

Equitable compensation for food policy council engagement

Brief by Jessica Fink, based on research compiled by Nina Wolff Landau
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A growing number of food policy councils (FPCs) are working to expand their memberships beyond paid professionals to include residents who have experienced food systems injustices. In doing so, many groups are exploring how to compensate members who are not participating as part of a paid job. This guide highlights examples from FPCs that have launched stipend programs to support members' participation in their councils. It concludes with additional considerations regarding stipend programs to keep in mind. If your FPC offers a stipend program for members and you would like to be listed below, please email Raychel Santo (rsanto1@jhu.edu).

Overview of stipend programs detailed below:

Council	Types of members eligible for stipend	Hourly rate	Stipend amount	Time commitment	Duration	Action required by members	Additional info
Baltimore Food Policy Initiative	13-16 Resident Food Equity Advisors	\$17/hour	\$204	2 hours, monthly	6 months	Application to participate in program	Representative from each council district
Greater Kansas City Food Coalition	Up to 5 steering committee members	\$30/hour + travel, incidentals, and tax offset	\$1,200	Not specified	Year	Members request to receive stipend	Event fees and annual donation requirement waived for stipend recipients
Montgomery County Food Council	Community Advisors	\$15/hour + meal gift card	\$120	2 hours, quarterly	Year	Application to participate in program	
	Advocacy Leaders	Not specified	\$1000	Not specified	10 months	Community Advisors returning from previous year	
Orange County Food Council	Community consultants for food assessment	Not specified	Varies by role, \$250-4000	Varies by role	Varies by role, 2-6 months	No application; individuals recruited via relationships in community	
	O.C. Black Farmer Group	\$150/hour	Not specified	Every 1-2 months	Year		
Rhode Island Food Policy Council	All members	\$20.83/hour	\$1,000	4 hours, monthly	Year	Opt-out	
San Diego Food System Alliance	20-24-member Stewardship Committee. Also compensates participants in strategic development work	\$100-150/hour	\$1,200 (individuals) \$2,400 (organizations)	Monthly	Two years	Selected by Alliance staff and leadership, composed of many partners from Food Vision 2030 development process	Members recommend someone from their organization / business to take their place when term is complete

Baltimore Food Policy Initiative, MD

Geographic focus: City/Municipality • Embedded in government

Established in 2010 by the City, the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative (BFPI) uses food as a catalyst to address health, economic, and environmental disparities in Healthy Food Priority Areas (areas with limited access to healthy food). The BFPI consists of three pillars: interagency collaboration, the Food Policy Action Coalition, and Resident Food Equity Advisors (RFEA). The Food Policy Action Coalition primarily engages professionals in the food system space, while the RFEA program engages Baltimore City residents in providing recommendations about the city's food environment plans and policies.

The RFEA Program is a collaborative governance model that engages residents in a process of learning and sharing. Advisors learn from BFPI staff about the City's food environment and government processes. BFPI staff gain a better understanding of the food challenges facing residents from the stories shared by advisors. Together, the advisors and BFPI staff develop policy recommendations for the City to consider. Topics vary depending on the focus of the cohort. Previous topics explored include food access, corner stores, food justice, nutrition assistance programs, equity in the food environment, and food environment research.

RFEAs are paid \$17 per hour to attend two-hour monthly meetings over the course of six months. Parking fees to attend the meetings are provided for and a meal is offered at every meeting. The composition and size of each cohort varies but has ranged from 13-16 advisors. The first three cohorts were comprised of one resident from each city council district. The most recent cohort was comprised of one resident from each Housing Authority development. Residents apply to participate, and BFPI looks for a range in ages and personal experiences with food access challenges when reviewing applications. The Initiative specifically seeks representation from seniors, parents of young children, and Latinx community members.



2018-2019 Food Equity Advisors Cohort. Source: <https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/>

Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition, MO/KS

Geographic focus: Region • Housed in non-profit

The Greater Kansas City Food Coalition acknowledges that the process for removing financial barriers should not require anyone to prove they need help, and that requesting assistance should be simple and private. The Council's stipend assistance is intended to address the time and costs associated with meetings, travel, and work preparing for meetings. The availability of stipends is communicated to potential and new members throughout the nomination and on-boarding process. Members may request the stipend by contacting the director by phone or email. There is no application. To receive payment, stipend recipients must submit a W-9 and a signed award letter outlining program expectations, payment amount, and participant responsibilities.

The stipend is available to a maximum of five steering committee members who indicate that they are experiencing financial barriers to participate in council activities. The Council created a baseline compensation rate of \$300 per quarter, beginning in the quarter requested and continuing for the duration of that two-year term or the end of their steering committee participation. This baseline rate is based on two factors: 1) a fair hourly rate developed after reviewing reimbursement practices and consultant rates paid by other agencies engaging impacted stakeholders in justice work, and 2) an estimate of the annual hours steering committee members are required to prepare for, travel to/from, and participate in coalition meetings, events, and advocacy. Coalition event fees and annual donation requirements are also waived for stipend recipients.

All steering committee members, regardless of whether they request or receive stipends, agree to fulfill roles and responsibilities including consistent participation in and support of at least one coalition initiative, workgroup, or major effort. They also contribute and develop personal expertise and participate in developing, executing, and monitoring the policy agenda. Steering committee members are also expected to attend two annual steering committee meetings as well as two annual member meetings.

Montgomery County Food Council, MD

Geographic focus: County • Non-profit

The Montgomery County Food Council created the Food Security Community Advisory Board (FSCAB) to ensure that the work of the Council is informed by residents' perspectives on issues that contribute to food insecurity. The Council believes engaging residents with the lived experience of food insecurity is essential to evaluating the effectiveness of programs and identifying gaps to be addressed. Furthermore, this engagement builds the community's capacity to increase food access in an inclusive and equitable manner.



The FSCAB engages with and listens to residents who are currently, or have in the past, experienced food insecurity firsthand. The FSCAB meets quarterly in addition to attending an annual orientation. Community Advisors receive a \$30 stipend per meeting in addition to a \$25 dinner gift card that all members receive for attending meetings. Up to eight Community Advisors returning from the previous year may become Advocacy Leaders, who provide increased time and expertise in advocacy and outreach activities. Advocacy Leaders receive a \$1,000 stipend in two installments at the beginning and end of the 10-month program to recognize the volunteer time and childcare, transportation, technology, and other costs that may be associated with participating. The Council received private foundation support to help fund the stipends, staffing, and other program costs.

Both stipend positions engage in community networking and leadership opportunities to connect with neighbors, virtually and in person. Stipend program participants also participate in events and conferences as well as advocacy efforts including providing testimonies and engaging elected or public officials.

Orange County Food Council, NC

Geographic focus: County • Embedded in government

As a guiding principle, Orange County Food Council is moving towards a model where all work is compensated, and community members are not only engaged in their activities but leading them as well. Accordingly, the Council has developed compensation support for two projects.

The Council hired community consultants to conduct their Community Food Access Assessment. Compensation varied based on the roles and commitments provided by community consultants, as described in the table below. Community experts from undocumented, immigrant, and refugee communities are represented in and guiding the process.

"While we have used the terms "consultant" and "expert" interchangeably, we are realizing that the term expert most aligns with our values and how we want to shift power. Arnstein's Ladder of Participation has really influenced how we are thinking about our language and methods. Unfortunately, even as we try to shift power in this assessment process, we cannot fully shift power in how decisions are made within the county government... We have strong partnerships with community experts where they lead this process (and are compensated for that expertise and work). But we cannot promise that their recommendations will be followed by our elected leaders...that's where we get stuck between tokenism and true power shifting."

- Ashley Heger, Orange County Food Council Coordinator

Position	Responsibilities	Time commitment	Compensation
Lead community expert/consultant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design assessment (with community input), recruit additional community experts, and advise research and facilitation team(s) • Have a combination of lived experience, experiences with advocacy work, and trusting relationships in most impacted communities 	Six months	\$4000
Photovoice participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document experiences around food access and insecurity using weekly diaries, photos, and voice memos • Present to researchers and County Commissioners • Council is working to ensure participants own this "data" and not the County, another attempt to shift power and reduce exploitation 	Four 1-2 hour sessions across two months + six weeks documenting experience	\$250
Community consulting sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze budget audit of County's investments in food access • Perform a gaps analysis of programs/priorities • Develop policy recommendations 	Three 1-2-hour consulting sessions	\$250-350

Through existing relationships, the Council also helped start the Orange County Black Farmer Group, seeking to develop a methodology where community members most impacted by systemic racism and oppression in the food system are centered in the policy/solution design process. The “think tank” idea stemmed from a racial equity assessment of existing county agriculture programs. The number one recommendation from the assessment was to build trusting and not transactional relationships with those most impacted (and those underrepresented in the existing programs). Accordingly, the group met every 1-2 months over 12 months, and continues to meet outside of the formal, compensated structure with the food council. The group created a report and gave a presentation to the council to share their feedback. The Council continues to strengthen ongoing relationships with the farmers and to implement the farmers’ recommendations in its operations and projects. The Council worked with an independent facilitator who helped coordinate the group and manage direct payments. Each participating farmer received a \$150/hour “stipend” for their time. The meetings were not recorded and confidentiality was maintained when requested in order to create safe spaces for the farmers to connect without judgment. This was an intentional move away from the data extraction model, with the goal to build the capacity to bridge the gap between community expertise and policy makers.

Rhode Island Food Policy Council

Geographic focus: State • Housed in non-profit

The Rhode Island Food Policy Council (RIFPC) values the knowledge and contributions of those most affected by inequities in the food system. The council offers a stipend to members who would otherwise have difficulty fully participating due to the time, financial, and/or emotional commitment required. The stipend program uses an opt-out model for compensation, encouraging members who can attend RIFPC meetings as part of their paid jobs or without losing pay to opt out of accepting the stipend.

Based on an average 4-hour monthly commitment, the stipend is \$1,000 annually, paid out in four equal installments at the close of each quarter based on full attendance. Payments require a W9 and are considered taxable income. Members agree to fulfill the standard Council member job description and sign a simple contract to receive the stipend.

Monthly Time Commitment	Compensation Rate	Quarterly Payment	Annual Compensation
~4 hours	\$20.83/hour	\$250	\$1,000

Council members spend an average of 1.5 hours a month at full meetings, plus up to an hour per meeting for travel, preparation, and follow-up. In addition, members spend approximately one hour each month participating in another Council structure and approximately one hour per month keeping up with online communications.

San Diego Food System Alliance, CA

Geographic focus: County • Non-profit

One of the San Diego Food System Alliance's goals is to cultivate justice in the food system, through the [San Diego County Food Vision 2030](#). This work starts by centering communities most impacted by inequities in the food system and BIPOC leaders across the region. As part of that commitment, they compensate community members and grassroots partners for their work as strategic consultants.

To continue guiding the San Diego County Food Vision 2030 forward, they created a diverse 20–24-member Stewardship Committee. Each member is paid \$100/hour for their participation in regular meetings; calculated annually for a total of \$1,200. “Community organizing partners” who are part of the Stewardship Committee receive \$2,400 annually, compensating additional funds for time spent outside of meetings. Community organizing partners support Food Vision 2030 by mobilizing their communities around policy priorities or campaigns (communities they are serving: BIPOC communities, tribal communities, food/farmworker communities, small farms/fisheries, small BIPOC and/or immigrant-owned food businesses).

The Alliance has also made it standard practice to compensate individuals (\$100-150/hour) for their participation in strategic development work, most recently with their Local Food Economy Lab co-design process. The lab is being co-designed by the beneficiaries, and compensation is being provided to the organizers/representatives from many of the same communities mentioned above.



Additional considerations regarding stipend programs

Accessibility:

Prioritizing equitable access to stipend programs is essential to recruiting diverse applicants that are inclusive and representative of the communities' needs they will advocate on behalf of and represent. Consideration of access to council meeting is also essential to ensure members are supported for their participation. Some accessibility needs to consider include the technology requirements to participate, the use of translated program documents for different language groups, transportation access, and childcare availability.

FPC budget constraints:

As many FPCs are operating with limited or no budgets, compensating residents or non-professional members may remain infeasible in the near future. Some councils have made efforts to reduce hardships involved in participating in other ways. For example, the Pueblo Food Project offsets the hardship of participating in a coalition activity by providing a \$20 gift card to members who request it. While the \$20 does not compensate members for their time, it may support the costs of childcare, gas, or other costs of participating. Other FPCs offer meals at meetings with the intent to reach more people, create a casual, interactive experience, and provide non-monetary compensation for participants' time.

Economic barriers:

Stipends are taxable sources of income for eligible FPC members. Additional income may impact members' eligibility for government assistance programs (e.g., SNAP).

Citizenship status:

Stipend programs seek to compensate community members for the valuable insight provided by their diverse and unique lived experiences; this includes input from immigrant populations. FPCs should consider how citizenship status may impact a member's eligibility to receive a stipend.

Membership management

Whether using an opt-out model or selecting qualified applicants, stipend programs expectedly create two groups of council members: those who are compensated for their contributions and those who are not. It is important to consider how this dynamic impacts member expectations, workload, and interactions.