripted questions. Most interviews took place over the phone and lasted from roughly a half hour to 90 minutes.

Once completed, interviews were transcribed, coded according to topic area, and analyzed using a memo-based system.

Follow-up data collection: As analysis moved forward, gaps in the research emerged and a certain number of follow-up and/or clarifying questions became necessary. In such cases, communication took place over email or by telephone.

Research partners were given the opportunity to view and edit their interview transcripts. Prior to the dissemination of the first draft, participants reviewed all instances where they were cited as sources with the option to modify or delete the citations as they saw fit. All partners reviewed the final research before its publication.

PREMIUM
NUTS • FRUITS

FARM FRESH
HARVEST
OF THE MONTH
PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Nutrition Services

SoupCycle

Origins

Because municipal food policy programs are so few in number, the reasons cities have instituted these programs are particularly relevant to this research. What do these cities, diverse as they are, have in common? What were the circumstances surrounding the establishment of their food policy programs? Are these circumstances replicable?

In exploring these origins, several themes become apparent. The catalysts for program creation can be divided into two categories: internal drivers (those that stem from within a city's bureaucracy), and external (those that arise from forces outside local government). While this breakdown might seem obvious, it's important to note that few cities created food policy programs without a combination of internal and external pressures. These pressures include:

INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
Political champions A strong proponent from within city government—usually a mayor or city council member—who moves food issues forward because of their own interest in the issue.	**Community demand** Pressure from individuals and groups from within a community; this demand can help bring food issues onto the political radar.
Organizational necessity Many cities deal with food issues in an ad-hoc, programmatic basis. When these programs become too fragmented, some cities create an official umbrella program in order to provide coordination, structure, and strategic vision.	**Grant funding** Sometimes food work is implemented simply because there is funding available to do so. While never the sole driver behind a food policy program, grant funding can be an extra nudge that turns a one-off project into a full-fledged city program.

INTERNAL FACTORS

Political champions

In more than half of the cities interviewed [10], [11], [20–25], at least part of their food programs' origins was attributed to a champion within the administration. Food issues can be an appealing platform: health, equity, and job creation are all winning issues, and municipal food policy combines all three.

Getting high-ranking officials involved in food policy can add valuable momentum to nascent programs. There have been several cases of mayor- (or city-council-) convened working groups that specifically recommend the creation of municipal food policy programs or positions [8], [10], [20], [26]. In other instances, electeds spearhead programs of their own to address a perceived need in the community: for example, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino (while still a City Counselor) was one of the driving forces behind the pilot program that later became the WIC Farmers Market Coupon Program [22]. Former Louisville mayor Jerry Abramson followed a similar path when he implemented his Mayor's Healthy Hometown Initiative, which in turn provided the seeds for Louisville's current food program [24].

A political champion can also be a vital force behind the prioritization of food within existing city agencies, as a tool to establish a support base and "get the public agencies marching with some direction [9]." As will be discussed further in *Interdepartmental Coordination,* this kind of support can be instrumental in the successful integration of food policy into the city-wide agenda.

Organizational necessity

The second internal driver of food policy programs is that of organizational necessity. Several cities had undertaken food-related projects well before the introduction of their official food policy programs; the piecemeal nature of these projects, however, made strategic thinking and cooperative action difficult [21], [27]. "You end up with programs that are happening because there is (or was at some point) a good opportunity, projects that happen because there is external funding, and unrelated projects that happen to touch on food," explains one food policy director. "You end up with a whole bunch of programs and projects—and they may all be great projects—that aren't necessarily coordinated or addressing strategic goals [28]." Creating an overarching food program helps prevent duplication of efforts among departments, channel inter-agency efforts toward well-defined goals, and take advantage of synergies between agencies [11], [21].

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Community demand

One major external impetus for municipal food policy programs is demand from the community. Several directors commented on the interest and activism around food issues from their citizens—this interest has, in many cases, been a primary driver in the creation of municipal food programs [6], [9–11], [20], [22], [27], [29]. In some instances, community members had an explicit hand in shaping the form of these programs: in Newark, for example, the priorities of the Food Policy Director emerged over the course of multiple community meetings [27]. Similarly, Baltimore's Food Policy Task Force—made up of 18 community and government stakeholders—collaborated on a report that in turn led to the creation of the city's current food policy program [20].

A citizenry that is already active in food system thinking can also make it easier for local government to take on food policy within its bureaucracy [10], [11]. Having community members and organizations available for support, engagement, and consultation can make food issues more manageable in a city context. "It's so much easier that way," points out Portland's Steve Cohen, "for government to assist, rather than to push [11]."

Grant funding

The final factor that can help spur the creation of a municipal food policy program is that of grant funding. Several existing programs have origins in grant-enabled projects, with work subsequently evolving and expanding into more comprehensive programs [20], [23], [24], [26]. The Cities of Louisville, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia, for example, each began with Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) federal grants geared toward obesity reduction, exercise, and tobacco cessation. This funding helped identify needs and opportunities and supported initial food-related work. These grants enabled cities to introduce food systems thinking into their bureaucracy without committing whole-hog to a municipal program. Once both the need for and the efficacy of these grant-funded programs was demonstrated, then, cities had the leeway to expand programmatic scope, seek additional funding, and work out a bureaucratic structure to support these activities [23], [24], [26].

SUMMARY

The odds of a municipal food policy program's 'success' do not vary based on its reasons for coming into existence. However, understanding the origins of a program can help directors better know the tools they will have available to shape their program, as well as some of the potential hurdles they might encounter. Political champions can be extremely useful in fostering inter-agency collaboration (see *Interdepartmental Coordination*), for example, while programs with strong support from the citizenry will have a different set of community resources at their disposal (see *Priorities and Metrics* and *Community Involvement*). Those food policy programs tasked with coordinating among already-existing projects will face one specific set of challenges, while those that emerge from project-specific grant funding might expect another (see *Funding* and *Interdepartmental Coordination*).

Funding

One of the most pressing issues for both nascent and established food policy programs is that of funding [9], [10], [20], [22], [23], [27], [29]: director and staff positions, operational expenses, and program implementation all require significant dollars, which are less and less available in the current economic climate. And because food programs are relatively new and untested on the municipal level, it can be difficult to compete with more established programs for a proportional piece of the funding pie [10], [29].

Of existing food policy programs, nearly all (Minneapolis excepted [29]) have at least some support from city sources[4]. This support is limited, though: while director positions are almost universally city-funded, only three staff positions (Boston, Louisville, and Toronto) are provided through city funding [6], [31], [32], and only two programs (Boston and Toronto) have any amount of discretionary funds channeled directly through the food office [6], [15]. The theme of time and capacity (and the serious lack thereof) surfaced repeatedly in interviews with food policy directors [10], [22–24], [27]. One director acknowledged that this constraint "has real impacts on how you think about what's possible [33]."

Despite these limitations, though, municipal food policy programs have become adept at finding alternative avenues for funding. While dedicated city funds are clearly the ideal, in the absence of government dollars it is important for programs to explore every alternative.

1. Take advantage of all sources of funding and resources available to the food policy program, including both general fund and grant support; the budgets, staff, and programs of other agencies; and public-private partnerships.

GRANT DOLLARS

Grants offer an appealing option for food policy work: because food systems touch so many areas (sustainability, health, equity, education, and economic development, to name just a few) there are a relative abundance of potential funding sources. Some are even tied to matching payments that can stretch capacity even further [34]. Indeed, grant dollars fund a huge chunk of the municipal food policy work taking place in North America, and all programs interviewed take advantage of this form of funding to some degree.

Despite its ubiquity, however, dependence on grant money comes with a number of challenges. Chief among these hurdles is the time lost fundraising: seeking out grant opportunities, navigating application processes, and then jumping through the bureaucratic hoops that come with the receipt of funds. This effort can be a barrier to pursuing otherwise-promising projects in a city ("to the extent that [fundraising] would be necessary, I don't know that I could take that on," notes Louisville's Theresa Zawacki, even while acknowledging that those foregone programs "could have a real meaningful impact [24]"). Even in instances where it is not a barrier, though, the effort still subtracts meaningfully from the amount of time actually spend managing municipal food policy [27].

> **"Ensuring you have resources is key. You want that built in from the get-go so that the staff isn't focused on justifying their position or raising funds at the same time as they're addressing this huge issue."**
>
> **Elizabeth Reynoso**
> *Food Policy Director*
> City of Newark

4 It should be emphasized that this section concerns only dedicated financial support. "We have not received funding from the city for Homegrown Minneapolis," notes Homegrown Minneapolis Coordinator Jane Shey, but she emphasizes that, "we have had considerable city staff time and engagement [30]." The benefits of this level of inter-agency prioritization are discussed further in *Interdepartmental Coordination*.

Further limitations of grant funding include the strings that are so often attached. "The foundation funds that we had [have] all been on the health side, which has limits," notes Minneapolis's Gayle Prest. "Economic development, environmental issues, community engagement: we haven't been able to use the funds with the kind of flexibility that we'd like [29]." As will be discussed further in *Priorities and Metrics,* reliance on grant funds can narrow the focus of a given project and, in extreme cases, distract from the overall mission of the program.

Finally, one last, unavoidable reality with grant funds is that they eventually run out. While some grants are significantly larger than others and some provide support over a considerable period of time, this type of funding is still comparatively uncertain and short-term [9]. Grants for staffing are of particular concern, as any resources spent on training this staff—and the whole of the institutional knowledge gained during the span of the work—can disappear at the end of a grant period [11].

CROSS-AGENCY IMPLEMENTATION

A very common method for leveraging the amount of resources dedicated to food is to look to other city departments for the implementation of projects. Indeed, it is not uncommon for local governments to set aside funds for food-related initiatives, even if these funds aren't channeled through food policy programs (the City of Vancouver, for example, has $360,000 of its capital budget dedicated to urban agriculture in 2012–2014 [34]). The Cities of New York, Philadelphia, Portland, San Francisco, and Seattle (among others) each fund food-related projects that are managed by non-food-focused agencies, and in most cases the situation works to the advantage of all [9], [11], [21], [23], [25].

The benefits of interdepartmental cooperation are discussed extensively in *Interdepartmental Coordination*. However, there are a few important things to note regarding the limitations of cross-agency implementation as a strategy: when other bureaus have charge of a program, choices regarding management generally fall to that agency, and opportunities for input can be very limited [24], [27]. "You can't co-opt the mission of other city programs," sums up Elizabeth Reynoso of Newark [27]. This inability to shape a program's direction—or, sometimes, even to know the details of its day-to-day implementation—can have negative repercussions when it comes to crafting an overarching food systems strategy for a city.

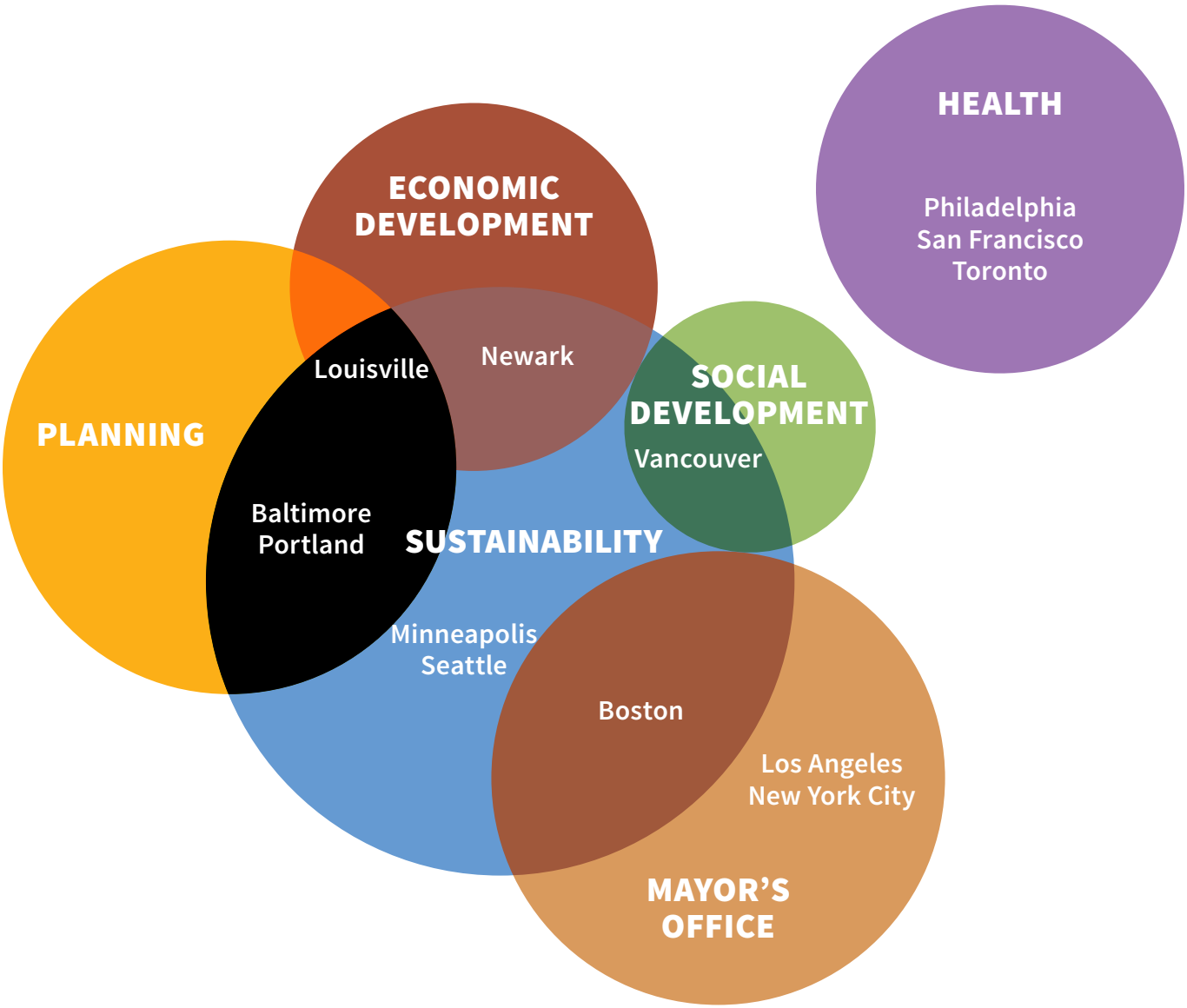
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

A final—and perhaps underutilized—method for working around limited funding is that of public-private partnerships. Academic institutions in particular can be promising avenues for gaining short-term staff: in Baltimore, the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health funds a full-time summer extern in the Food Policy Director's office [20], while Portland's Sustainable food program "lives by the kindness of graduate students [11]." These institutions can also provide capacity for one-off projects (Newark's Elizabeth Reynoso, for example, is working with Rutgers Business School to map the city's food supply chain [27]).

Apart from academic institutions, partnerships with private business are not uncommon (though, notably, there are few examples of programmatic funding being provided by the private sector). Collaboration on specific initiatives—forging a sustainable restaurant network [35], for instance, or promoting healthy retail [36], [37], implementing skill development and community training programs [6], crafting institutional procurement policies [8], or incentivizing locally-made food products [24], [38]—can certainly expand the scope, audience, and resources available to a project [25]. It is worth noting, however, that these expanded resources are generally dispensed at the discretion of the partner organization.

While most public-private collaboration seemed to occur through Food Policy Councils [6], [36], [37], [39], [40], some city food programs are reaching out more deliberately to the local business community. For instance, the City of Seattle will soon be hosting a roundtable for food and drink processors, its goal being to better understand and develop relationships with that sector [41]. There appears to be considerable untapped capacity for similar initiatives in other cities: reaching out formally to the private sector could result in more fixed, long-term relationships with the business community. Similar outreach to academic institutions has the potential for the same. Both options should be explored as a means to increase the resources available to understaffed and underfunded food policy programs.

FIGURE 1: BUREAUCRATIC LOCATION OF FOOD POLICY PROGRAMS



[6], [12], [14–17], [42–46]

Organization

As reflected in Appendix A's city factsheets, there are myriad ways to organize a food policy program within a municipal bureaucracy. Programs have met with success in sustainability, health, social development departments, as well as in mayoral offices.

While there is no 'should' when it comes to the organization of food policy programs (there are benefits and drawbacks to virtually every bureaucratic structure), several trends can be observed. It is notable how many of the programs—eight out of 13 (see Figure 1)—are housed in sustainability-related agencies. Of these eight, three have direct connections to Planning as well: Both Louisville and Portland have directly linked Planning and Sustainability within their bureaus (Portland's Office of Sustainable Development and Bureau of Planning merged in 2009) [16], [42], while Baltimore's Office of Sustainability is housed as a division of its Department of Planning [14].

In discussions with food policy directors, two important lessons emerged regarding organizational structure:

1. Pay careful attention to the location of food programs within the bureaucracy, as institutional structure can influence food policy priorities.
2. House any new food policy program in a manner that promotes frequent cross-agency collaboration.

FOOD POLICY PRIORITIES

The location of a program—where it is housed, its proximity to electeds—can have a material influence on the way in which it defines its focus. For example, in discussing their place in sustainability departments, both Holly Freishtat of Baltimore and Gayle Prest of Minneapolis cite the relative flexibility and autonomy that the department gives with regard to program focus [20], [26]. The Homegrown Minneapolis food program even went so far as to transition out of the Health Department and into the Office of Sustainability in early 2012 ("Health had done a lot … but because of the grants, it didn't allow for some movement into environment and economic development and things like that [26]"). While not every city faces comparable limitations within health (or other) agencies, the situation underlines the very real impact that bureaucratic location can have on program priorities [6], [20], [22], [26]. Keeping this in mind while determining program location can help head off any unintended programmatic or policy-related limitations.

Along this same theme, many programs cite proximity to their mayor or city council members as a benefit of their organizational structure [6], [8], [22], [25]. This proximity can lead to a degree of outside control over program priorities ("this office … is influenced very strongly by what it is the Mayor is looking to get accomplished [22]"), and it can also add a level of authority to food initiatives [6], [8] and smooth interactions between departments [25]. While being housed in the Mayor's Office is not always necessary for this kind of high-level involvement, it is undoubtedly beneficial to have "some level of authority to be able to reach the Mayor's Office [20]."

INTERDEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION

What Figure 1 does not reflect are the many linkages between food programs and other city agencies, and the importance of these linkages to ultimate program efficacy. The connections are legion: Philadelphia's food program, for example, while officially housed in its Department of Public Health, benefits greatly from the part-time support of Sarah Wu, the Policy and Outreach Manager in the Mayor's Office of Sustainability [44]. Similarly, Paula Jones of San Francisco is housed in the Department of Public Health but works closely with the Planning Department toward an "integrated plan around food and economic development [9]." Most food policy programs have dynamic and meaningful relationships with city agencies beyond the one in which they reside, taking advantage of staff, skill sets, and resources that are housed elsewhere [6], [9], [10], [20–23], [25], [27], [29]. As was discussed briefly in *Funding* and will be explored in greater detail within *Interdepartmental Coordination,* this kind of fluidity is often integral to program effectiveness. With this reality in mind, food policy programs should be housed in areas of government that allows them easy, unfiltered access to other city agencies.

Earl Boyles Park
Ribbon-Cutting Event
Monday, July 9th
11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Priorities and Metrics

One of the first priorities in establishing a municipal food policy program is determining what, exactly, it will work toward (priorities) and how to best gauge success (metrics). These are two distinct processes—emerging programs should define metrics only after they have established priority areas (for example, tracking the number of households within one mile of a full-service grocery store will do little to gauge the success of efforts to promoting urban agriculture within city limits [47]).

However, despite their seemingly straightforward nature, these two elements have been difficult for many existing programs to pin down. This section will discuss best practices regarding priority development, as well as the various factors in play when establishing appropriate metrics to track progress.

DEVELOPING PRIORITIES

Municipal food policy is a far-reaching and dynamic subject; there is opportunity for city involvement in any number of areas, and programs face the daunting task of narrowing down these options into workable—and finite—priorities. This process has been described as "overwhelming [26]," but it is a necessary step in crafting an effective food policy program. Concentrating effort in just a few program areas and tabling "back-burner [24]" issues, however, allows for a focused and strategic application of limited resources [21], [24], [26].

The process for distilling all options down to a handful of priorities is not set in stone. Four common approaches emerged from interviews with municipal food policy directors:

- Cross-sector collaborations involving extensive consultation with community actors.
- Internal, city-driven processes driven by one or more municipal agencies.
- Mayoral or city council mandates.
- An entirely grant-based approach, with focus areas determined by project funding sources.

Each method has pros and cons. Priorities imposed from outside the food policy program—through grants for example—might not dovetail exactly with the aims of those within [11]. On the other hand, working within an externally-dictated framework allows food policy programs to focus their finite resources on policy and projects rather than the often-political prioritization process [20].

Exactly how priorities are crafted often lies outside the control of any given program or food policy director. However, regardless of the approach, certain steps can assist the development process.

1. Determine the mix of time, staffing, and resources to be dedicated to policy work versus project work.
2. Identify and take into account the city-specific factors—including local governance structures and community resources—that will shape the program.

Policy versus projects

In considering the work being done by food policy programs, there is an important distinction to be made between policy and project work. Policy work identifies and engages with those areas in which local government touches or shapes the city food system. Project work, on the other hand, involves the development and implementation of specific initiatives. For example, revising city zoning codes to remove barriers to community gardens is policy work, while actually setting up and maintaining these community gardens falls under the 'project' heading.

> **"We collect and develop policy, we get information together, we connect people up … we provide technical assistance and policy guidance. We're very much policy people. And we try to create the conditions and capacity for our partners to implement the work."**
>
> **Paula Daniels**
> *Senior Advisor on Food Policy*
> City of Los Angeles

Many existing food policy programs have learned to be deliberate in their focus, clearly differentiating between policy- and project-related activities. "They're different. It's very important to work together on these issues, but they're different," notes Baltimore's Holly Freishtat [20]. Some go further, highlighting the distinction between project development and project implementation (development being the conception and fleshing-out of a project; implementation being its execution and day-to-day management) [21], [22], [25]. While most food policy programs deal with some mix of policy and projects, several directors note the importance of recognizing and separating the two [20], [21], [25]: "once you start implementing programs, you're dealing with different considerations and a different level of detail" explains Sharon Lerman of Seattle [21].

The risk programs run in failing to define their policy/project balance is that the overarching vision might fall by the wayside as efforts concentrate on getting specific projects off the ground. "In some cities—particularly at the early stages—people are often working on very programmatic things," notes Kim Kessler of New York City. "That may or may not be the right focus. It's a good thing to think about as you design the role [25]." Conflating projects and policy may lead to the pursuit of funding sources inappropriate for a city's long-term goals: chasing down limited-duration, project-specific grants can distract from the kind of holistic, big-picture thinking necessary for food systems management [11]. Delineating between the two different "levels [20]" of work—and specifying the time, staffing, and resources to be devoted to each—thus allows a city to better define its long-term vision and pursue appropriate funding sources for the same.

City-specific factors

City food policy directors recognize that the character of a food program is heavily influenced by the characteristics of the city and its citizenry [6], [8], [9], [22], [27], [29]. In other words, "for each city and town, the culture of that city or town helps define what issues they are going to come up with [22]." Governance structure, community interests and resources, regional economy, and even the physical characteristics of the city cannot help but play a role in both what a city prioritizes and how it pursues these priorities. Those in charge of defining food system priorities should understand these forces and utilize them to leverage city resources toward appropriate focus areas.

On the most basic of levels, the structure and operations of government shape the scope of food policy within a city. The City of Portland, for example, has no jurisdiction over any of its six area school districts: any mandate to influence procurement at public schools, then, would come with a very distinct set of complications[5] [11]. The availability and expense of property is of similar influence: because Newark does not have much city-owned open land within its limits ("and the land that is available needs to be remediated [27]"), the potential for larger-scale urban agriculture is restricted, and any expectations regarding significant growth of this type of farming should take that into account.

> **"You have to understand the differences between the local contexts. You can do all the best practices research you want, but if you don't understand how it's different in your place (or how it's similar), it's really not going to help you."**
>
> **Paula Jones**
> *Food System Director*
> City of San Francisco

Another essential consideration when crafting priorities is that of the community environment in which the program will operate. An engaged citizenry can steer the priorities and facilitate food systems work, leverage resources, and go a considerable way toward making municipal food programs effective on the ground. By recognizing plugged-in organizations and individuals, cities can determine how value is best added to food systems work in the region: this could be through coordinating among already-existing entities, publicizing available resources, or utilizing the expertise of local specialists. Tailoring city priorities to complement existing community work benefits municipal food programs on multiple levels.

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5 That is *not* to say that such work is impossible: the City of Los Angeles deliberately crafted a coalition-driven program in order to affect school purchasing (which is governed by the Los Angeles Unified School District) [8]. Moreover, the City of Portland did work on school food until a coalition of state and nonprofit actors received funding to address the issue across all Oregon school districts.

- It engages city actors in the issues most relevant to the citizenry [6], [24], [27].
- It avoids any duplication of efforts among local government, community, and individuals [8].
- It leverages the interests and abilities of existing organizations toward a common vision [8], [10], [24], [25], [29].

Once programs identify their role (or roles) in the existing food movement, they can craft goals, priorities, and community interactions (see *Community Involvement*) appropriate to the needs of local individuals and organizations.

Beginning any strategic planning by ensuring comprehensive understanding of the local status quo—with particular focus on regional governance structures, as well as community organizations and interests—promotes a realistic view of the priorities that will best guide a given municipal food policy program.

METRICS

A fundamental aspect of setting goals is knowing how to measure progress toward meeting them: without this basic step, the ability to judge the effectiveness of both individual initiatives and overarching food strategy is significantly limited [23]. Once goals and priorities are finalized, then, the pressing task becomes defining appropriate indicators for success and establishing a regular tracking of these indicators.

Codifying and tracking metrics has been a material challenge for many food policy directors. There are two main reasons: some numbers relevant to food policy programs are not tracked on a municipal level [27], [48] and, even for those that are, it can be difficult to establish definite causality between tracked data and food policy work [6], [10], [23], [29]. Unlike other city programs, where quantifying success is straightforward—the number of potholes filled, for instance, or the amount of waste diverted from landfills—food system work has few objective, cut-and-dry measures for measuring progress [6], [23], [48].

For emerging municipal programs, there are two complementary strategies for addressing the above challenges:

1. Identify those metrics that are already tracked—or that can begin to be tracked in the short term—to establish a rough baseline for food policy initiatives.
2. Explore non-numerical methods for measuring success.

In most cases, for the purposes of measuring success, an imperfect proxy is better than no metric at all. Simply starting with those indicators that can be quantified—health metrics (such as rates of obesity and chronic disease) are in some cases tracked through city departments [24], [25], [27], while grant-funded projects often have performance measures identified at the outset [23], [24]—gives a program leeway to add additional benchmarks as capacity allows. These metrics may be flawed, but they provide at least a partial picture of city status. (See sidebar for a list of common metrics tracked.)

For those areas that are either too complicated or too expensive for the average food policy program to track (e.g., behavioral change [11]), or for those areas where causality is difficult to establish (e.g., obesity reduction [23]), a food policy program can choose to explore non-traditional methods for measuring success. While very few programs have pursued qualitative over quantitative performance metrics, the Cities of Louisville and Vancouver are both exploring options for doing so [10], [24], [48]. In Louisville, elements such as press releases, feedback, and relationship-building are bundled together to create a comprehensive picture of the progress of the city's Farm to Table program. "Things like that are not really measurable quantitatively," admits Louisville's Theresa Zawacki. "But the qualitative results are helpful, in that you start to see that you have a way of building relationships that produce the numerical results later [48]."

Even though development of these narrative-driven approaches is still in its infancy, it is easy to see how qualitative—yet rigorous—methods might someday be used to complement and flesh out more conventional data to better measure progress. By exploring this option, food policy programs can advance program measurement and, ideally, reach a point where successes are more thoroughly noticed, publicized, and replicated.

TABLE 5: COMMONLY TRACKED FOOD METRICS
Distance of households from full-service grocery stores
Number of corner stores converted to healthy retail
Number of new or revised institutional procurement policies
Number of new food truck businesses
Number of food manufacturing jobs
Number of new hoop houses, farmers markets, community kitchens, market gardens, CSAs, etc.
Dollars spent at farmers markets, CSAs, food-buying clubs, etc.
Dollars spent on fruits and vegetables
Percent of population eating five servings of fruits and vegetables per day
Rates of SNAP participation
Rates of school meal participation (including Free and Reduced Lunch)
Rates of chronic disease and obesity

Interdeparmental Coordination

One of the common themes among those interviewed was the importance of interdepartmental coordination to food policy programs. The most oft-cited benefit of this type of coordination is that of sharing agency resources: as mentioned above, food policy programs must cope with an almost universal shortage of staff, funding, and hours in the day [22], [23], [27]. Crafting meaningful communication between departments thus becomes an essential implementation and capacity-building strategy.

Different programs utilize this type of coordination to varying degrees. The cities of Boston, Philadelphia, and Seattle, for example, conduct implementation work almost entirely through non-food offices. "We don't really have the staff or the budget to be programmatic," explains Edith Murnane of Boston. "It has to be about inception, creation, development, and handing off [22]." Other cities have been less successful about establishing cross-agency partnerships ("that's something we began to realize a few years ago: that we could do better [11]") At both extremes, though, is an unambiguous recognition that cultivating partnerships is a solid strategy for extending the amount of resources devoted to food issues.

Food programs that place a higher priority on interagency coordination activities often garner dividends beyond budget and manpower: the perspective and skill sets of other departments can provide a valuable boost to the creativity applied to a given issue. "There is just so much innovation among city agencies," points out Paula Jones of San Francisco [9]. Other food policy directors echo this sentiment: beyond simple capacity-building, interdepartmental coordination diversifies the perspectives and expertise devoted to food policy across the board [21], [25]. This would be a valuable contribution to any subject area, of course, but the heterogeneity of food issues makes this benefit particularly useful in food policy.

> **"I have been really surprised—in a good way—by the level of expertise and commitment at city agencies on the issues that I've worked on with them."**
>
> **Kim Kessler**
> *Food Policy Coordinator*
> City of New York

Beyond expanded resources and creativity, interdepartmental coordination also allows food programs to withstand the political transitions that inevitably arise in local government. "We want everyone working on food," explains San Francisco's Jones, "because then it can't go away [9]."

PRIORITIZATION AND STRATEGY

Food is a cross-cutting, dynamic issue that spans virtually all areas of city government. This reality presents food policy programs with two challenges: that of making food a priority in all of the agencies that touch on food, and that of crafting (and maintaining) an overarching food strategy that prevents these separately-administered programs from becoming fragmented.

Prioritizing food

Cities start out with different levels of awareness regarding food issues. Some food policy programs begin work with relatively high buy-in from other agencies [20], [25], [27], while others have had to make considerable efforts to justify the importance of food on the city agenda [6], [10], [23]. Programs in the former category have the clear advantage: rather than spending time to get other departments on board, they can (more or less) immediately marshal cross-city resources to the cause. For those programs in the latter category, enlisting other agencies is a necessary—but sometimes tricky—first step. However, interviews with municipal food policy directors reveal some common themes that can help fledgling food policy programs start these conversations.

1. Enlist support from high-ranking city actors (such as the mayor or city council).
2. Take time to understand the priorities of other departments and consider how food can fit into their existing agendas.
3. If possible, start with projects that will garner some easy and visible 'wins.'

As discussed earlier, many food policy programs spring—at least in part—from the efforts of a vocal, high-ranking official (or officials) within the administration. However, the role of political champion does not end once food work begins: having support and direction from electeds can be instrumental in the prioritization of food within other city agencies. "By having it a priority of the Mayor and the City Council … it kind of keeps everybody on alert," notes Gayle Prest of Minneapolis [29]. The value of high-level involvement is acknowledged virtually across the board [8–11], [20–23], [25], [27], [29]. For nascent programs (and even more established ones), making an effort to secure backing from the mayoral or city-council level can add valuable momentum and go a long way toward facilitating cohesive interdepartmental coordination.

Even with high-level backing, though, there will likely still be barriers in prioritizing food in other city departments. "There are always challenges around resources, or what to prioritize when," points out New York City's Kim Kessler. Given this reality, municipal food programs are likelier to find allies and resources in other agencies if they can tie their work into the already-existing priorities of these agencies [6], [9], [10], [21], [23], [25], [27]. Thinking comprehensively about these "opportunities for connection and enhancement [21]"—and even meeting with different departmental actors to better understand the synergies between agencies [9]—can make coordination a much simpler endeavor and promote an effective (and painless) integration of food-related thinking into various city departments.

> **"It's an opportunity. It's an opportunity if whoever is charged with advancing a food policy agenda can position it as an issue that contributes and adds value to other city agencies."**
>
> **Wendy Mendes**
> *Social Planner*
> City of Vancouver

And finally: early victories can pave the way for increased interdepartmental cooperation related to food issues [27], [29]. "Start to build successes … tangible success that people can touch and feel and visit and see and understand [10]." These victories can unambiguously connect food system work to the larger municipal agenda and help "de-mystify [10]" the issue to city colleagues. Moreover, partnering on "very concrete [6]" initiatives with specific and immediate outcomes can serve as a kind of proof-of-concept, paving the way to more significant coordination between agencies down the road.

Crafting an overarching food strategy

Along with the prioritization of food, food organization and strategy between departments is a chief consideration in food policy. In many cases, it is one of the primary purposes of a city's food program: "our job is to stitch together individual food policies into a coordinated whole that represents the entire food system," explains Vancouver's Wendy Mendes [10]. Particularly in cities where food programs are implemented through non-food-focused departments, it is important for food policy directors to be able to "take a critical step back and think about things that people who are in implementing agencies can't think about [23]." An inter-agency food strategy can help clearly define departmental roles and responsibilities [24] while allowing each agency the freedom to pursue their own piece of the overarching vision [9], [27].[22]

There are, however, general challenges that food policy directors face in crafting a unified strategy: the easy transfer of information between agencies, for example, can be difficult to establish [23], [24], [27]. ("It's just, administratively, these kinds of lines of communication have not been set up before [27].") Moreover, when multiple agencies take charge of various food-related programs—the Health Department managing corner store initiatives, for example, while Parks offices run community gardens and Transportation staff monitor mobile vending units—it can be difficult to channel these disparate efforts into a single, cohesive food policy vision [10], [21], [23].

While pursuing interdepartmental communication and cohesion, most programs will face some form of the issues outlined above. While some deal with these issues on an ad-hoc basis [11], and some must play a more political game in order to engage other agencies in a food strategy [8], an alternative approach for addressing these challenges did emerge:

1. Establish an inter-agency steering team to facilitate communication and strategic planning among city departments that connect to food issues.

An interdepartmental steering team brings to the table all those who have a hand in shaping city policy and projects related to food [10], [21], [25]. This access is instrumental—particularly in the early stages of a program—in inventorying any existing programs that touch on food, illuminating those areas where additional work is needed, and settling which agency will be charged with advancing any given agenda item. Ideally, departmental decision-makers would form the bulk of the group: such high-level participation promotes true buy-in regarding strategy and prioritization [21].

An excellent example of effective inter-agency coordination is New York City's Food Policy Task Force—codified by Mayor Bloomberg's Executive Order 122—which includes participants from 11 city departments, including Health, Education, Parks, Economic Development, and Housing [12], [49]. Another valid template is Vancouver's Food Systems Steering Committee, which is supplemented by a number of issue-specific technical teams. Both of these inter-agency bodies offer their cities "regular, set times where folks from different departments sit down and talk it through [10]."

While there may be some challenges associated with convening such a committee (the availability of director-level participants being key [9], [21]), even a limited-duration workgroup or one composed of staff-level individuals can provide valuable opportunities for coordination and planning [9], [29]. No matter what the approach, however, establishing a cohesive vision among city agencies is an important step in advancing a city-wide food agenda.

Emerson Street Garden
all are Welcome

Community Involvement

Community actors are crucial partners in city food policy. They can provide perspective, resources, and boots on the ground; existing programs have greatly benefited from seeking out their participation [6], [8], [10], [11], [20], [22], [24], [25], [27], [29].

While the most common avenue for community involvement in municipal food policy programs is through a government-sanctioned Food Policy Council (alternatively called a 'Food Policy Advisory Committee [20],' 'Food Council [22], [29],' or 'Food Policy Advisory Council [23], [24]'), cross-sector consultation and partnership is certainly not limited to the FPC umbrella. And indeed, FPCs take nearly as many forms as there are cities that host them: the City of Toronto, for example, is singular in that it houses the Food Policy Council directly within its bureaucracy. Since its founding in 1990, the Toronto FPC has been an official subcommittee of the Toronto Board of Health, complete with full-time staff—funded through the city and province by Toronto Public Health—as well as a discretionary budget and formal ties to Toronto's Food Strategy Team [6]. "We are all part of the same team," explains Toronto's Lauren Baker, "As a citizen's advisory group, the Toronto Food Policy Council has a considerable amount of autonomy, but it's very connected to and invested in the implementation of the food strategy [6]."

Other FPC models embrace different structures and missions. The City of Seattle, for example, is one member of the Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council, an advisory-focused body that takes a regional, four-county approach [21]. Other municipalities—New York City being a prime instance—do not have a city-staffed FPC at all. There, Food Policy Coordinator Kim Kessler utilizes a project-specific approach, allying with different consortiums of community organizations depending on the initiative [25].

The many different ways in which food policy programs can invite community involvement allow for almost infinite flexibility, and programs can take advantage of this flexibility to optimize value to the program and the impact of community input.

1. Understand program needs regarding community involvement in food policy, and structure formal interactions with these needs in mind.
2. Ensure that the mission of any city-convened body is well understood by its membership, and take care to select participants with appropriate types and levels of expertise.

FORMALIZED CROSS-SECTOR INTERACTION

By examining the strengths and weaknesses of a region's existing food movement—as should be done when crafting goals and priorities—a food policy program better identifies how it adds value. Is it through coordination and facilitation among robust-but-fragmented organizations? Is it through policy work that removes barriers to change? Is it by giving support and information to a nascent movement? Different objectives can necessitate different structures for community engagement. Some examples:

- A city interested in leveraging the collective force of its community toward a common agenda ("working together, and working powerfully as a whole [20]") could do well to convene as many and as diverse a company of individuals and organizations as is possible [20].
- Programs that want to identify and remove policy barriers to food systems action are often best served by providing a forum for higher-level specialists in a given field [8], [11].
- Outreach-oriented agendas, on the other hand, could benefit by prioritizing interactions with engagement-focused local entities that have "good credibility in the community [10]."

To be sure, there is no one-size-fits-all model for engaging individuals and organizations. Understanding program needs, however, and then deliberately crafting interactions to serve these needs, can go a long way toward creating productive and lasting ties with local actors.

CASE STUDY

Two cities that exemplify the wide spectrum of available strategies for effective community engagement are Los Angeles, California and Portland, Oregon:

Los Angeles

The City of Los Angeles built its community engagement strategy around its Food Policy Council. The LA FPC, while an independent nonprofit, has close ties with city government: Paula Daniels, LA's Senior Advisor on Food Policy, is the full-time chair ("akin to a CEO [39]") of the FPC and oversees five FPC staff. (These five FPC staff even share office space in the Mayor's Office, though they are funded separately through the Food Policy Council.) With 33 core members and up to 130 attendees per regular meeting (workgroup participation can be even higher), Los Angeles prioritizes coalition building, collaboration, information sharing, and collective action [8]. The LA FPC is hands-on in crafting official policy, and it has close and constant ties to city work [8], [39]. "Probably 80 percent of my time is devoted to the Food Policy Council," Daniels explains, "because that is where all the work is being implemented [8]."

LA promotes a highly-inclusive model, with working groups open to the public—though each must include at least one of the 33 FPC members—and of unlimited size. (Focus areas include Healthy Food Retail, Good Food Economy, Good Food Procurement, Farmers Markets for All, Street Food, Urban Agriculture, and School Food and Gardens.) "We structured this deliberately so that [the city is] not a stopgap, we're not a bottleneck, we're not a vetting organization," Daniels elaborates. "It's really collaborative, coalition architecture [8]." This model has had produced notable successes in increasing amount of fruits and vegetables served in area schools (as well as the use of locally-sourced ingredients), and members have made significant progress in the areas of food cart legalization and food procurement policies [8].

Portland

The City of Portland, while maintaining a long-standing relationship with the Portland-Multnomah Food Policy Council, employs parallel and project-specific strategies of community engagement. For its recent Urban Food Zoning Code Update—a project that was initially incubated by the FPC—city staff assembled a deliberately selected group of 18 community members to provide expert advice during the final stages of the project. This Code Development Advisory Group (CDAG) represented virtually all aspects of urban food production and distribution, and—over the course of six meetings across four months—highlighted current policy barriers, reviewed code language, and engaged in outreach efforts on behalf of the project.

CDAG member Will Newman II described the process during a public hearing for the proposed zoning code amendments:

> *"I have been an advocate for food security and social equity in the City of Portland for over 40 years, and in that time have been involved in processes at the city level and at the county level many times. I want to say that this particular instance of the process is the most satisfying experience that I've ever had in dealing with government. […] From the very beginning—from outreach to the community, […] through getting a broad array of representation on the Code Development Advisory Group, to actually listening to the input from all the various parties, to balancing those conflicts that arose, to clear communication, […] to the final resolution of the potential conflicts—[it] was done in a highly professional way, and really showed respect for public input [50]."*

Both of these examples demonstrate deliberately-crafted, effective community engagement that advances urban food policy and builds lasting relationships with individuals and organizations. One leans heavily on implementation through sustained interactions with a broad, inclusive group of actors, while the other has a short-term, advisory focus with pinpointed goals and highly specialized participants. Emerging food policy programs would do well to consider which model (if either) is more appropriate for their own particular circumstance.

MISSION AND MEMBERSHIP

Though a deliberately-crafted Food Policy Council (or any other form of city-convened advisory group) is a boon to most any food policy program, an FPC without a well-understood mission or structure can cause severe headaches in the long run. Bodies with a muddy idea of their purpose ("they want to be an advocacy body but they don't want to be an advocacy body; they want to give us advice but then they don't want to give us advice [23]") or their role in government processes are ineffective and can lead to mutual frustration between city and community [11], [29]. Ensuring that all involved are fully aware of both their overriding mission and the structure of their relationship with the city goes a long way toward ensuring a productive dynamic.

Also important is ensuring that membership has an appropriate level of expertise—both of the issues at hand and of the mechanics of city government—to provide constructive and realistic input [11], [23]. While the input of those with a "more idealistic than realistic view of what can be accomplished [8]" can certainly be valuable in some contexts, a group composed entirely of such individuals is unlikely to provide support that can translate into substantive action.

One final element to note is that program needs can change over time. A food program's relationship to its FPC can evolve and, in some cases, be cyclical, strengthening or weakening based on factors such as membership, programmatic focus, and political leadership. Even cities with positive and long-term connections to an FPC can experience bumps in the road ("there's certainly been soul-searching and periods of angst on the part of the Food Policy Council, and who they are and what they're for," acknowledges one food policy director, even while characterizing the overall city-FPC relationship as "fantastic" [50]). Policy advisory bodies in particular are subject to shifts in dynamic: the type, specialization, and duration of advice needed by a food program can shift dramatically depending on its initiatives of the moment. Programs re-evaluate their community interactions on a continual basis, and should be flexible enough to modify their approach if the need arises.

Photo: Northwest Agricultural Business Center

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

Through the course of this analysis, 13 concrete suggestions emerged as guidance for emerging food policy programs:

Funding

1. Take advantage of all sources of funding and resources available to the food policy program, including both general fund and grant support; the budgets, staff, and programs of other agencies; and public-private partnerships.

Organization

2. Pay careful attention to the location of food programs within the bureaucracy, as institutional structure can influence food policy priorities.
3. House any new food policy program in a manner that promotes frequent cross-agency collaboration.

Priorities and metrics

4. Determine the mix of time, staffing, and resources to be dedicated to policy work versus project work.
5. Identify and take into account the city-specific factors—including local governance structures and community resources—that will shape the program.
6. Identify those metrics that are already tracked—or that can begin to be tracked in the short term—to establish a rough baseline for food policy initiatives.
7. Explore non-numerical methods for measuring success.

Interdepartmental coordination

8. Enlist support from high-ranking city actors (such as the mayor or city council).
9. Take time to understand the priorities of other departments and consider how food can fit into their existing agendas.
10. If possible, start with projects that will garner some easy and visible 'wins.'
11. Establish an inter-agency steering team to facilitate communication and strategic planning among city departments that connect to food issues.

Community involvement

12. Understand program needs regarding community involvement in food policy, and structure formal interactions with these needs in mind.
13. Ensure that the mission of any city-convened body is well understood by its membership, and take care to select participants with appropriate types and levels of expertise.

While these guidelines might not be appropriate to every situation (indeed, one thing that defines this research is the variety among programs), they nevertheless outline several factors that should at least be considered when crafting of a municipal food policy program.

NEXT STEPS

One reality that became apparent over the course of this research is the lack of awareness among many food policy directors regarding the activities and experiences of other municipal food programs—this despite the two regularly-scheduled conference calls[6] among food policy professionals that were initiated in the past year. The conversation on these calls is meant to provide a forum in which food policy directors can discuss their current projects, and general consensus among participants is that these platforms are useful [36–38], [40], [41]. Why, then, the lack of awareness regarding other urban food programs?

Two factors might explain the reason for this deficiency in information-sharing:

- The conference call format is limited, with no opportunity for in-depth discussion or one-one-one dialogue; callers often participate with their attention divided [22], [25], [38], [41].
- The focus of the calls is not always relevant to every participant (for example, there has been much attention paid to the Farm Bill recently, but national legislation is not a priority for every participant's food policy program) [38], [51].

As nearly all research partners saw the value of collaboration, problem-solving, and dialogue among their peers, it seems that there is great potential for improving the format in which food policy directors network with one another. An ideal platform would allow for:

- Problem solving and idea generation
- Discussion of current projects
- Collective action
- Dissemination of best practices
- Easy access to informational resources
- Professional development
- One-one-one dialogues and occasional in-person meetings

[6], [22], [25], [35–39], [41], [51]

With these priorities in mind, it appears that the current conference calls could either be expanded to facilitate more in-depth interactions among participants, or a parallel platform could be established to enhance the current format. Considering the busy schedules of all involved, creating topic-specific forums into which smaller groups can break off (as opposed to every food director participating in every discussion about every issue) is one possible first step. Another easy action would be to create a resource library where each member can upload, view, and comment on reports, articles, and the news of the day. Indeed, establishing an online footprint for food policy directors would be a low-commitment, simple, and relatively affordable way to explore alternative (and complementary) networking options.

A more ambitious step is the facilitation of face-to-face meetings. Funding must be secured and logistics sorted; these are material barriers that will only grow as the number of food policy directors across the US and Canada increase. However, these barriers are surmountable: indeed, meetings of food policy directors have already taken place (sponsored by the nonprofit Wholesome Wave and the Surdna Foundation).

More meaningful interaction among food policy directors would go a long way toward spreading best practices, building coalitions, and—more aspirationally—advancing the overall field of urban food policy. Time and resources will always prove barriers, but this research has highlighted some potential avenues for easy inroads toward a more dynamic system that better serves the needs of food policy directors and their programs.

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6 One, a Food System Users Group, is sponsored by USDN and began its bimonthly telephone meetings in April 2012; this call is open to other USDN members, and the bulk of participants are city staff whose responsibilities span many issues (not just food). The other conference call (also beginning in early 2012) is made up entirely of food policy directors.

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[10] W. Mendes, "Personal Interview," 21-Jun-2012.

[11] S. Cohen, "Personal Interview," 27-Jun-2012.

[12] K. Kessler, "Personal Interview," 07-Aug-2012.

[13] G. Prest, "USDN Questionnaire (Minneapolis, MN)." 24-May-2012.

[14] H. Freishtat, "USDN Questionnaire (Baltimore, MD)." 03-May-2012.

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[23] A. Wagner and S. Wu, "Personal Interview," 15-Jun-2012.

[24] T. Zawacki, "Personal Interview," 06-Jun-2012.

[25] K. Kessler, "Personal Interview," 18-Jul-2012.

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[27] E. Reynoso, "Personal Interview," 16-Jul-2012.

[28] Name Withheld, "Personal Interview," 2012.

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[30] J. Shey, "Email to Molly Hatfield," 23-Aug-2012.

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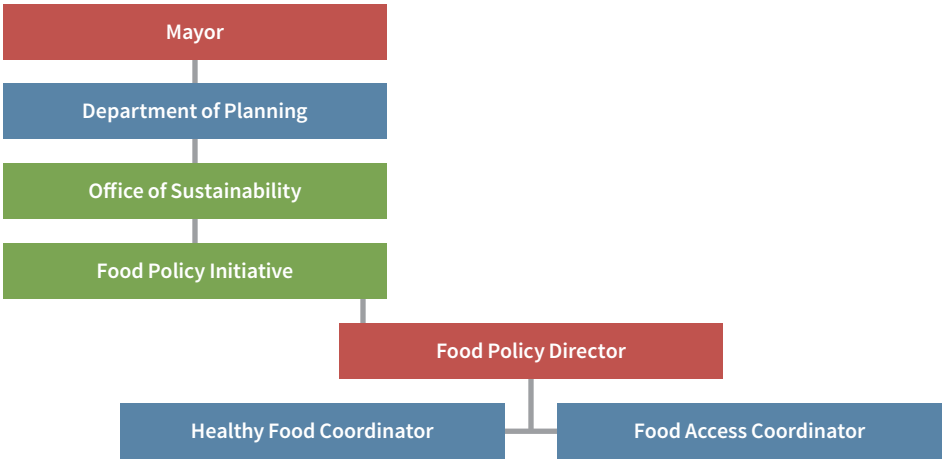
[52] K. Kessler, "Email to Molly Hatfield," 23-Aug-2012.

Appendix A:
Existing Food Policy Programs

Baltimore

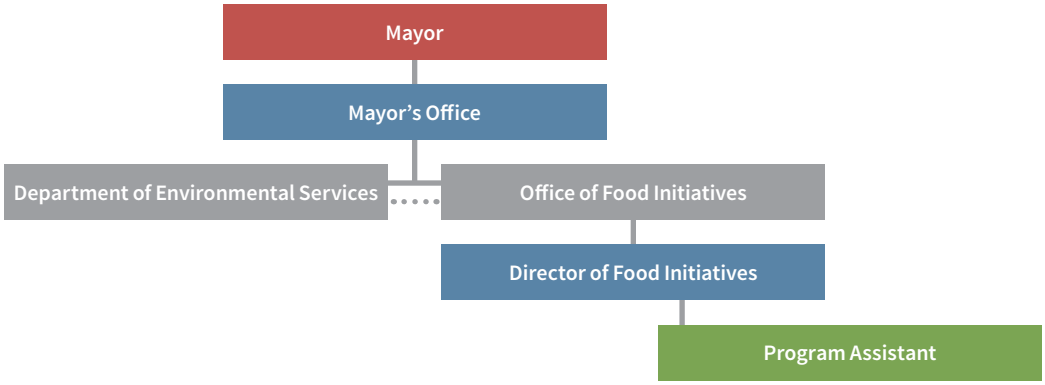
PROGRAM LEAD	Holly Freishtat
TITLE	Food Policy Director
REPORTS TO	Director of the Department of Planning
STAFF FIRST HIRED	2010
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	3
DIRECTOR POSITION	City funded
STAFF	Grant funded
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	None
LIAISES WITH	Baltimore Development Corporation Baltimore City Health Department Mayor's Office
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	Baltimore Food Policy Advisory Committee
FOUNDED	2010
STRUCTURE	Government-convened advisory group
BUDGET (2011)	None
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	0
MEMBERS	45+ (self-selected)
PRIMARY FUNCTION	Discussion / outreach Coordination



[14], [36]

Boston

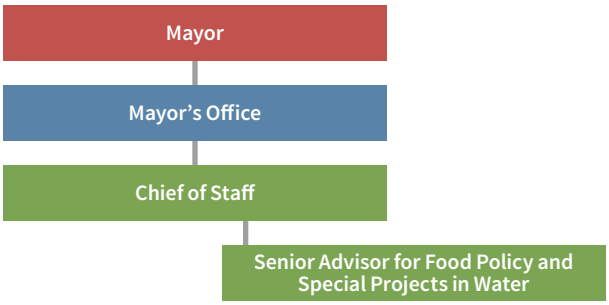
PROGRAM LEAD	Edith Murnane
TITLE	Director of Food Initiatives
REPORTS TO	Mayor
STAFF FIRST HIRED	2010
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	1
DIRECTOR POSITION	City funded
STAFF	City funded
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	$25,000
LIAISES WITH	Boston Fire Department Boston Parks Department Boston Police Department Boston Public Health Commission Boston Redevelopment Authority Boston Public Schools Department of Arts, Tourism, and Special Events Department of Information and Technology Department of Intergovernmental Affairs Department of Neighborhood Development Department of Public Works Department of Transportation Inspectional Services Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance Mayor's Office of Constituent Services Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services Office of New Bostonians
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	Boston Food Council
FOUNDED	2009
STRUCTURE	Government-convened advisory group
BUDGET (2011)	$50,000 (grant funded)
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	1
MEMBERS	35+ (invited)
PRIMARY FUNCTION	Discussion / outreach Policy consultation



[15], [31]

Los Angeles

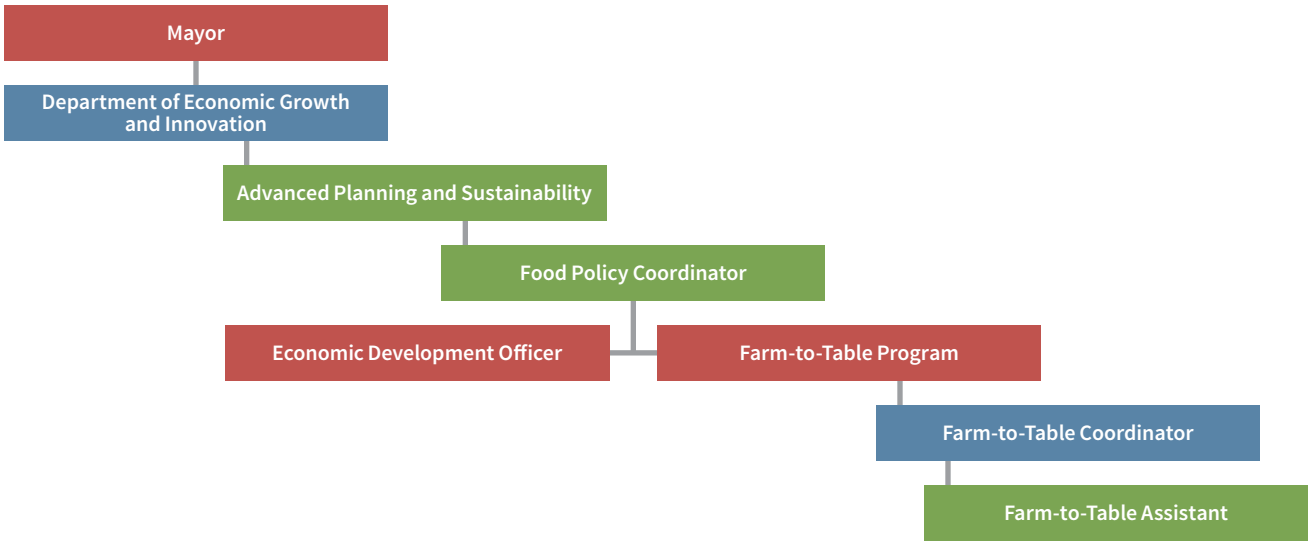
PROGRAM LEAD	Paula Daniels
TITLE	Senior Advisor on Food Policy, Special Projects in Water
REPORTS TO	Mayor
STAFF FIRST HIRED	2011
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	1
DIRECTOR POSITION	City funded
STAFF	None
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	None
LIAISES WITH	City Council Offices Community Development Department Department of City Planning Department of Public Works Department of Building and Safety Housing Department Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services Los Angeles Unified School District
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	Los Angeles Food Policy Council
FOUNDED	2011
STRUCTURE	Independent nonprofit
BUDGET (2011)	$500,000 (city funding/in-kind, philanthropic donations, grant funding)
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	5.5
MEMBERS	33 (recruited)
PRIMARY FUNCTION	Discussion / outreach Coordination Policy consultation Implementation



[39], [43]

Louisville

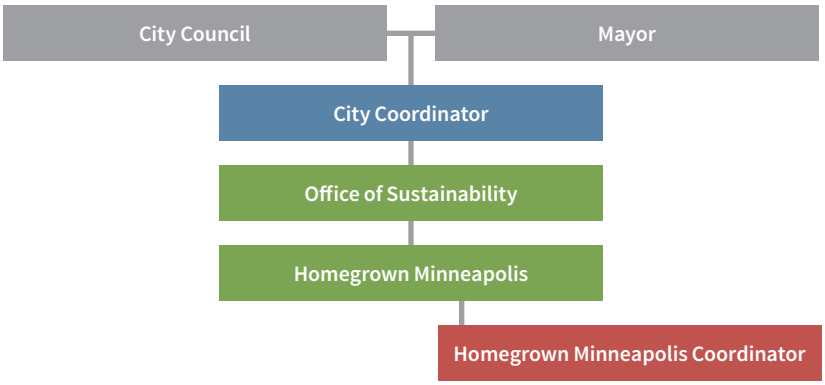
PROGRAM LEAD	Theresa Zawacki
TITLE	Food Policy Coordinator & Brownfields Program Manager
REPORTS TO	Chief of Economic Growth and Innovation
STAFF FIRST HIRED	2011
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	2
DIRECTOR POSITION	City funded
STAFF	City funded + Grant funded
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	None
LIAISES WITH	Codes and Regulations Department Department of Public Health and Wellness Department of Public Works and Assets Jefferson County Extension Office Metropolitan Sewer District Parking Authority of River City Parks Department Transit Authority of River City
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	Louisville Food Policy Advisory Council
FOUNDED	2010
STRUCTURE	Government-convened advisory group
BUDGET (2011)	None
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	0
MEMBERS	25 (appointed)
PRIMARY FUNCTION	Discussion / outreach Coordination Policy consultation Implementation



[16], [32]

Minneapolis

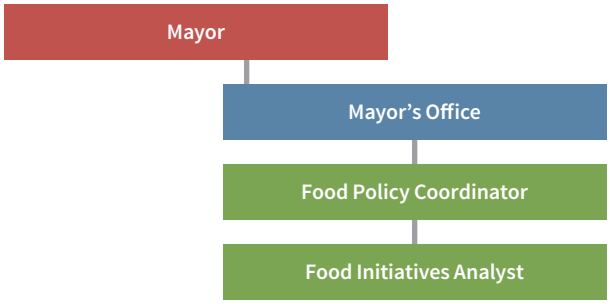
PROGRAM LEAD	Jane Shey
TITLE	Homegrown Minneapolis Coordinator (Contractor)
REPORTS TO	Sustainability Director
STAFF FIRST HIRED	2008
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	1
DIRECTOR POSITION	Grant funded
STAFF	None
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	None
LIAISES WITH	Department of Health and Family Support Department of Community Planning and Economic Development Department of Regulatory Services Department of Public Works Mayor's Office City Council Offices
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council
FOUNDED	2012
STRUCTURE	Government-convened advisory group
BUDGET (2011)	None
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	0
MEMBERS	21 (6 City reps, 8 appointed, 7 elected)
PRIMARY FUNCTION	Discussion / outreach Policy consultation Implementation



[13], [40]

New York City

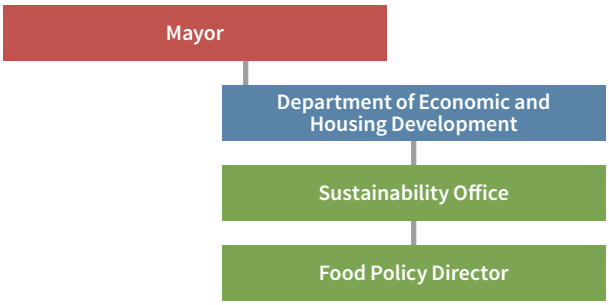
PROGRAM LEAD	Kim Kessler
TITLE	Food Policy Coordinator
REPORTS TO	Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services
STAFF FIRST HIRED	2007
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	2
DIRECTOR POSITION	City funded
STAFF	Grant funded
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	None
LIAISES WITH	City Council Offices Department for the Aging Department of City Planning Department of Citywide Administrative Services Department of Education Department of Environmental Protection Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Department of Parks and Recreation Economic Development Corporation Human Resources Administration Mayor's Office New York City Housing Authority
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	None



[12], [52]

Newark

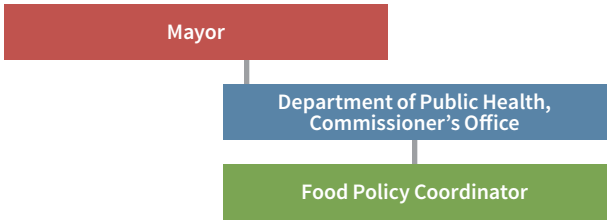
PROGRAM LEAD	Elizabeth Reynoso
TITLE	Food Policy Director
REPORTS TO	Director of Economic and Housing Development
STAFF FIRST HIRED	2012
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	1
DIRECTOR POSITION	City funded + Grant funded
STAFF	None
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	None
LIAISES WITH	Department of Child and Family Wellbeing Department of Finance Tax Abatement and Special Taxes Planning Department
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	None



[17], [38]

Philadelphia

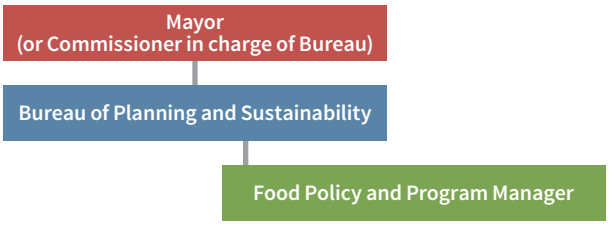
PROGRAM LEAD	Amanda Wagner
TITLE	Food Policy Coordinator
REPORTS TO	Director of Policy and Planning
STAFF FIRST HIRED	2010
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	1.25
DIRECTOR POSITION	City funded
STAFF	None
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	None
LIAISES WITH	Office of Sustainability Department of Commerce Water Department Department of Licenses and Inspections Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Philadelphia City Planning Commission Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission Mayor's Office Policy Team
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council
FOUNDED	2011
STRUCTURE	Government-convened advisory group
BUDGET (2011)	None
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	0
MEMBERS	29 (21 appointed, 8 ex-officio)
PRIMARY FUNCTION	Discussion / outreach Policy consultation



[37], [44]

Portland

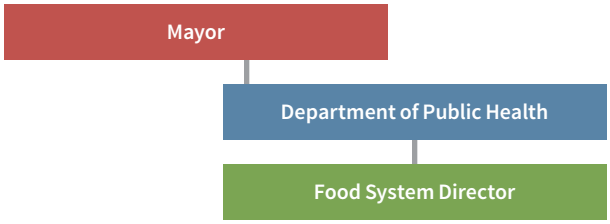
PROGRAM LEAD	Steve Cohen
TITLE	Food Policy and Program Manager
REPORTS TO	Senior Sustainability Manager
STAFF FIRST HIRED	2005
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	1
DIRECTOR POSITION	City funded
STAFF	None
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	None
LIAISES WITH	Bureau of Environmental Services Office of Management and Finance Parks and Recreation Portland Development Commission Bureau of Transportation Bureau of Development Services Water Bureau Office of Neighborhood Involvement Multnomah County Health Department Multnomah County Office of Sustainability
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	Portland-Multnomah Food Policy Council
FOUNDED	2003
STRUCTURE	Government-convened advisory group
BUDGET (2011)	None
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	0
MEMBERS	21 (appointed)
PRIMARY FUNCTION	Discussion / outreach Policy consultation



[42], [51]

San Francisco

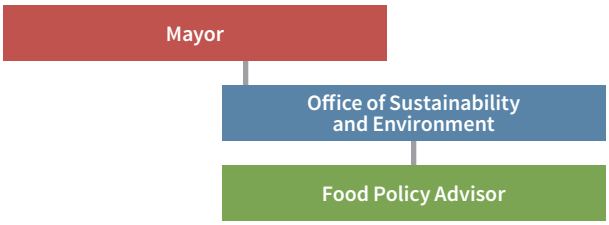
PROGRAM LEAD	Paula Jones
TITLE	Food System Director
REPORTS TO	Director of Environmental Health
STAFF FIRST HIRED	2002
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	1
DIRECTOR POSITION	City funded
STAFF	None
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	None
LIAISES WITH	Agriculture Commission Department of Aging and Adult Services Department of Children, Youth and their Families Department of Human Services Department of the Environment Planning Department San Francisco Unified School District
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	San Francisco Food Security Task Force
FOUNDED	2005
STRUCTURE	Government-convened advisory group
BUDGET (2011)	None
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	0
MEMBERS	14 (appointed)
PRIMARY FUNCTION	Discussion / outreach Coordination Policy consultation



[35], [45]

Seattle

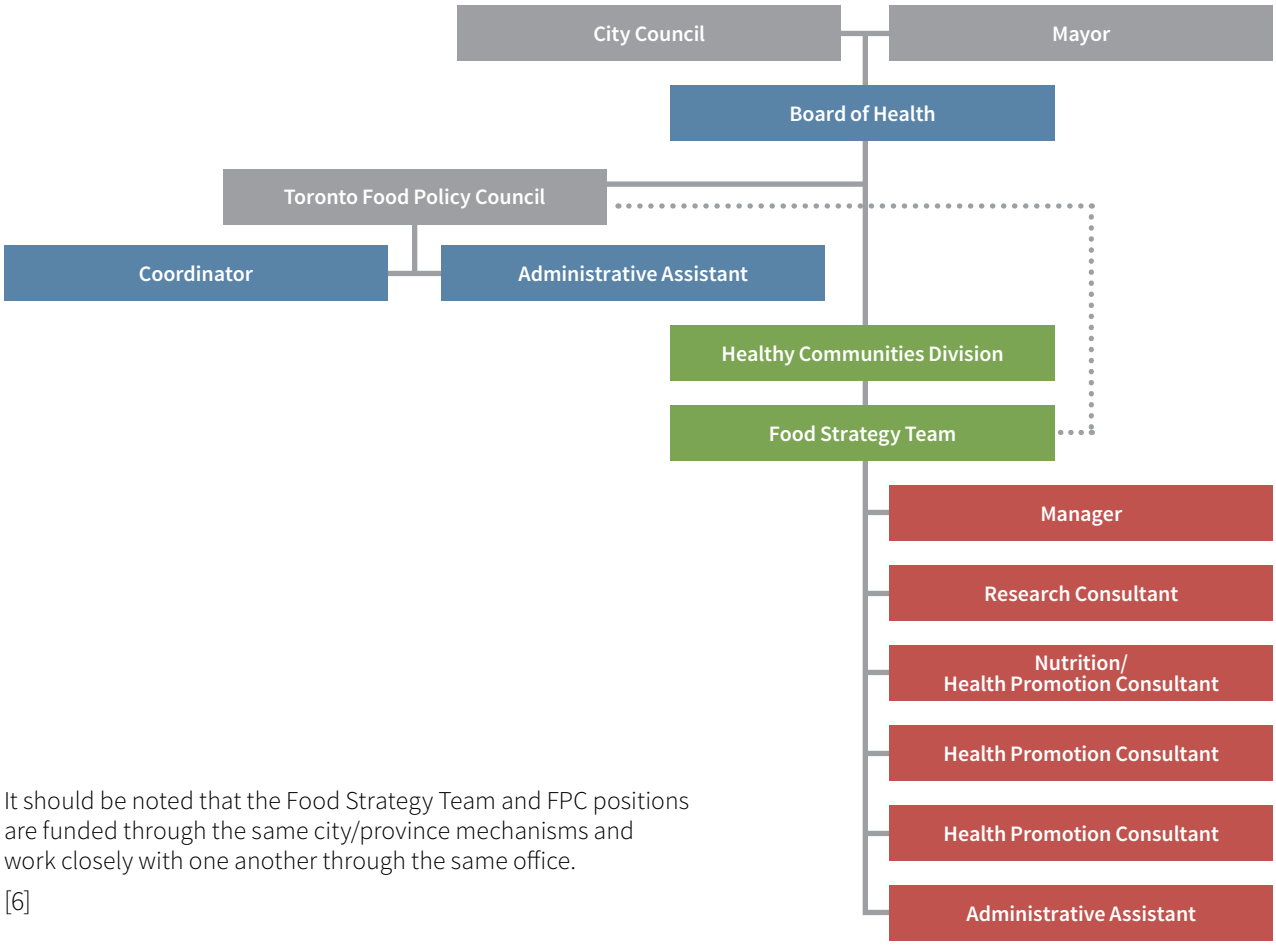
PROGRAM LEAD	Sharon Lerman
TITLE	Food Policy Advisor
REPORTS TO	Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment
STAFF FIRST HIRED	2012
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	0.8
DIRECTOR POSITION	City funded
STAFF	None
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	None
LIAISES WITH	Seattle Parks and Recreation Department of Neighborhoods Department of Planning and Development Department of Transportation Seattle Office for Civil Rights Seattle Public Utilities Human Services Department City Budget Office Office of Economic Development City Council Offices Mayor's Office Public Health, Seattle and King County Office of Intergovernmental Relations
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council
FOUNDED	2010
STRUCTURE	Metropolitan-Planning-Organization-convened body
BUDGET (2011)	None
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	0
MEMBERS	33 (elected)
PRIMARY FUNCTION	Coordination Policy consultation



[18], [41]

Toronto

PROGRAM LEAD	Barbara Emanuel
TITLE	Manager, Food Strategy
REPORTS TO	Director of Healthy Living, Toronto Public Health
STAFF FIRST HIRED	1990
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	51
DIRECTOR POSITION	City and Province funded
STAFF	City and Province funded
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	$30,500
LIAISES WITH	Economic Development & Culture Division City Planning Division Toronto Environment Office Employment and Social Services Park, Forestry, and Recreation
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	Toronto Food Policy Council
FOUNDED	1990
STRUCTURE	Government-convened advisory body
BUDGET (2011)	$15,500 (City funded and Province funded)
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	1.5
MEMBERS	30 (appointed)
PRIMARY FUNCTION	Discussion / outreach Coordination Policy consultation

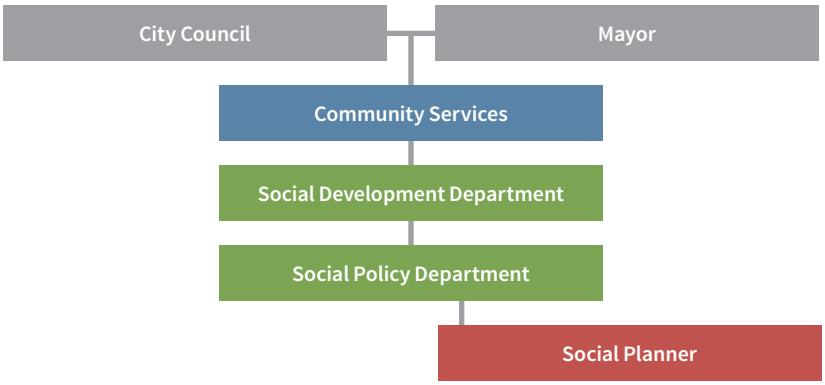


It should be noted that the Food Strategy Team and FPC positions are funded through the same city/province mechanisms and work closely with one another through the same office.

[6]

Vancouver

PROGRAM LEAD	Wendy Mendes
TITLE	Social Planner
REPORTS TO	Director of Social Policy
STAFF FIRST HIRED	2004
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	1.5
DIRECTOR POSITION	City funded
STAFF	City funded
DISCRETIONARY BUDGET	None
LIAISES WITH	City Manager's Office Development Services Engineering Services Legal Services Department Office of Business and Special Licenses Office of Housing Policy Office of Sustainability Parks and Recreation Planning Department Real Estate Services
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	Vancouver Food Policy Council
FOUNDED	2003
STRUCTURE	Government-convened advisory group
BUDGET (2011)	$15,000 (city funded; no budget in 2012)
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	0
MEMBERS	21 (appointed)
PRIMARY FUNCTION	Discussion / outreach Coordination Policy consultation Implementation Advocacy



[34], [46]

Appendix B: Sample Questionnaire

What year did the city's food policy program first hire staff?

Does the program have a set charge or mission statement? (If so, please paste it below and indicate whether this was adopted formally by City Council or at a staff level.)

Organizationally, where is the program housed in the city bureaucracy? To whom do you report?

Please list the city/county departments with which the food policy program routinely liaises.

How many dedicated paid staff positions are there within the program?

What is the food policy program's budget? What are its sources of funding?

Please list all significant public-private/community partnerships undertaken by the program, (e.g., Food Policy Councils)

Please mark those areas of focus that are actively addressed by the city's food policy program at the present time. *(We acknowledge that there is considerable overlap among these focus areas—separating public health from food education, for example, is difficult—but please answer as best you can.)*

- ☐ Access & Equity
- ☐ Community Building
- ☐ Economic Development
- ☐ Environmental Sustainability
- ☐ Emergency Preparedness
- ☐ Food Education
- ☐ Local & Regional Food
- ☐ Mobile Vending
- ☐ Nutrition & Public Health
- ☐ Political Advocacy (Federal, state, other)
- ☐ Purchasing
- ☐ Urban Agriculture

What kind of policy documents (e.g., food charters, sustainability plans, comprehensive plans, policy directives/resolutions) codify or reinforce the mission of the program? *(Feel free to simply copy/paste document links.)*

Appendix C: Sample Interview Script

Talk a little bit about your professional background and how you came to work in food policy.

Walk me through the origins of the city's food policy program.

(prompt) What were the primary drivers behind its creation?

Talk a little bit about your job description.

(prompt) Do you have a defined workplan?

(prompt) Describe some of your recent projects.

What are the chief objectives of the program?

Through what process are your programs implemented?

How do you judge the success of your initiatives?

(prompt) Are there any specific metrics that you utilize to gauge your progress? Who tracks these data?

(prompt) What's your personal opinion of the program's performance?

What are some of the chief challenges you face in the implementation of food policy initiatives?

Describe your relationship (if any) with private and community groups (FPCs, etc.).

How do you engage other city and county departments to support food policy initiatives?

What accomplishments of your program make you the most proud?

Are there any other food policy programs that you consider particularly exemplary? Why?

(prompt) Do you see any other cities doing things that you wish you could do?

What are some of the chief lessons you've drawn from your time in the food policy program?

(prompt) Is there anything you wish you had known sooner?

(prompt) What has surprised you the most during your time?

Where do you go for answers or advice related to food policy issues?

Do you have any advice or warnings for other cities wanting to implement programs?