

# DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY:

## A GUIDE FOR FOOD POLICY COUNCILS

Anne Palmer, Kyra Battaglia, and Raychel Santo

### FOOD POLICY NETWORKS

Building Community | Applying Research | Cultivating Action



JOHNS HOPKINS  
CENTER *for* A LIVABLE FUTURE

# CONTENTS

Introduction and acknowledgments .....	1
Getting Started.....	2
Determine communication goals that are part of a strategic plan .....	3
New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council .....	3
Cass Clay Food Partners .....	4
DC Food Policy Council.....	4
Identify and profile your audience .....	5
Audience considerations for advocacy campaigns .....	5
Montgomery Roots .....	5
Beaufort County HEAL Collaborative and Food Council .....	5
Develop messages .....	7
The Rhode Island Food Policy Council .....	9
The Good Food Purchasing Program .....	10
Chicago Food Policy Action Council .....	10
Select communication methods, materials, and activities .....	11
Direct advocacy for policy change .....	11
Cultivate Charlottesville Food Justice Network .....	11
Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition .....	12
Community engagement .....	13
Northwest Indiana Food Council .....	13
San Diego Food Systems Alliance.....	14
Media engagement .....	15
Social media.....	16
Alaska Food Policy Council .....	16
HEAL Food Alliance, Food Chain Workers Alliance, and Union of Concerned Scientists National Call-in Day Action .....	16
Establish partnerships.....	17
Chatham-Kent Food Policy Council .....	17
Sonoma County Food System Alliance .....	17
Implement the plan .....	18
Evaluate and make mid-course corrections .....	18
Other resources.....	19

# INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

From September 2019 to May 2020, the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future's (CLF) Food Policy Networks project hosted a monthly community of practice (COP) focused on external and internal communication strategies for food policy councils (FPCs). CLF invited Arzum Chilogu and Stephanie Desmond from the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs to facilitate several sessions. Along the way, we invited other colleagues, both inside and outside of CLF, to contribute their expertise. Special thanks go to Lily Fink Shapiro, Sherri Duggar, Christine Grillo, Abby Gold, Darriel Harris, Mark Winne, and Andrea Jasken Baker. Participation was steady until the COVID-19 pandemic turned the world around. Even then, a core group of councils showed up, ready to discuss, share, and learn. When the COP ended, CLF decided to produce an FPC communication guidebook to capture and share some of what was learned in the COP and introduced some additional communication topics.

The authors thank Dania Orta-Aleman for developing an early draft of this guide. Many thanks to the various FPC staff and members who reviewed this guide: Qiyam Ansari, Abby Gold, Kristina Kalolo, Miaisha Mitchell, Robbi Mixon, Michelle Tsutsumi, Renea Wood, and Kate Wright. This introductory guide documents some of the material we covered in the community of practice sessions, focused explicitly on external communication efforts, with examples that reflect the reality that many FPCs operate with volunteers or few financial resources. We also encourage you to explore the community of practice's [recordings](#), which provide more details. We also created templates and worksheets that can be accessed [here](#).

## About the Food Policy Networks project

The Food Policy Networks project is a project of the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, based at the Bloomberg School of Public Health. Through FPN, CLF works to build the capacity of food policy councils (FPCs) and similar cross-sector stakeholder groups to collectively advance equitable, healthy, and sustainable food systems through policy, programs, and partnerships. Since 2013, CLF has supported FPCs through research and data collection about FPCs, a listserv, monthly webinars, virtual networking, advising to individual FPCs, and convenings of FPC leaders. For more information, visit: [www.foodpolicynetworks.org](http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org).

## About the Center for a Livable Future

Since 1996, the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future has been addressing some of the most pressing issues in the food system while advancing public health and protecting the environment. As an interdisciplinary academic center based within the Bloomberg School of Public Health, the Center for a Livable Future is a leader in public health research, education policy, and advocacy that is dedicated to building a healthier, more equitable, and resilient food system. For more, visit: [clf.jhsph.edu](http://clf.jhsph.edu).

# GETTING STARTED

Food policy councils (FPCs) are built on relationships and collaboration. Core to FPCs' effectiveness is their capacity to leverage these relationships into collective action and advocacy for food systems policies. Communicating with your communities, policymakers and members encourages and motivates them to join and support your work. How you choose to speak out in your council matters. Communication strategies are an essential component of this process.

## VISUAL IDENTITY

Adopting a logo or visual identity can be a great way to distinguish your council's work. Some groups elect to use a particular font with the name, while others work with a designer to create a logo. A few key questions should be answered before deciding what you need to do, if anything.

- What are your organization's goals? What audiences do you intend to engage with?
- Do you want to be recognized outside of your organization?
- Will your organization have marketing materials, including but not limited to: a website, handouts, or signage?

These questions should all be answered before creating a visual identity and will likely be answered after your initial planning phase. If you spend a couple of years doing work seen by people outside of your organization, you are building a brand. Your brand will be stronger with a visual identity. If the visual identity is appropriately done, the logo transcends and becomes a powerful symbol of your work. It is not essential to decide this early on; the council can decide this once they are established and seeking to gain exposure.

A communication strategy is a written plan that describes an organization's communication goals, objectives, values, key audiences, channels, messaging, and activities. Communication activities can be either external facing, such as an advocacy campaign, or internally focused on organizing a group's communication. This guide focuses on external communications efforts (e.g., campaigns, marketing, or public relations). Councils' external communication efforts can be divided into 1) general external communication efforts and 2) communicating for advocacy, such as a food program or food policy.

This guide outlines the fundamental steps to create a strategic communication plan and illustrates each step with relevant examples from food systems organizations, mostly FPCs. We adapted the framework from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's "[Elements of a Strategic Communications Plan](#)." We also used materials from the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs' [COMPASS for Social and Behavior Change](#) to create a resource specific to FPCs.

This guide assumes that a council has discussed and developed a vision and mission statement, values statement, and guiding principles for your work, all components of an organizational strategy. We suggest completing those activities before discussing a communication strategy, as those components provide the communication strategy's bedrock. Without an organizational strategy, an FPC can use a communication strategy to determine what to publicly convey about its work, current advocacy issues, and who the FPC needs to communicate with.

Some councils have a communications committee to help guide their work. A committee can develop messages, provide regular oversight of the FPC's communication activities, serve as a media liaison, and develop relationships with the media. Given available resources, however, volunteers are responsible for the communication efforts in most FPCs.

# ELEMENTS OF A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN

## DETERMINE COMMUNICATION GOALS THAT ARE PART OF A STRATEGIC PLAN

Having a well-defined vision, mission, goals, and set of values for the council helps create a communication plan. Some food policy councils, especially nonprofit models, have a strategic plan to guide their work. If so, you can develop a communication plan to complement the larger body of work undertaken by the FPC. The FPC will likely have communication objectives within the strategic plan to help guide specific communication needs. The same is true for FPCs that drafted a food action plan for their area. There are communication elements of a food action plan to consider, such as creating a platform or dashboard to communicate progress made with the action plan.

As much as possible, develop your communication strategy and define your goals using data as evidence—secondary data, qualitative interviews, listening sessions, food system assessments, and other information relevant to the FPCs’ community and the councils’ issues. For groups that are getting started, [here is a chart](#) with publicly-available data sources that might prove helpful.

There may be little in the way of data available, or perhaps it is difficult to access. That in itself can be a story—“There is so much about this problem that we don’t understand.” Who are the people who personify that story, and how are they working to make change? Developing relationships with journalists can help shine a light on what’s working and what still needs to happen. In the absence of resources, consider reaching out to your local university or college to see if they can help collect data. In the absence of geographically specific data, it is possible to use data from another jurisdiction to illustrate scenarios similar to yours.

When developing communication goals, ask for input from the council and community members. Do you have spokespeople or council members most affected by a particular food system problem? Can you host a listening session, community dinner, or attend a community association meeting with community members to hear their concerns about food? Once you understand community priorities, you can marry them to the council priorities and craft goals for your communication strategy.

### *Communication elements of a strategy: New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council*

Since 2003, the New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council has collaborated with communities, organizations, agencies, and individuals to advocate for local, state, and national food and agricultural policies that benefit all New Mexicans. Using a variety of forums and methods of dissemination, they “educate and inform the public, those directly affected by food and agriculture programs, and public and legislative decision-makers about selected policy issues.” The FPC welcomes representation from a variety of sectors, communities (tribal, urban and rural),

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What issues are most important to your council right now?
- Who is most affected by these issues? Are they members of your council?
- How will you engage people affected by these issues in developing your strategy? (e.g., workshop, listening sessions, advisory group, etc.)
- How will you ensure that engagement considers justice, accessibility, and inclusivity?
- Who makes decisions about this issue?
- What resources are available to address the issue?
- What other groups, community organizations, and government agencies address this issue, and can you partner with them?
- What are the overall goals you want to achieve? (e.g., do you want your local policymakers to seek guidance from the council on food policy issues? Do you want the public to advocate for better school food?)
- What measurable outcomes would you like to achieve through a communications effort (e.g., number of people showing up for a hearing, new partnerships with organizations working on similar issues)?
- How will you know you are achieving your goals?
- What work has already been accomplished with the issue you are addressing, and what is happening now to catalyze interest?

## Key resources:

- [“Food System Assessments, Partnerships, and Policy: Evaluating the landscape”](#) webinar slides
- [Developing a communication strategy](#) recording
- [Chatham Kent Food Policy Council Marketing Plan](#)
- [HEAL Collaborative Communication draft plan](#)
- [Cass Clay Food Partner brief](#)

and economic circumstances. These members determine policy priorities through open and transparent discussions. Several of the FPC's goals are related to communication activities, as excerpted here:

- Review and comment on proposed legislation and regulations that impact food and agricultural systems and their security.
- Make recommendations to the executive and legislative branches of government on food and agricultural policy.
- Establish an ongoing educational program and projects for the public about food and agricultural systems based upon accurate facts and reliable reports and analyses.
- Be aware of and work to prevent food insecurity for families and children in New Mexico.
- Educate about and promote stewardship and conservation of land, water, and resources.

### *Integrating communication into a strategy:*

#### *Cass Clay Food Partners*

A cross-state partnership between Cass County, North Dakota, and Clay County, Minnesota, the Cass Clay Food Partners (CCFP), launched in 2010 as a grassroots movement to support local food initiatives. Over the past decade, the CCFP has evolved and now includes three entities: the Cass Clay Food Commission, supported by the Metropolitan Council of Governments and representing multiple jurisdictions in the region; the Cass Clay Food Action Network, comprised of residents, community organizations, and nonprofits seeking to influence their local food system; and Cass Clay Food Partners Steering Committee, where representatives from both groups collaborate. In this brief strategy document, CCFP describes their mission, values, and the key messages they have agreed upon.

### *Promoting a new program: DC Food Policy Council*

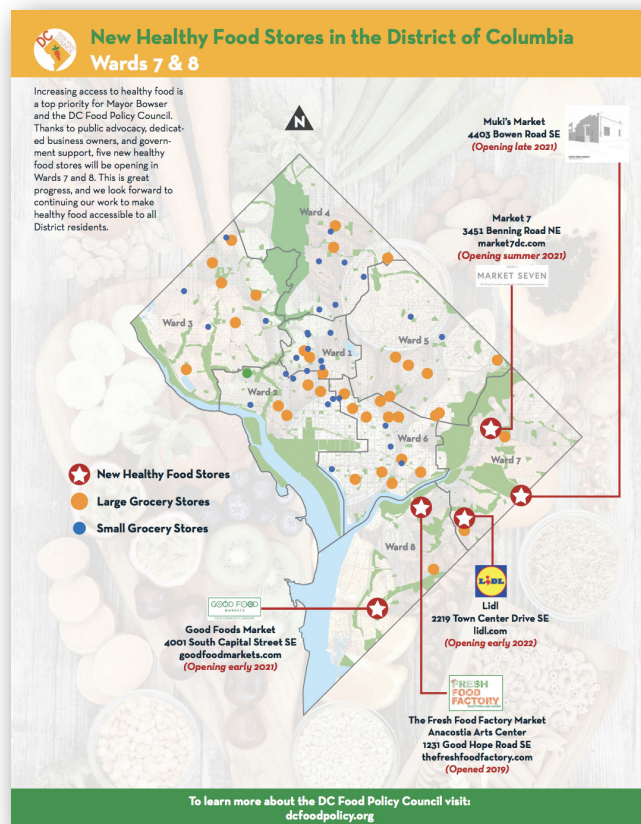
The DC Policy Council in Washington, DC, was established in 2014 and consists of food leaders and government representatives that Mayor Muriel Bowser appointed to advocate for policies that create an equitable, healthy, and sustainable food system. Since 2019, the council has delineated its food policy priorities for each year. In 2020, one of the priorities was food access and equity, which had a communication component with materials, excerpted here.

#### Food Access and Equity:

- Create a DC Good Food Investment Fund to invest in locally-owned businesses serving District neighborhoods with low access to healthy food.
- Promote programs that explore how nutritious food can improve health.
- Celebrate and increase awareness of new grocery options in DC.

The DC FPC created an attractive 2-page promotional piece about new healthy food stores in DC to share with residents, nonprofits, planners, and funders.

Figure 1: Promotional flyer about new healthy food stores in DC





## IDENTIFY AND PROFILE YOUR AUDIENCE

Once you've gathered data and finalized your goals, you can begin to think about the audiences you seek to reach with your communication activities. We encourage you to be as specific as possible with your audience profiles. Different audiences favor different communication channels and need different message strategies.

You may further break down audience segments into primary and secondary audiences. Primary audiences directly influence a particular issue and are essential to include in your communication. Secondary audiences indirectly affect the issue and are crucial at different stages or places. Power mapping is one tool that helps to determine your audiences for advocacy campaigns by prioritizing who has the power and influence to change things. For more information on power mapping, visit [The Commons](#).

### ***Audience considerations for advocacy campaigns***

Policymakers and decision-makers are core audiences for the advocacy work that FPCs undertake. Elected officials also want to make decisions that reflect their constituents' interests, concerns, and desires. Their interest in hearing from the public is one of many reasons to work closely with people affected by the issue you are addressing.

You may have to target more than one agency, institution, or government entity for successful advocacy. Consider who you need on board to make your case for change.

The list of questions to the right is not comprehensive but is intended to share ideas for developing an advocacy campaign for your food policy issues.

#### ***Reaching new audiences: Montgomery Roots***

In 2017, Montgomery Roots, a food council in Alabama that EAT South hosted, conducted a community food assessment deeply embedded in the community. Rather than distributing paper copies of their [formal report](#), they created a flyer to resonate with the general public. The flyer highlighted key findings on one side and the Alabama and Auburn football schedules on the other side (Figure 2), recognizing that this would be well received by community members who are not aware of their work. They distributed the flyers at community events, health fairs, and food education sessions at the housing authority and churches.

#### ***Identifying target audiences: Beaufort County HEAL Collaborative and Food Council***

Beaufort County, North Carolina, is a rural county with 47,000 residents. As part of the Beaufort County HEAL (Healthy Eating Active Living) Collaborative and Food Council's [communication plan](#), they prioritized the audiences they needed to reach, focusing on residents and officials in Beaufort who are affected by the FPC's efforts. They also named a person to lead each effort. Here's an excerpt from their plan:

## KEY QUESTIONS FOR AUDIENCES

- What is their current and past position on the issue (if they have one)? How can you address their concerns?
- What data/information do they need on the issue?
- How would they benefit by supporting what we want them to do? Similarly, how can achieving your objectives support their interest?
- How will support for this issue address racial equity or food justice in your community? Are there any perceived inherent biases that may influence decision-making?
- Who are the likely allies? Opponents? Undecided?
- How does this decision-maker(s) typically make policy decisions?
- How have other jurisdictions addressed this issue? What plans and studies can inform your communication?
- Are there any legal considerations you need to communicate about the issue?

## KEY RESOURCES:

- [CLF power mapping example](#)
- [Bolder Advocacy](#), a program of Alliance for Justice, provides free advice on advocacy for nonprofits and has many resources available to understand the legal considerations.

## TAILORING MATERIALS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Embedding **all** of your work in and with community members most affected by food system disparities will make your efforts most relevant and will elevate your legitimacy as a group. Throughout this guide, we highlight several examples of councils that have employed various techniques to create a council that is influenced and sometimes led by the community. When you are doing communications work that is intended to reach community audiences, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

1. Use background materials that reflect community perspectives, interests, goals, and priorities.
2. Know where community members currently get their news and information and use those distribution channels.
3. Pretest your messages and materials with the people you want to reach.
4. Within any audience, you will find variations. Try to tailor your messages as much as possible to fit who you want to reach.

## Priority Audiences Based on Goal

Goal 1: Maintain and grow summer food program:

- Local families
- Beaufort County Schools
- Youth (children in grades 9 through 12)
- Churches
- Early childcare workers


Goal 2: Increase funding for HEAL in Aurora:

- Elected officials
- County residents

Goal 3: Provide a shared vision for creating a virtual and/or physical network for farmers

- HEAL Collaborative
- Farmers
- Restaurants
- School system

Figure 2: The Food Turn Up Flyer



**THE FOOD TURN-UP REPORT**

Our Food Turn Up Report (@MontgomeryRoots) is an educational tool that shares practical ways to prevent and reduce chronic disease by creating a stronger and more local food system.

Earning potential, generational wealth, access to health education and living in a community that reflects health and monetary success are related to the physical health of a person.

**WE FOUND THE BIGGEST ISSUES TO BE AROUND:**

- Hunger and waste
- Barriers to accessing locally grown, fresh and healthy food
- Lost skills around growing, preparing and preserving fresh and local food

EAT BETTER. LIVE BETTER. LOOK BETTER. FEEL BETTER.  
EatSouth.org

**THE FOOD TURN UP**

**HERE'S SOME VALUABLE INFO YOU NEED!**  
@MontgomeryRoots

**2017 GAME SCHEDULE**

ALABAMA		AUBURN	
9/2 vs	Florida State	9/2 vs	Ga Southern
9/9 vs	Fresno State	9/9 @	Clemson
9/16 vs	Colorado State	9/16 vs	Mercer
9/23 @	Vanderbilt	9/23 @	Missouri
9/30 vs	Ole Miss	9/30 vs	Miss St
10/7 @	Texas A&M	10/7 vs	Ole Miss
10/14 vs	Arkansas	10/14 @	LSU
10/21 vs	Tennessee	10/21 @	Arkansas
11/4 vs	LSU	11/4 @	Texas A&M
11/11 @	Miss St	11/11 vs	Georgia
11/18 vs	Mercer	11/18 vs	UL Monroe
11/25 @	Auburn	11/25 vs	Alabama

EAT BETTER. LIVE BETTER. LOOK BETTER. FEEL BETTER.  
EatSouth.org



## DEVELOP MESSAGES

Message development is the next step in the process. Messages are value statements for FPCs and need to be developed by a team of people. Your messages are also closely tied to your goals, which reflect available data and information. Messages deliver essential information about key issues and compel intended audiences to think, feel, or act on an issue. While data alone rarely move people to make any changes, you can use data to help make a case for your communication campaign—creative approaches such as storytelling animate what might otherwise be a dry regurgitation of facts.

Messaging statements can be used as a set of talking points about the benefits of supporting a particular policy change, letters to the editor, or community outreach activities.

Particularly for advocacy efforts, people use the term “framing” to describe message development. Simply stated, framing is the process of deciding how you present and discuss an issue to influence someone’s view of that issue. We encounter framing examples every time we engage with media sources, political or social movements, political leaders, or influential individuals. How we frame a message can change its meaning and impact.

For example, the photos in figure 3 illustrate the process that was followed by a group of stakeholders in Dayton, Ohio, to bring a co-op grocery to their community using a democratic decision-making process. They framed the issue of food access as one that needs to be in the community’s hands rather than relying on a large retail chain to solve the problem. They describe their process as a step toward building a movement.

Figure 3: “Advocate, Reflect, Vote” (Hall Hunger Initiative, Ohio)

*“Dayton has been hard hit by grocery store closures in low-income areas. Instead of begging the big companies to stay, the community took the lead and built a worker-owned, community-controlled co-op grocery store. These photos are from the Annual Membership Meeting. Upon proof of membership, each person receives a green and red card. Throughout the evening, various options are debated then put to the vote of the members. Decisions aren’t made in New York by looking at a spreadsheet; they are made in a community center looking at the neighborhood. The Hall Hunger Initiative proudly supports Co-op Dayton, the lead organization bringing a community-run grocery to the people. We’re not building a grocery store; we’re building a movement!”*



Photo credit: Mark Willis, CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2019.

## TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE MESSAGING

- **Be succinct and avoid jargon:** Most people will remember up to three points. Define the problem and the solution, provide soundbites and examples that people can use, and provide simple data visuals as necessary (e.g., policy briefs that address the “so what” question).
- **Turn data into images:** Compare big numbers and information with something readers can understand. For example, “the amount of farmland lost every year in our state is equal to the size of Delaware.” This tactic is called social math.
- **Exercise cultural competence:** Messages need to consider cultural differences among your audiences and understand and respect different world views. Cultural competence also means taking into account language differences and the need for translation. For example, the Springfield FPC in Massachusetts chose to produce their [website](#) in Spanish and English.
- **Share the benefits:** Provide persuasive responses to the questions and communicate the benefits of supporting an issue. Why is this issue important now? What pushback may your audience face from others?
- **Use compelling stories/narratives:** Humanize the issue(s), emphasize how the solution addresses disparities and helps constituents. People remember stories that create an emotional connection.

*Continued on next page...*

*Continued from “Tips”...*

- **Select appropriate messengers:** The spokesperson must be trustworthy and credible to the audience. Different messengers may be needed for different audiences.
- **Carrots versus sticks:** As much as possible, use positive messages that motivate people and propose solutions. Negative messaging can backfire, and people get fatigued hearing about all the things that are wrong. Better to inspire than scare.

#### **Key resources:**

- Messaging for External Audiences workgroup session [recording](#) and [slides](#)
- [Good Food Movement messaging guide](#)
- Voices for Healthy Kids [Racial Equity in Public Policy Messaging Guide](#)
- Voices for Healthy Kids [Tips for messaging](#)

In 2001, the Food Trust in Philadelphia framed poor access to healthy food as a children’s health issue. “Food for Every Child” was launched to increase the number of supermarkets in low-income neighborhoods “to ensure that children live in communities that have access to safe, nutritious and affordable food.” They cite higher rates of diet-related disease in both children and adults, the small number of supermarkets located in low-income neighborhoods, and the private sector’s outsized influence on where supermarkets choose to locate as reasons to support public investment in new food retail.

When you consider how to frame an issue, you want to understand the context in which you operate. Some things to consider:

- **Political climate:** Is there political will? Can you build political will? Are you interested in creating awareness for future activities?
- **Economic climate:** What are the competing strains on the budget? What are the priorities? Are you interested in expanding on existing ideas/actions, new initiatives, both? What is the cost of not doing something? Can you partner with other organizations to expand your reach?
- **Social climate:** Is the public already interested? Have you made your issue known with support from an array of potential stakeholders? Are there existing networks you can tap into to gain support?

If you advocate augmenting SNAP benefits at the state level, you will frame the message differently for different audiences. Research has shown that increasing SNAP benefits helps families avoid food insecurity and operates as an economic stimulus. Policymakers will be interested in knowing how many constituents the increase will affect. They may also be interested in the implications for local grocery stores that rely on SNAP customers. Community members will want to know if the increase will help families and neighbors avoid hunger. Nonprofits will advocate for the increase if it positively affects the people they serve. Each frame requires a nuanced message that reflects your understanding of the issue.

Pretesting messages is a great way to test ideas without executing an entire campaign or communication activity. It is best to pretest your message ideas with people from the audience you are trying to address. You can share it with others and ask for feedback in a pinch, but this is a less effective method. Is the message appealing? How does it make them feel about the issue? Would they be persuaded to take action? Do they read any implicit and explicit meaning in the message? Pretesting messages is essential to avoid any miscommunication or missteps.

## The Rhode Island Food Policy Council

As part of the state's focus on developing a food systems resilience plan, the Rhode Island FPC launched a multimedia campaign called "Grown here, caught here, made here" in 2020. Each week, they focused on a different aspect of the food system: (1) farming, (2) food justice: urban farming and food access, (3) commercial fisheries, (4) emergency feeding, (5) aquaculture, (6) food waste: gleaning and composting, (7) farmers markets, and (8) food hubs. They used the COVID-19 pandemic to understand the importance of resilience and discussed the ongoing issues for each sector. The campaign offered three ways to engage: 1) Advocate for the issue with an elected official, 2) Support the economy by purchasing a product, and 3) Donate to a related nonprofit. Weekly live segments featured local food leaders.

*"We've all seen the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on our food system; long lines at emergency feeding sites fields full of food going to waste. The market channels linking farms and fisheries to our communities are more fragile than most of us imagined. The need for greater resilience in our food system has never been clearer."*

For each area of focus, the FPC provided a brief description of the issue and why it is happening, how readers can use their purchasing power, and what organizations they can donate to and support efforts in Rhode Island.

Figure 4: Example issues highlighted in Rhode Island FPC multi-media campaign



### Food Waste: Gleaning and Composting

U.S. dairy farmers have dumped as many as **3.7 million** gallons of milk each day, and chicken processors are smashing millions of unhatched eggs every week.

**Take Action:** Tell your elected officials and share with your networks: "Food waste is not garbage — if it can't be eaten it should be composted!"

[BUY](#) [DONATE](#) [WATCH AUG. 5 VIDEO](#)

**The Challenge:** Food is wasted in RI because our small farms lack the labor to harvest all of their produce, and because we throw most of our food scraps and yard clippings in the trash instead of composting.

[LEARN MORE](#)



### Food Justice: Urban farming and Food Access

Researchers have found that home gardeners saved on average **\$92** per month and community gardeners saved **\$84** per month by growing their own food.

**Take Action:** Tell your elected officials and share with your networks: "Urban gardens and farms deserve public support!"

[BUY](#) [DONATE](#)

**The Challenge:** A persistent lack of access to both fresh produce and land leads many urban residents, including immigrants and refugees, to maintain less healthy diets.



## The Good Food Purchasing Program

The Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) works with public institutions to create a transparent and equitable food system. They identified five core values that guide their work: local economies, health, valued workforce, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, the GFPP recognized the values that guide them and provide solutions to many of the problems emerging from the pandemic. They created a COVID-19 [messaging guide](#) for their partners to share how investing in GFPP can help them transition to the new normal circumstances that communities face. Here are a couple of examples:

1. Local economies: Shorter value chains are more resilient to global economic shocks, environmental crises, and pandemics.

Talking point: A strong local and regional economy can pivot quickly to meet changing demands for food. When confronted with supply chain disruptions, our local and regional farms, processing plants, distribution channels, and businesses make our communities resilient.

2. Valued workforce: Workers who are valued by society keep us healthy and ensure a stable food supply.

Talking point: Workers who harvest, process, distribute, deliver, and serve food perform a service that is essential to sustaining our communities.

3. Environmentally sustainability: Environmentally sustainable agricultural and business practices keep our communities healthy and more resilient in times of crisis.

Talking point: Agricultural production systems that prioritize healthy ecosystems, such as organic, biodynamic, and pasture-based livestock produce food that benefits our health.

## Chicago Food Policy Action Council

Here is another example from Carolina Sanchez and Kara Rodriguez of the Chicago Food Policy Action Council of using photos to tell the story of their policy process. As illustrated in their photo description:

*“Earlier this year, we brainstormed strategies for passing the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) in Cook County. We dreamed big of not only passing GFPP in the county but also across the state and the nation, and we mobilized food justice advocates to make calls and sign petitions. The second picture reflects how advocacy efforts take a lot of time inside meeting chambers—but our mobilization and patience paid off! We were the first county to pass the Good Food Purchasing Program in the nation. The Cook County resolution is the most explicit Good Food Purchasing Program policy to date that accounts for and corrects power imbalances in access to resources, land, and investment for businesses, workers, and farmers that have long been marginalized in the food system, particularly low-income and communities of color. Under this program, the County will incentivize contracts with minority- and women-owned businesses in order to preserve and secure urban farmland with equitable community ownership and to transition publicly owned vacant lots to minority-owned social enterprises and land trusts. The impact will be over \$20 million in annual purchasing for the county’s hospitals and prisons.”*

Figure 5: “From Dreaming Big to Equity: Passing the Good Food Policy Program in Cook County”



Photo credit: Carolina Sanchez and Kara Rodriguez, CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2018.

## SELECT COMMUNICATION METHODS, MATERIALS, AND ACTIVITIES

There are a variety of communication methods available to reach your intended audiences. Channels take many forms, and there is an infinite list of possibilities.

When advocating for a policy issue, you can employ different methods to achieve your goal.

- Direct advocacy: Persuading decision-makers on public policy
- Community engagement: Building awareness and support
- Media engagement: Getting your message out to the public

The examples below highlight how food systems organizations have implemented these three communication and advocacy methods.

### ***Direct advocacy for policy change***

#### ***Cultivate Charlottesville Food Justice Network***

The Cultivate Charlottesville Food Justice Network in Virginia “builds racial equity in the food system through education, organizing, and advocacy. As a collective, over [35 organizations](#) work in unique and complementary ways to build a healthy and just food system in Charlottesville.” Cultivate’s Food Justice Network focuses on the intersection of food equity and multiple sectors including: healthy school foods, affordable housing, urban agriculture, access and markets, and food pathways and transportation.

Food Justice Network (FJN) works in partnership with community members, nonprofits, the University of Virginia, and Charlottesville City government. FJN explores ways in which our local food system creates opportunities and barriers to accessible healthy food; amplifies an understanding of practices that contribute to racial and food inequity; mobilizes resources for combined impact across aligned organizations; and implements strategies and activities to transform inequities in our food system. After five years of working collaboratively, the Network launched the Food Equity Policy Platform in the spring of 2021. The Mayor and other elected officials joined their virtual launch and spoke in support of their forward-thinking platform which includes six planks: food equity and justice, the power to grow, the right to good food, inspire youth choice, build community wealth, and restore earth and climate. When the platform was launched, they also created an advocacy toolkit that details the purpose, audiences, platforms, timeline, and recommended social media messages when they launched the platform. Finally, they provided a sample letter to send to city councilors and school board members to urge them to support the platform. The local paper covered the policy platform.

Example message for The Power to Grow: In pursuit of restoring the power to grow for every community, an equitable investment in urban agriculture is needed to counter impacts of necessary housing redevelopment and decreased food access and environmental health. When families have the power to grow, land is liberation.

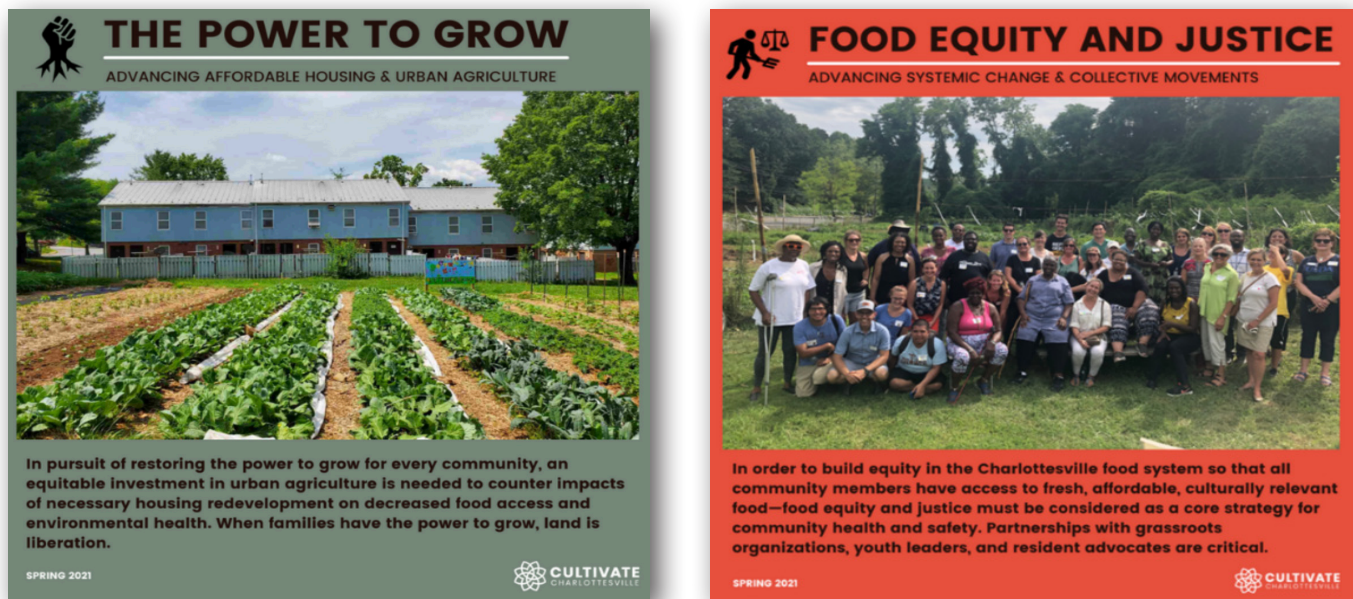
## KEY QUESTIONS FOR IDENTIFYING THE CHANNELS FOR REACHING AUDIENCES

- Where or from whom does this audience get its information?
- Who do they find credible?
- Where does this audience spend most of its time?
- Where are they most likely to give you their attention?

## KEY RESOURCES FOR DIRECT ADVOCACY:

- [Advocacy and Lobbying 101 for FPCs](#)
- [Get it Toolgether: Assessing Your Food Council’s Ability to Do Policy Work](#) was developed for any food system group that works (or aspires to work) on policy issues

Figure 6: Food Equity Initiative Policy Platform webpage screenshots



Example message for Food Equity and Justice: Sign on to show your support for the Food Equity Initiative Policy Platform recommendations and the Food Equity Initiative goals for cultivating a healthy and just food system for ALL Charlottesville residents.

### *Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition*

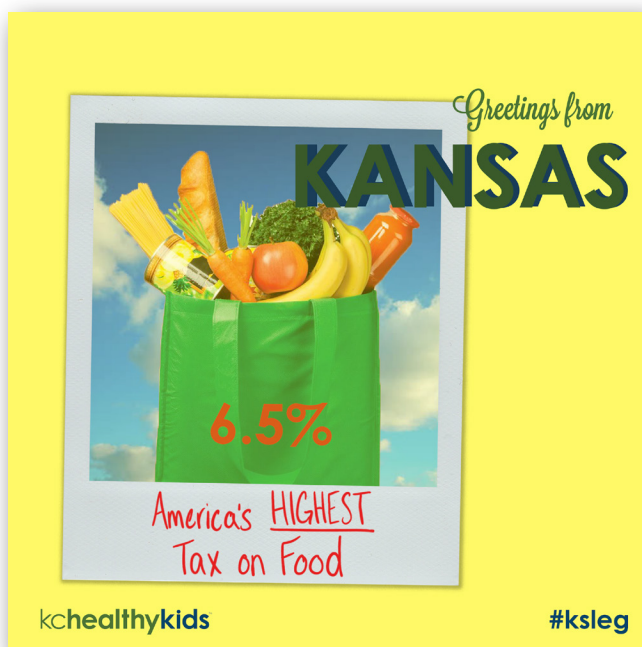
**Goal:** The Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition, housed within the nonprofit KC Healthy Kids, has led the legislative battle to reduce the state grocery tax. The Coalition is advocating to remove the sales tax on food as an undue burden on low-income families.

**Audience:** State policymakers

**Key Messages – Objectives and Tone:** One of the priorities in the 2020-2023 Policy Agenda of the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition is to “improve access to affordable fresh foods through local, state, and federal policy.” Kansas currently has the highest grocery tax in the US, at 6.5%. Under this goal, the Coalition launched a campaign in 2019 to persuade policymakers to reduce the sales tax on food in Kansas to one comparable to surrounding states to communicate the impact of grocery tax on food access. They drafted a sign-on letter that included persuasive arguments to end the grocery tax.

**Key Channels:** The Coalition developed informative postcards and printouts sent to supportive legislators to encourage them to file legislation in the 2019 session to reduce the grocery sales tax in Kansas. This material communicates the policy issue and reasons to support a lower grocery tax. The 2020 legislative session used similar materials, and they successfully lowered the tax that year, but not the rate they were seeking.

Figure 7: Postcard used to advocate against the grocery sales tax in Kansas





## Community engagement

Community engagement means different things to different councils, and engagement differs depending upon where councils are situated. Many councils struggle to determine how to engage community members meaningfully, yet developing relationships with the people most affected by food system problems is paramount in shaping your work. Recognize that it will take years to build trusted relationships, so proceed knowing that it's never too late to reach out. The continuum in figure 8 illustrates the stages of community engagement.

Consider your current relationships, capacity, and ability to determine what you can take on for your communication efforts authentically.

### Northwest Indiana Food Council

The NWI Food Council was established in 2015 to serve all counties in Northwest Indiana and create a “just, thriving, and regenerative local food system.” NWI Food Council focuses on the local food system, outreach and education, policy, research, and food access. The council uses collaboration and partnerships to improve NW Indiana’s food system by effective grant writing, consistent, ongoing projects, and successful, community-focused events. In 2017, NWI Food Council hosted Farm Hop, an annual event that allows community members to engage with producers

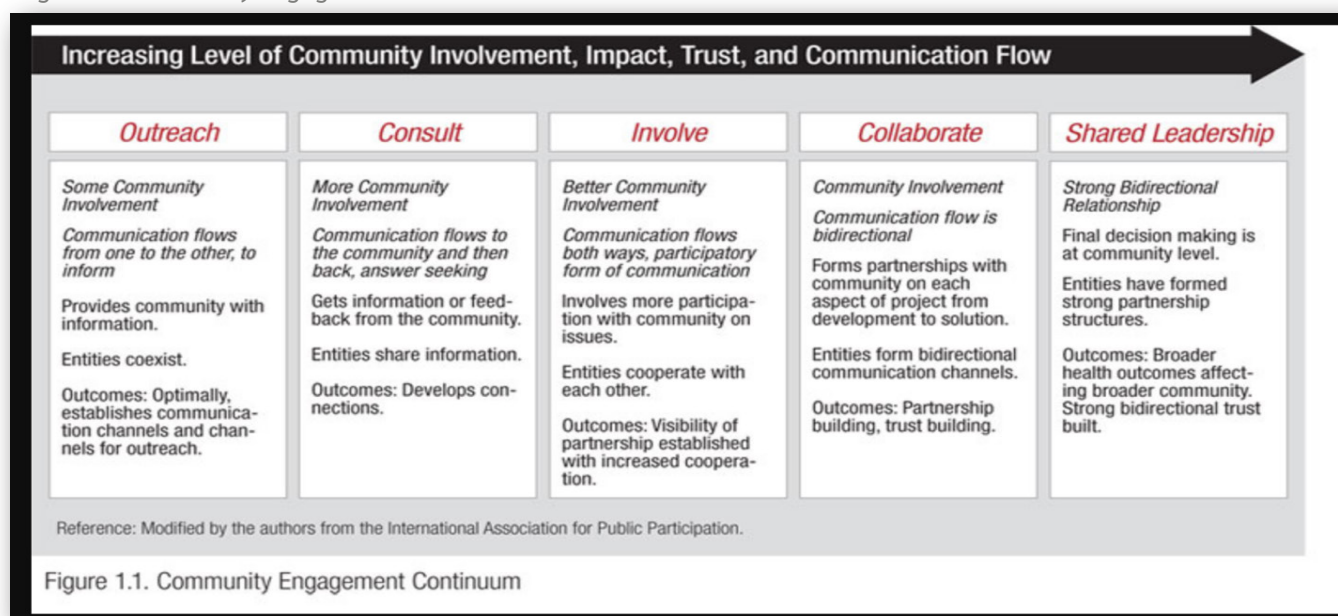
in their region and learn more about local food. The council even hosted a modified virtual version during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Audiences:** Community members, business/restaurant owners, and distributors served by the NWI Food Council and are local to the region.

**Key Messages - Objective and Tone:** One of the NWI Food Council’s focus areas is local food and farmer support, which creates an opportunity for community members to bolster the local economy and enhance the quality of life in the area. Supporting local food also “strengthens relationships between eaters, farmers, winemakers, brewers, and producers across the region.”

**Key Channels:** Pre-COVID, this event was held in person, and guests chose multiple tours, each focused on different producer specialties such as urban farming, organic vegetable farming, and farms with heritage breed animals that participate in the annual Farm Hop. This event puts the farms in the spotlight to effectively frame the value. The 2020 event was held virtually due to COVID, allowing farmers to create media footage of their farms, describe what they specialize in, and emphasize their personal messages. NWI Food Council educated the public on the local food system and encouraged community and farmer relationships during this activity.

Figure 8: Community engagement continuum



Source: McCloskey et al. (2011). “Community engagement: Definitions and organizing concepts from the literature,” in *Principles of Community Engagement (Second Edition)*. NIH Publication No. 11-7782. Figure modified by McCloskey et al. from the International Association for Public Participation.

### ***San Diego Food Systems Alliance***

In June 2019, the San Diego Food Systems Alliance began developing a campaign to create a food system that belongs to everyone. The [San Diego County Food Vision 2030](#) is a multi-year effort that seeks to create “a healthier, more sustainable and more just food system in San Diego County by 2030.” After spending its first year reviewing historical and current data and interviewing local food system leaders and experts, the Alliance launched its campaign to engage multiple communities to develop the Food Vision. They developed relationships with 12 community-based organizations working in under-invested neighborhoods throughout the County.

As part of the overall visioning exercise, the Alliance called out three cross-cutting topics that intersect with the food system: climate change, equity, and resilience. They created a web page for each of these topics, including a brief description of the issue, recommended shorter readings, and a virtual Post-it® wall full of ideas. The Alliance used the visioning exercise to introduce new issues to community members who may not have considered them connected.

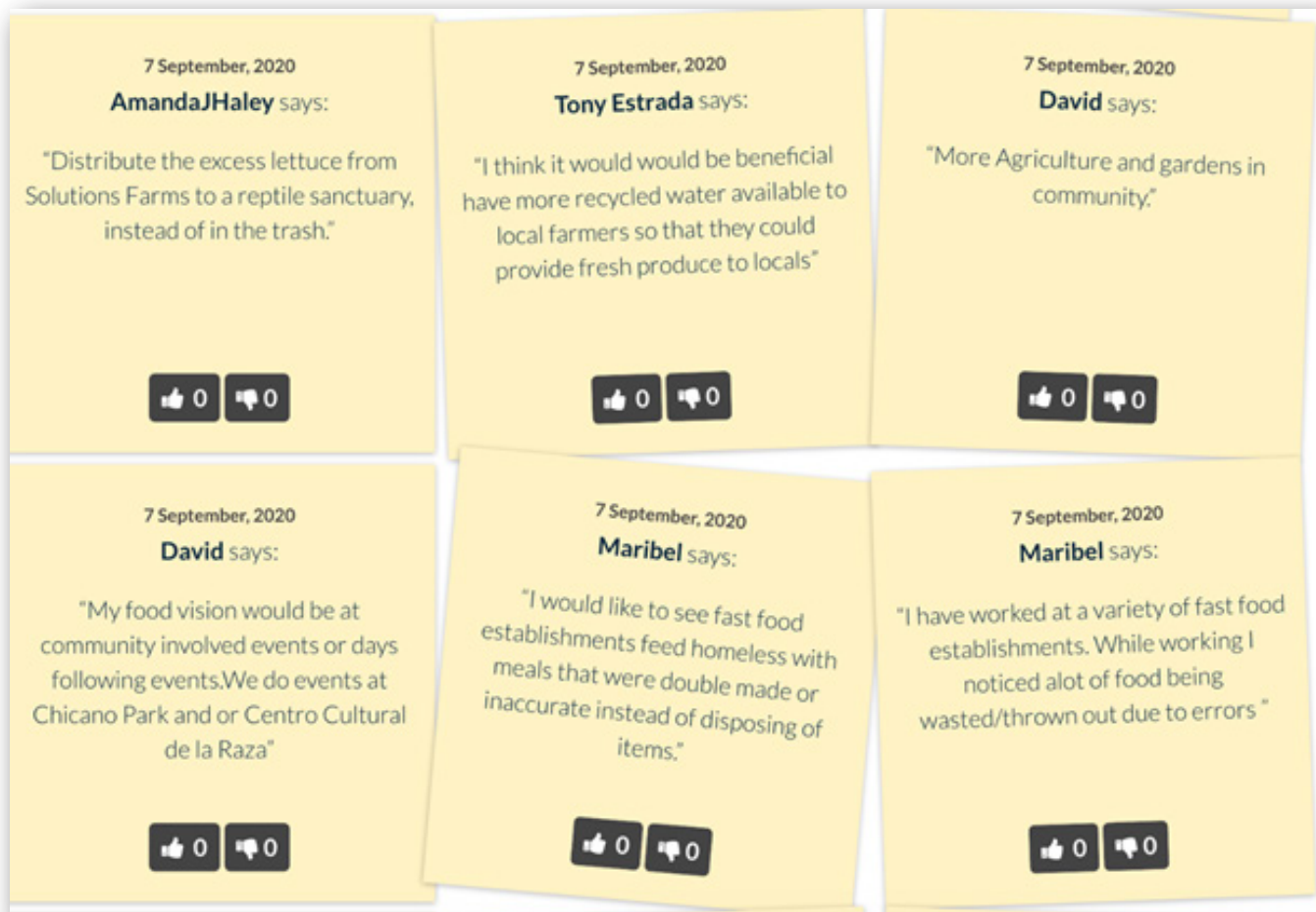
**Audiences:** Community members affected by food systems issues and food system workers.

**Key Messages – Objectives and Tone:** “The San Diego Food System Alliance launched Food Vision 2030 because the time to reimagine and rebuild our food system is now. Our current path is not working, and changes need to happen at the community level.

To create a food system that works for everyone, we engage the whole community, including people who produce, prepare, distribute, serve, and eat food. We want to build a shared vision—one that includes your voice.”

**Key Channels:** Pre-COVID-19, the Alliance hosted in-person gatherings, but their work shifted online due to the pandemic. The website includes a food vision wall with virtual Post-it® notes where people can post their hopes and dreams for their community. A short survey is available for community members to identify priorities for their communities. Finally, they have also created surveys for workers from each sector to weigh in: farmers, farmworkers, restaurants, independent retailers, fisherfolk, and food workers.

*Figure 9: Virtual Post-it® food vision wall*



Community success stories are highlighted and snapshots of relevant San Diego County data. All community activities are available in multiple languages. Sixty percent of the respondents were from under-invested neighborhoods or were food workers.

## Media engagement

Media engagement can be defined as contacting a journalist, editor, or media outlet to pitch a story, submitting a letter to the editor, or issuing a press release. While social media has swallowed up much of the media space, there is still value in connecting with and developing relationships with local reporters. They can be powerful allies in your work. If you hold a candidates' forum, do you know who to contact at your local newspaper? What about increasing public awareness of what your council does and who it seeks to engage? Depending upon the size of your media market, reaching out directly to journalists can be an effective means of getting the word out about anything relevant to the council. Social media is a popular tool to repeat and emphasize your messages, but it may not suffice as the only tool for your work. FPCs regularly engage with the media in their area. We offer several media engagement examples below:

- Winton Pitcoff, Massachussets Food System Collaborative, published this guest [viewpoint](#) on a statewide news website during the pandemic.
- In Michigan, the Washtenaw County government [used local news media](#) to recruit new members.
- Chicago Mayor Lightfoot announced the [first food equity agenda through a press release](#). [Ruby Ferguson](#) talked about her new position leading those efforts on local television.
- Detroit Food Policy Council released a press release to announce its [Great Grocer project](#) with Wayne State University.
- In Kansas, LiveWell Geary County's food policy council [announced access](#) to healthy meals and promoted their food system survey through local news coverage.
- In North Carolina, the Salisbury Post featured the [Rowan Farm and Food Network](#) and its role during the pandemic. Asheville-Buncombe FPC used their local newspaper to [announce their meetings](#).
- The Cass Clay Food Partners of Minnesota and North Dakota wrote a [series of letters](#) to their local paper in the summer of 2020 advocating for local food system solutions to many of the pandemic's food system problems.

## KEY RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

- Alliance for Justice offers an assessment tool called [PowerCheck](#) for organizations, coalitions, and groups to assess their capacity to engage in community organizing
- [Network Weaving Workshop on engagement](#)
- [Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement: A guide to transformative change](#)
- [Jefferson County Public Health Food Systems Team, "Recovery, Rebuilding, and Resilience: Centering Community to Create a Food Secure Jefferson Co"](#)
- [The Healthy Food Policy Project, Food Access Policy Change Through Authentic Resident Engagement](#)
- [Food Policy for All: Inclusion of Diverse Community Residents on Food Policy Councils](#)

## KEY RESOURCES FOR MEDIA ENGAGEMENT:

- [Slides on "Spokesperson techniques for effective media relations"](#)

## Social media

Social media has become a part of our daily lives and has created an opportunity to facilitate consistent communication between FPCs and their audiences. Social media also presents an opportunity for FPCs/food system organizations and community members to advocate to their officials for policy change. Many FPCs have included specific social media goals in their communication plans with ideas to increase engagement with their page(s).

Successful social media strategies regularly provide new content, reinforce across platforms, cross-promote other organizations' relevant content, release new content during popular times. Hootsuite is a platform that allows you to schedule posts for different platforms like Facebook and Twitter. If you can't afford or manage a separate website for your group, Facebook provides a cheap and easy alternative. Depending on the size of your organization, an active Facebook page may be preferable to maintaining an entire website, and it streamlines events promotion. Right-size your expectations for your group with available resources and consider what platforms your audiences are most likely to engage with.

Since most FPCs do not have paid staff, partnering with similar organizations to amplify your messaging is a great way to extend your reach. Ask your members to post on behalf of the FPC and offer to do the same for them. There may be local media personalities who are interested in your issues. If you use Twitter, tag and follow anyone you think would be interested in your events or issues. Even if you are only posting a couple of times a week, that exposure can be amplified through others on social media.

Campaign for Action produced a [getting started guide](#) on social media, which provides step-by-step instructions for setting up your social media efforts.

Media Cause also created 25 tips on [social media best practices](#) for nonprofits, including visuals, content calendars, and cross-promotion.

### Alaska Food Policy Council

The Alaska Food Policy Council created a three-tiered [digital communication strategy](#) focused on its website/blog, social media, and a quarterly newsletter. The council developed the strategy to effectively show its relevance and communicate its mission: to improve Alaska's food system through secure access to healthy foods and create a sustainable food system for residents. The social media section includes schedules,


best practices, and engagement ideas.

### HEAL Food Alliance, Food Chain Workers Alliance, and Union of Concerned Scientists National Call-in Day Action

In July 2020, a group of environmental and food system organizations organized a National Call-in Day for community members to call or tweet their Senators and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to tell them to issue emergency standards to protect meatpacking and other frontline workers in the food system during the COVID-19 pandemic. They put together a [social media toolkit](#) with sample tweets and graphics to use and suggestions about which senators to tag.

The social media toolkit has a specific function but provides a relevant example for using social media to advocate for a policy or program change and adapt to FPC-specific goals. The excerpt in Figure 10 shows some of their sample tweets during COVID-19.

Figure 10: Social media toolkit from a national call-in day of action for food workers

Tell Congress & OSHA: #PROTECT WORKERS National Call-in Day Action Social Media Tool-kit Start Posting THURSDAY July 30 at 9AM		
Sample Social Media Language		
Sample tweets	Graphics	Suggested Tags
The COVID-19 Every Worker Protection Act of 2020 was included in the HEROES Act and passed by the House. Now, the Senate must do the same. Workers have the right to a safe workplace #ProtectAllWorkers bit.ly/EmergencyStandardsNow	<a href="#">Download here</a> 	@SenateDems @SenSchumer @SenatorDurbin @PattyMurray @SenStabenow @SenDougJones @SenGaryPeters @SenatorSinema @SenatorTester @senatemajldr
@FERNnews: Tens of thousands of meatpacking & farm workers have contracted COVID-19, & cases continue to increase, with nearly 90% of infections occurring among workers of color. Congress must ensure that OSHA issues an emergency standard. #S3677 #ProtectAllWorkers.		
Why hasn't @OSHA_DOL issued an emergency standard requiring all employers to provide necessary protections for workers?! Essential workers are not disposable! We need the Senate to step up to #ProtectAllWorkers bit.ly/EmergencyStandardsNow		



## ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS

As noted earlier, relationships are the bedrock from which FPCs derive their legitimacy. Overall, the partnerships you need to form for your work are different from those you need for external communication efforts. Are they endorsing your efforts, co-leading, cross-promoting, doing media interviews? Prioritize partnerships that share your vision and have a potential impact on your audiences. What do you have to offer your partners or potential partners, and what do you need from them? Be creative and consider new partners and allies—who is fighting poverty, providing job training, supporting opportunity youth, or advocating for affordable housing? Strategic partnerships will magnify your messages for smaller and low-resource councils, and cross-promotion opportunities can be mutually beneficial.

Consider what partnerships your group needs to achieve your communication mission. Are you promoting a community event, and are you seeking participants? Do you want to reach a particular government agency with a campaign message? For advocacy campaigns, you will be seeking endorsements from other groups, organizations, etc. For any joint advocacy efforts, account for additional time to vet the content.

### *Chatham-Kent Food Policy Council*

The Chatham-Kent Food Policy Council in Ontario, Canada, focuses on policy and local food system advocacy. Chatham-Kent is a large producer of fruits and vegetables in Canada, but the rate of obesity and diabetes is higher than in other parts of Ontario. They have found that most of these healthy foods are not on residents' plates. The FPC was started to improve access to and increase food security in Chatham-Kent and create a more sustainable food system. To effectively share their mission and implement their goals, they created a marketing plan focused on community and social media engagement. Their [marketing plan's](#) first recommendation specifically addresses community engagement and informs people about what the FPC does. Here's an excerpt:

**Recommendation #1:** Increase the number of food policy council presentations that take place throughout the community.

#### **Purpose:**

- To enlighten the community on “What We Do” as a food policy council
- To provide opportunities for relationship building which can, directly and indirectly, support programming (increase number of volunteers, donors, community partners, etc.)

#### **Events for consideration:**

- SouthWest Ontario Agricultural Conference
- Rural-Urban Dinner (Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce)
- Taste of Lambton-Kent Gala hosted by Ag in the Classroom

#### **Agencies/Organizations for consideration:**

- United Way of Chatham-Kent (Bushels of Hope)
- Service Groups (i.e., Optimist Clubs of Chatham-Kent, Rotary Clubs of Chatham-Kent, etc.)
- Chatham-Kent Nonprofit Network
- Business-related groups (Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce, BIA's – Blenheim, Chatham, Dresden, Ridgeway, Wallaceburg, Wheatley)
- Schools

#### **Cultural/Diversification Opportunities**

- Work with various organizers of cultural groups/event organizers to develop strategies that support using local foods and offering healthier food options.
  - ▶ Diverse City Party
  - ▶ Festival of Nations
  - ▶ Chatham-Kent Local Immigration Partnership
  - ▶ Adult Language & Learning Centre

### *Sonoma County Food System Alliance*

The Sonoma County Food System Alliance in California developed the [Healthy and Sustainable Food Action Plan \(FAP\)](#), which establishes a community vision, local food system goals, and encourages community participation. The three-phased approach spanned 2009-2016. Phase 2 focused on action and engagement and used a three-pronged approach, including an endorsement and city resolution effort, as well as a communication plan designed specifically to support the growth of Sonoma County's food system network. The endorsement strategy established about “350

endorsements and 7 City Council resolutions from private and public sector leaders, businesses, and organizations.” The FAP included an endorsement form, allowing potential supporters to describe the basis of their support and specific elements of the FAP goals that their organization most aligns with.

Their communication and engagement strategy included a website equipped with tools and an opportunity to endorse and collaborate around the FAP, two editions of newsletters produced in partnership with Sonoma County Go Local, and a Food Action Plan webinar.

## IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

---

Use the following steps to determine time, budget, and staffing needs:

1. List all activities
2. Under each activity, outline the steps that will lead to its completion
3. Assign a budget estimate to each step
4. Assign staffing needs to estimate each step – who is responsible for the work to ensure it stays on track?
5. Working backward from the activity completion point, assign a date for each step in the activity. Add time to get needed approvals from any campaign partners.

**Staying on track:** You can plot your dates on calendar pages if you’d like, or you can organize them in another timeline such as a [Gantt chart](#). Workplans are also a good tool for tracking your progress. See a suggested template [here](#).

## EVALUATE AND MAKE MID-COURSE CORRECTIONS

---

As with most things in our lives, it is good to schedule a time to reflect on how your work is proceeding.

- If you have a written plan, use it to develop benchmarks for your work. Specify times to take stock of progress.
- Who can you ask from outside of your group to provide feedback?
- Where are you running into obstacles?
- Do you admire other organizations’ communication work?
- Consult with communication technical assistance advisors.



## OTHER RESOURCES

---

### Other communication guides

- [Good Food Movement Message Guide](#), produced by the Farm to Fork Initiative
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation [Communications Toolbox](#)
- LiveWell Colorado's [Communications Guide for Emergencies Like COVID-19](#)
- [Catchafire](#) matches professionals who want to donate their time with nonprofits who need their skills.

### Storytelling

- [Webinar on food policy storytelling: Harnessing the power of story maps](#)
- [Rhode Island Stories](#) compiled by the Rhode Island Food Policy Council
- [How is COVID-19 impacting our food system?](#) by San Diego Food System Alliance
- [What Is Public Narrative: Self, Us & Now](#)

### Framing

In 2006, [Frameworks Institute](#) researched how the public perceives the food system; some of these findings are still relevant and are worth reviewing.

### Communication materials examples from FPCs

#### Annual reports

- [Charlotte-Mecklenburg FPC 2018 Annual Report](#)
- [2020 Annual Report from the Los Angeles FPC](#)
- [Washtenaw FPC Annual Report 2021](#)
- [Delaware Council on Food and Farm Policy Annual Report 2020](#)

#### Briefs and website pages of specific FPCs

- [Jefferson County FPC](#)
- [Zoo City Food and Farm Network](#)
- [The Food and Farm Council of Riley County and Manhattan, KS](#)
- [Butte County Local Food Network](#)
- [Lynn Grows](#)

#### Facebook pages

- [Plumas Sierra Community Food Council](#)
- [Chatham Community Food Council](#)
- [High Desert Food and Farm Alliance](#)

#### Newsletters

- [Springfield FPC November 2021](#)
- [Indy Food Council – The Beet, August 2021](#)
- [Staying on Beet Prince George's County Food Equity Council Newsletter, December 2021](#)

# FOOD POLICY NETWORKS

**Building Community | Applying Research | Cultivating Action**



JOHNS HOPKINS  
CENTER *for* A LIVABLE FUTURE

111 Market Place, Suite 840

Baltimore, MD 21202

[www.jhsph.edu](http://www.jhsph.edu) | [clf.jhsph.edu](http://clf.jhsph.edu)