The Politics of Community Engagement:

How to Involve Community in

Needed Food Policy Reform

By Brenda Mutuma

Detroit Food Policy Council

Emerson Hunger Fellow, 20th Class, 2013-2014
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is a big thank you to all who helped in the creation of this report. A special thanks to my supervisor, Cheryl Simon, who never failed to nurture me in my growth here in Detroit, or pick me up when the buses were running late. And to the current and former council members I interviewed, Suzette Olaker, Charity Hicks, Betti Wiggins, Malik Yakini, Phil Jones, Ashley Atkinson, and Kathryn Underwood, thank you for granting me a bit of your time, an ounce of your insight, and a wave of your brilliance.

In addition, I want to acknowledge the openness of the Minnesota Food Charter lead, Maggie Adamek, and the Oakland Food Policy Council coordinator, Esperanza Pallana, and Joel Batterman, the Policy Coordinator at M.O.S.E.S. Their efforts to help me better understand how food policy reform interacts with community members in different parts of the country showed me how important leadership development and inter-council relations are to this food movement. The food and community-focused organizations in Detroit have also played a large role in shaping my belief in the Detroit Food Policy Council’s potential.

Finally, I want to thank my family. Their belief in my greatness and potential has left me believing in the power of others to right wrongs, to turn bad into good, and to change the things that seem unchangeable. To resiliently transcend and transform and love, even when such a task gets tremendously difficult, is the key to humanity, and the heart of my work. My belief in this very council comes from that place, and I dedicate all my efforts to that kind of struggle.
Table of Contents

Section I: Introduction
  o Preface
  o Value of Community Engagement
  o Food Policy Council History

Section II: Detroit Food Policy Council
  o Background and Founding of Council
  o Land Access Achievements
  o Public Education Achievements

Section III: Case Studies
  o Oakland Food Policy Council
  o Minnesota Food Charter

Section IV: Recommendations for Detroit Food Policy Council
  o General Community Engagement Strategies for Council
  o Recommendations for Council Members Pertaining to Community Engagement

Section V: Moving Forward
  o Conclusion
  o 12 Month Process for Engaging Community Input with Council Work

Citations and Resources
Section I: Introduction to Food Policy Councils and Community Engagement

Preface

Within the past five years, the number of food policy councils has grown from 70 to 193 as more stakeholders and citizens become interested in playing a larger role in directing their food system through policy reform (2). The city of Detroit adopted its own Food Security Policy and food policy council in 2009. What makes Detroit’s Food Policy Council different than most, however, is its unique founding and the political and economic climate under which it currently exists: dissolving school districts, financial dispossession, high unemployment, elimination of basic welfare and public resources, the list goes on (8). Despite these issues, however, the Detroit Food Policy Council strives to become an advocate of inner city Detroiters, created to advise the city council on how to make Detroit a food-secure, healthy, and more equitable environment. The following report offers strategies for the Detroit Food Policy Council to increase engagement with Detroit community members in food policy decisions. Involving those most impacted by our broken food system in meaningful and educational dialogue is essential to creating a more fortified community.

Work Plan and Research Method

As an Emerson National Hunger Fellow, I was placed with the Detroit Food Policy Council from September 2013-February 2014, and focused on enhancing DFPC community engagement and public education strategies. I assessed the Council’s public education and community engagement strategies for effectiveness, efficient use of resources, leadership development and partnerships with similar organizations. After studying the history of the Detroit Food Policy Council, researching food policy councils and coalitions, interviewing numerous board members of the food policy council, and studying two cases and outreach methods of food policy focused councils in the United States, I will address the community engagement needs of the Detroit Food Policy Council, and provide recommendations for increasing community engagement.

The Value of Community Engagement

“Community” is regularly used to define a group of people that generally have something in common; a community can be determined by geographic location, shared interest, or shared identity. Engagement is a compilation of methods that describes the “broad range of interactions between people” (4). There are many ways to engage folks, whether through consultation, collaboration, informal group or town hall meetings, even information delivery and advocacy. Putting the two words together, community engagement is having a “planned
process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people.” These groups of people will share a common interest or identity, and will interact and share information in a variety of ways.

With improved community engagement, the council would have a better sense of the issues affecting inner city Detroit residents and gain insight into how to work towards increasing food security within the city. Detroit is at a unique juncture in its political and economic climate; with only a 25% voter turnout to elect Detroit’s mayor Mike Dugan, and a federally appointed emergency manager pushing the city to file for bankruptcy, disenchantment with the electorate and local city government is at an all-time high. This is not ignoring the fact that Detroit has been facing issues around food security, employment, transportation, and land access for decades. Uplifting a process of meaningful dialogue and discussion, this kind of community engagement will allow “communities to learn about, contribute, and shape the decisions that affect their lives,” while enabling the DFPC to accomplish its goals of creating a more food-secure Detroit (1).

The Detroit Food Policy Council should not take the apathy of the citizens of Detroit, nor the very real and clear issues at hand, for granted. This is an ideal moment in Detroit’s history to make significant changes in the food system, and for that reason the process of engagement from the Detroit Food Policy Council must be very intentional, pertinent, and persistent. The strength of a food policy council “lies in [its] ability to be locally relevant” and the Detroit Food Policy Council has many relevant issues it should focus on (3). The council will continue to grow in influence and notability if it has heavy community input and participation on its side. Once this strong community involvement has been established, with a higher level of participation in the policy making process, the health and welfare of such communities will improve.

Food Policy Councils: Purpose and Obligation

Food policy councils are bodies of representatives and stakeholders that come together from diverse sectors of the food system to help reform, resolve, or build awareness around food issues in a given community. Councils can be local, regional, or statewide, and are often used to advise governing bodies and educate communities about how to improve the food system. Oftentimes, food issues are dealt with in a divisive fashion, with health departments dealing with food and nutrition, or transportation departments dealing with food access, or non-profits dealing with hunger alone (5). Food policy councils were created to rectify the divisiveness, and facilitate a way for all players in the food system to come to the table and address food issues in a collaborative manner. Furthermore, council members are translators; they are responsible for figuring out, and then “translating” how certain policies affect the food systems of communities through programming and outreach, and equally responsible for advocating the needs of those same communities to governing officials (6).
Section 2: The Detroit Food Policy Council

A Brief History

Officially beginning its work in November of 2009, the Detroit Food Policy Council was founded on more activist-centered terms than most food policy councils; with a focus on community empowerment, racial equity, and the transformation of the health and wellness of Detroit, the policy council’s creation was spearheaded by members of the Detroit Black Food Security Network. DBCFSN is a grassroots organization focused on principles of self-determination, self-reliance, food sovereignty, and justice for the residents of Detroit. Malik Yakini, a founder and executive director of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, played a leading role in the founding of the Detroit Food Policy Council. Speaking with him, I discovered that the council was founded under unique conditions, with Detroit suffering from the results of “disinvestment, unemployment, racial inequities, white flight, middle class Black flight, widespread poverty, drugs, poor schools, and shortsighted, sometimes corrupt political leadership” (7). He and Charity Hicks, co-creator of the Detroit Food Justice Task Force and founding member of the Detroit Black Food Security Network, worked and researched diligently to compose a food security policy for the city of Detroit. In 2009, the city council unanimously approved The Detroit Food Policy Council to serve as an advisory board to the city council.

As was stated earlier, what makes this food policy council special is its founding by a grassroots community organization, instead of a municipal government or university body. The vision for the food policy council is grounded in making the city of Detroit “a healthy, vibrant, hunger-free populace that has easy access to fresh produce and other healthy food choices” (10). The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network was interested in educating Detroiters about their relationship to the food system, pushing them to think about their role in a policy context, and creating a body dedicated to ensuring justice for the residents in regards to the way in which they obtained their food. Their goals for the council surrounded advocating for urban agriculture rights, making sure the City of Detroit Food Security Policy was implemented and monitored, and producing and distributing an annual City of Detroit Food Policy System Report. With that, the Detroit Food Policy Council was born, and has accomplished many of the goals the founders set out hoping they would do.

The greatest accomplishments of the Detroit Food Policy Council have been on agricultural rights and public education issues. With the city facing heavy economic turmoil, the local government developed the habit of looking outward for resources instead of inward for solutions. Such a practice has left public services tarnished, political participation low, and diminished any chances of consistent conversation between city officials and community
members. The Detroit Food Policy Council must work to combat such practices and keep the opinions and values of community members as involved in government decisions as possible.

**Land Access**

When Detroiters received the news that the city was planning to sell 1900 city-owned lots to a business corporation, at a rate initially cheaper and a process faster than many Detroiters had ever seen, the Detroit Food Policy Council stepped in to accomplish one of its biggest goals yet. The council sponsored and helped facilitate a listening session between city officials and community members in July of 2013 that allowed a conversation about gentrification and land rights to transpire. The Detroit Food Policy Council partnered with the following groups: Riverfront Eastside Congregational Initiative, Gleaners Community Food Bank, and the Detroit Food and Fitness Collaborative, and came up with a series of recommendations for the city, along with a statement on behalf of Detroit residents. Advocating for a fair, just, and transparent process for purchase of City of Detroit owned land, the resulting report and controversy pushed the city government to create the Urban Agricultural Land Sale work group. The Deputy Director of the Planning and Development Department, Marja Winters, who also served on the food policy council as a government representative, led the new work group to create a new application for the purchase of city-owned land for agricultural uses. Although it didn’t address all the recommendations—for their hope was to get a new application for the purchase of city-owned land for agricultural and all other purposes—it was the first time the city government made an obvious effort to address the concerns of the food policy council and the people of Detroit.

Even before this feat, however, the food policy council’s still worked with the City Planning Commission to revise certain city regulations, like the Adopt-A-Lot permit, that allows Detroit residents access to pieces of city owned land for up to a year, and the Urban Agriculture Ordinance. The ordinance focused on protecting people from being penalized by the city government for engaging in urban agricultural practices in their living area. The Agriculture Advocates work group, in collaboration with the City Planning Commission, worked together to conduct three listening sessions, allowing residents to help compose revisions to the urban agriculture ordinance. The work group is now working on creating a similar ordinance that applies to having farm animals on private land.

**Public Education**

Another key goal of the Detroit Food Policy Council is “to produce and disseminate an annual City of Detroit Food System that assess the state of city’s food system...including activities in production, distribution, consumption, waste generation and composting, nutrition and food assistance program participation, and innovative food system programs” (11). With that, the
Detroit Food Policy Council has released two annual food reports in its period of existence. These reports offered insight into Detroit’s current food system and recommendations on how to make increase food security throughout the city.

The annual food summit has been the Detroit Food Policy Council’s primary method of educating the public for the last four years. The summit focuses on highlighting the council’s achievements and increasing their visibility in the city, promoting community engagement in local food-focused organizations and activities, and allowing the work groups an opportunity to involve community members in their specific projects.

The conference has had different themes every year, although food access and food sovereignty are the main focus. The first two summits, titled “Powering Up the Food System” focused on gaging where the community stood on food issues, and involving community members in the work of the council members. Although the food policy council offers opportunities for feedback at every summit, the first summit gathered the most information and feedback on what the community considered to be the highest priorities at that time. At the third summit, there was a greater focus in collaborating with other food-focused organizations like EarthWorks, Restaurant Opportunities Center-Michigan (ROC-MI,) DBCFSN, Institute for Population Health, Keep Growing Detroit, and RECI (Riverfront Eastside Congregational Initiative) to help run the summit. These collaborations happened in the form of the workshops offered, facilitators and speakers with heavy experience within food system issues, and of course, good food. The average number of attendees every year ranges from 300-400 people over the two day period, and the subjects covered have included: Healthy Food Access, Community Food Justice, Schools and Institutions, and Urban Agriculture. This year’s theme for the summit focuses on race and the role it plays within food access/sovereignty issues.

Section III: Case Studies

The following studies center on the methods of two food-focused organizations aspiring to influence and reform in the food policies of their area. As was stated earlier, this report focuses on methods of community engagement and involving as many members as possible in the food policy work, and the following two cases underscore the importance of consistent collaboration and community input at the base of policy.
**Oakland Food Policy Council**

“Food is our focus and policy is our tool but we are nothing if not a gathering of the community first.”

-Oakland Food Policy Council

The Oakland Food Policy Council values a collaborative approach when it comes to internal and external forms of engagement. Speaking with Esperanza Pallana, the Coordinator for the Oakland Food Policy Council, I discovered that one effective way to engage large numbers of community member in food policy council work is through partnering consistently with organizations which focus mainly on community building and community empowerment. There are three organizations the Oakland Food Policy Council partners with, all of which are rooted in gathering feedback and participation from community members. The three organizations—the HOPE Collaborative, People’s Grocery, and People United for a Better Life In Oakland (PUEBLO)—all have a social justice focus, a significant following, and a base in community organizing. The HOPE Collaborative, who they have worked very closely with is an organization that has a focus on peoples’ health and well-being in the city of Oakland. Alone, the HOPE Collaborative is an organization compiled of agencies and community based organizations that offer leadership training, youth programming, and tangible ways for community members to get involved in issues that plague their environment. With the Oakland Food Policy Council, however, the HOPE Collaborative helps organize forums and town-hall meetings where the Food Policy Council can gage what issues are of highest priority to the people of Oakland. Pallana explained that within the reach of the three aforementioned groups, the Oakland Food Policy also conducts community surveys “to ensure our priorities are aligned with what the community needs and wants” because, “, academia is not enough, especially about those who are affected most by the hardships of economics and hunger.”

The most interesting part of my conversation with Pallana was her take on how the council related to people, and the people related to policy. Initially, when beginning her work as the coordinator for the council, she had heard that the council was seen as “heady-trippy” by many in the city. “Head-trippy,” as she defined it, was a term used to describe an “academic heavy” council, that had a tendency to be more research and writing-focused than involved with the folks they were attempting serve. This tendency is understandable initially, for policy is heavily informed by academic research and data. If not enough time is dedicated, however, to civil servant and civilian interaction, distrust and apathy follow, and policy will reflect less of the wills of community members. What folks need to understand, stated Esperanza, is that “all cultures council,” that it is “basic human behavior to council.” To most, “policy can seem like a very intimidating thing,” but if the policy is rooted in the voices of the people first, and then allowed to be transformed and molded by both the people and the council members, then it doesn’t seem so bad. She said that achieving that goal, of getting the council members to make
a habit of operating from the standpoint of community members first, has been one of the most rewarding aspects of working with the Oakland Food Policy Council. The OFPC has been able to effectively handle land and food access issues, move forward with their work group projects, and strengthen their publicity within the community and Alameda County governance. The key to a successful food policy council lies in the ability to stay relevant, and the use of community input as a base to work up from is the perfect way to start.

**Minnesota Food Charter**

If operating from a community standpoint is the key to getting community involved in food policy work, then gathering what the community thinks and feels about their food system is the next step to real engagement in the policy process. Where the Oakland Food Policy Council uses a convening method that involves being present in a physical space, the Minnesota Food Charter takes community engagement to another—more virtual—level. The food charter is a broad based public input process that will enable the state of Minnesota to better understand the state of affairs of their food system. Using a consulting firm of fifteen, a steering committee of 24, and an online tool capable of quantifying, gathering, and documenting the thoughts, suggestions, and inquiries of community members, the state of Minnesota will be able to better address the needs of those suffering from food injustice within the state.

Heavy strategic planning went into running the food charter program, of which is still being carried out today (Figure 1). I spoke with Maggi Adamek, the founder and principle of the agency that is heading the Minnesota Food Charter project, and she broke down the process of implementation. I was informed that after the internet tool was created, there were Food Charter Events held in order to gather information on the ground. Adamek and her colleagues “developed structured worksheets combining close ended/ranked and open-ended questions focusing on barriers and strategies” for community members to fill out. Using the steering committee they created, composed of people from diverse sectors of the food system, their own connections, and people who were connected via the Healthy Eating Minnesota Network, Adamek and her agency were able to take people who were already leaders in the food community and get them to conduct nearly 150 public events that enabled folks a new way to “better understand how to identify or think about barriers and strategies with a great deal of specificity.” Adamek explained that the events were not just about addressing the fact people didn’t have equal access to food but pushing folks to think about ways they could bring more healthier food into their state within the context of policy, systems, and environmental change. The workshops were also designed to make leaders out of community members, offering workshop training to anyone willing to run a workshop, with the intention of pulling full participation by everyone at the meeting, even introverts.
“It is important to consider that this participant feedback is NOT data, but information shared by participants through a consistent, structured public process that can be systematically analyzed to ascertain civic priorities and interests.”

- Minnesota Food Charter Methodologies Overview

An important distinction the food chartering process makes is the difference between qualitative and quantitative feedback. Open ended questions about the barriers of the food system (like transportation and cost) are considered qualitative research and are later organized into categories to be integrated into analysis. Close ended questions are quantitative, and are most helpful in clearly understanding what community members consider to be the most challenging and critical issues in the five domains the current food charter plans to address: Food Skills, Food Availability, Food Accessibility, Food Affordability, Food infrastructure. After gathering the information from the workshops, regional gatherings, and online surveys, the information will be given to the Food Charter Drafting Committee and a document will be drafted and presented to the steering committee. After the steering committee reviews and confirms the charter, the state’s Department of Health and Human Services will work with the Center for Disease Control and Blue Cross to begin implementing changes. This includes the possible initiation of new school and day care food programs, and the possible founding of a food policy council.

Figure 1

Maggie Adamek, Minnesota Food Charter Methodology Document, 2013
Section IV: Recommendations for the Detroit Food Policy Council

• **Prioritize Community Input, Refresh Strategies of Engagement Annually**

It is most important for the council to recognize the importance of community input before deciding what project or program to implement. Both the Oakland Food Policy Council and the Minnesota Food Charter share a common interest in figuring out the immediate concerns and priorities of the people, while implementing processes for community members to have input to their policy work. Interviewing Charity Hicks, one of the leaders in the Detroit Food Policy Council’s founding, and the co-drafter of the Detroit Food Security Policy, I pondered the lasting effects on community members that came with policy. She stated the following:

“Everything is touched by policy. Policy delineates where the money goes, who gets benefits and who doesn’t, [a person’s] quality of life, and [is supposed to] reflect the beliefs of a people.”

When policy is not grounded in the beliefs of the community it is supposed to serve, she went on to explain, a large divide between the government and it constituents occurs, leaving the decisions up to other bodies, like corporations and businesses, who may be more concerned with profit than people. As an advisory board, the Detroit Food Policy Council has the opportunity to serve as the bridge that connects the voices of community members to the ears of the decision-makers in government. With high poverty rates and low voter turnout in Detroit, the divisions are clear and need amending. The Detroit Food Policy Council is obliged to meet the needs of the population that it was created to serve, and therefore needs a way to constantly keep the communities involved in the decision making processes of the council, and engaged in understanding the way in which the community can understand its role in policy that affects their food system. The council needs to invest in tools and strategies that will allow them to gage the priorities of their targeted communities and at the same time measure the changes of priority over time.

• **Strategically Target Communities**

The Detroit Food Policy Council needs to engage the folks who are affected most by a lack of food access, and whose voices get marginalized in the community. The council has to be explicit about the audience it wants to see at the table in order to explicitly seek them out. In an article written by Yakini, he explains,

“...our biggest challenge has been our lack of deep, effective organizing and mobilizing in Detroit’s most food insecure (often African American) communities...We are also not satisfied
with our limited engagement with members of Detroit’s Latino, Asian, Native American and Arab communities” (7).

Looking at some of the mapping and census driven data that has been conducted by Data Driven Detroit, there are maps that break down where people are according to their race, income, and other demographics (see Figures 2 and 3). These maps can serve as useful tools in order to bring different communities to the table.

Figure 2
Speaking with Joel Batterman, the Policy Coordinator at MOSES (Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength,) he explained that the strategy they use at MOSES revolves around touching and building leaders in every district possible, and spreading the work of MOSES out in that way. They take a few community members in their church network interested in mobilizing others in social justice issues and conduct monthly meetings and trainings that focus on developing the leadership and outreach skills of these folks. A similar tactic was used by the Minnesota Consulting group, mentioned above, where Adamek explained the importance of making the people who pass out surveys, give presentations, and conduct focus groups to be members of their own communities. She and her group made it a priority that community members, not consultants, or state officials, or any so called ‘experts,’ be the ones to do the reaching out and asking questions.

Like the council setup, where experts and leaders of sectors are brought together monthly for meetings, it is just as possible to have representatives from the aforementioned communities be enabled and given the tools to go back to their communities and conduct the sessions
needed to gather community input. The council has taken a positive first step by opening up monthly meetings to community members, but the council should go one step further and offer to bus or carpool community members to the nightly meetings if transportation is an issue. Not only would this get the council more community input, it would also show the public that the council is serious about involving the community voice in transforming the food policies in Detroit. The summit is also another opportunity for collecting such information. If the council could invest enough commitment and resources to getting two to five representatives from the targeted communities, (see Figure 3) ensuring that people from specific area codes, for example, show up to the summit, we could make stronger links between the council’s work and different communities, bringing more folks into the work of the council.

Figure 4

- **Gather Community Feedback, Develop Virtual Database for Consistent Documentation**

The Detroit Food Policy Council needs tools that can make gathering input and tracking Food Policy Council activity an easier and more consistent process. Currently, the website holds information around the council’s founding, the council’s past accomplishments (members and work groups,) and contact information for council staff. The website has the potential to grow into a place for transparent community engagement and an informational resource for all. In the ideal situation, the Detroit Food Policy Council could hire someone strictly as technical staff to set up a website that is able to consistently document community feedback consistently
transparently: feedback from the summit, from surveys, from listening sessions of the DFPC, so that the public can easily always know what the council is up to, and what their fellow community members are thinking/feeling at their own listening sessions. The website could also be a place where people who did not make it to the meetings can voice their opinions. The universities and adolescent centers within the city would be good places to look for folks with creative ideas and resources around website design and maintenance. There could potentially be a small internship program that the council could offer to fill this position as well.

- **GroundSource Surveys**

Another tool that can be used to gather data is a relatively new mobile engagement system by GroundSource, a start-up that is working to make engaging with folks from far away easier. The tool allows the user to come up with and ask survey questions over SMS and voice message. The creator of the survey can set up the site on his/her computer and organize the information and feedback, and the site will allow the creator ways of creatively displaying the information when the survey is over. Having an organized data base of phone numbers would fundamentally be helpful when dealing with outreach; having an organized database of answers to a set of questions focused on food issues would be awesome.

**Council Member Input in Community Engagement**

- **Hire More Staff for Work Group and Technical Management**

Speaking with council members, there was a belief that the staff took on too much, and that council members were being required to do too much. With 21 board members and two staff people, the Detroit Food Policy Council has indeed been able to accomplish some of the goals originally set in the last five years: From the annual summits, to the annual reports and recent voter guide, to the progress made in agricultural issues, council members highly commended Cheryl’s hard work and commitment to the council over the last few years. One board member explained, however, that the way boards were supposed to work, boards usually only provided guidance, recommendations, and resources. “Board members are supposed to decide the issues, while staff members are to decide the way in which those issues are taken care of.” Both Pallana and Adamek spoke of a balance that needed to be reached between council members and how involved they were in the work. “You don’t want to chase [board members] away,” Adamek stated, “you must remember that they are volunteering,” so the staff/facilitators must put heavy planning into the meetings, (i.e. having goals to reach, a set agenda, questions to ask everyone so that they are engaged and one person is not running the meeting, making sure that people leave the meeting with something to do or report back about, and feel included.)
There should be a staff person for each of the four work groups, leaving the council members the task of coming up with the projects—a experts in their field—and providing resources (like volunteer students, or money from sponsors, or a physical location/space for a listening session, etc.) and staff to implement the vision. Perhaps there could be an internship program the food policy council could have that would offer a few credits for students per semester, or offer high school students community service hours. The summit can be used not only as an opportunity to understand what is most important to community members, but also an opportunity to empower them with a serious job opportunity or internship.

- **Training for All Board Members**

Council members should also get to know one another on more deep and personal levels. Annually, the Oakland Food Policy Council goes on a retreat and partners with an intensive training, facilitation, and consulting program called Fierce Allies. The program focuses on addressing the divisiveness of privilege and power, enabling its participants to engage in “fiercely honest dialogue”. It is in this way that the council members come to the table with a more well-rounded understanding of their responsibilities to one another, as well as those who are marginalized in the community. Many members of the Detroit Food Policy Council have advocated that every member on the council and staff go through anti-racism training.

Anti-racism training should be required for all council members and staff working on food justice issues. Because board members and staff are closely working with diverse groups of people, not to mention a diverse board, it is important that DFPC members operate from a similar frame of mind when it comes to understanding the racial inequities within the food system. Board members do not have to agree on everything, but it is critical that they understand where others are coming from in their experiences and beliefs. Comprehensive decisions by council members are likely to be made on behalf of people who are marginalized, and it is only best if the council members and staff understand the contexts of everyone they are impacting. Understanding where people come from also makes taking things personally less likely. Working closely with groups like the Michigan Roundtable, Allies for Change, and The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond during retreat could help push council members and staff to go through the training together. Instead of trying to attend anti-racism training hosted by other groups, (which is still a great idea) it would be great if all involved with the food policy council could experience their transformations together, perhaps having one retreat focused on strategic planning for the year, and the other solely focused on growing and understanding one another.

*Other Recommendations:*
-Abide the By-Laws: The Detroit Food Policy Council is a legitimate body that has a constitution with by-laws that should be respected. If a board member breaks one of these rules, the penalty should be applied to the council member. The rules should be enforced so that motions can get passed during meetings, and the work of the council can flow in a consistent manner.

-Tangible Monthly Goals Built Into the Strategic Work Plan: The council is currently working on finishing the strategic plan. Although work in policy is slow, there should be tangible goals set every month for each work group; goals accomplished steadily will not only increase morale, but create a more sustainable attendance rate of council/community members. As was recommended earlier, a staff member to ensure that every work group is doing what it was set out to do would help this process significantly.

-Fundraising: I challenge the council to use creative fundraising techniques to engage more community members as well as DFPC board members. One strategy would be to use food as way to bring people together. The Hawaiian Food Policy Council has taken that philosophy to heart and spent most of 2012 engaging their community members through remarkable fundraising events that celebrated food (13). If the Detroit council held fundraisers aimed at community members, it would be more likely to bring more people in inner city Detroit together around food, create a larger network between food organizations, and provide evident presence/results to community members. Using the council members as resources, the council could have dinner nights (there are chefs and cooks on the council,) movie nights (showing movies that speak to the food justice movement, with the provision of healthy snacks) teach-ins (council members could give a ‘how-to make’ cooking class,) ‘teach-outs’ for both kids and parents (there are plenty of gardeners on the council!) These kinds of small events would not only get the food policy council’s name out in the public, but they would also foster community and accountability among council and community members, and keep community engaged in the policy process. These smaller events could happen two to three times yearly in addition to the summit.

-Offering Educational Tools: To cater to the ongoing food issues while policy reform occurs, the Food Policy Council has the potential to serve as a food hub of resources for people as they struggle to gain access to healthier food. The policy council could set up a healthy food access hotline for people to call whenever they encounter expired/low quality items in their local convenient stores. The hotline could connect the caller to a food bank, another food program, or an alternative store near the caller’s location. Resembling the Minnesota Food HelpLine, this hotline could also help callers see if they qualify for SNAP or TANF benefits (12). When council members and staff visit other food-focused organizations, or visit communities to take surveys, the food hotline number is a tangible resource they could hand out.
The Detroit Food Policy Council has the unique opportunity to provide tangible food resources to community members and community organizations. Publishing a brochure/pamphlet that showed multiple maps of the city, using one map to identify where community gardens were located, another to show where food banks/soup kitchens were, another map to show where food organizations were located, and markets and stores that sold quality food, the booklet would be an extremely helpful resource to the community (see Figure 4). I saw a poster inside the office of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network that listed all the farmers markets that accepted bridge/EBT cards; each market listed had a location, an opening/closing time, a phone number, a website, and transportation symbols that explained the variety of ways one could get there. If we went into the communities having something like that to offer, or even a phone number to give out that could serve as a hotline for those experiencing a negative occurrence within the Detroit food system, a lot more people would know who we were, and a lot more people would want to get involved. Posting the number on the website would be helpful as well.

Figure 4

(Robert Linn, Mapping the Strait, 2010)
Section V: Moving Forward

Conclusion

The DPFC has the potential to make comprehensive positive change in the food system of Detroit. This council is at the nexus of a lot of different food sectors and anti-hunger work in the city, having access to information that isn’t readily available to most. The council must consistently work together with staff to better understand just how effective the council could be. The work must be rooted in community engagement, because community members are the ones who will be affected most by these policies. By gathering community input, obtaining more staff, getting more training, and abiding by the by-laws and strategic plan, the Detroit Food Policy Council has the potential to rectify the food injustices of the city.

The annual food summit is a perfect place to start handing out surveys and getting community input. It is also a good place to gather volunteers for the upcoming work ahead. Below is a suggested 12 Month Plan for the upcoming year:

February

- **Introduction and Implementation of New Strategic Plan:** community survey idea brought up to council members (what questions are council members interested in asking? How can we frame these questions so that they are answered with a policy framework in mind?)

March

- **Preparation for the Annual Food Summit:** collaboration with other food organizations, brainstorming programs, serious outreach, logistics, etc.
- **Publicize new staff position**, with technical expertise preferred (as council members to help look for someone)

April

- **Food Summit: Conduct pilot survey** to see what the youth and adults in attendance are interested in learning about/improving about the food system in the city (getting people to speak on their experiences is just as important)—**Event 1**

May

- Collaborate with groups like People’s Platform of Detroit and the Detroit Food Justice Task Force (especially for the youth) to hold a listening session for adults and youth to voice their concerns around food injustices they face (and take the survey!)—**Event 2**
• Use council connections (including Renee Wallace!) to get surveys to the folks in targeted communities (see Figure 2.) Soup kitchens, bus stops, liquor stores, etc. Area codes are important too. Everyone is connected to a community in some way. That’s why you’re a council member!

June

• Have third staff hired, and all seats for council filled
• Board Training/Retreat
• Continue to conduct survey-launch website with all/previously collected information
• Work Group Check-In-Where is everyone at? (If a work group is not handing a specific project, they are helping pass out/collect surveys! — and yes, even at their job)

July

• DFPC Dinner and a Movie Night (dinner can be included or healthy snacks provided watching a “foodie” movie at the Public Library—Event 3
• Express interest about an internship with the DFPC at the event. Seek out Food Academy and Detroit Youth Justice Food Task Force
• Work Group leaders can voice what their projects are at the end/beginning of the film, and ask people to get involved
• Explain the importance of the survey to audience members, and ask if they would be interested in helping conduct it as well (this is how the council can get volunteers, and monthly meeting attendees...by giving them something to do!)

August

• A large part of the monthly council meeting is dedicated to the progression of the community survey (have we hit our target communities? What does our data say thus far? Is there something else we should do to reach Community A? Whose voice are we not hearing? How is the website functioning?) This meeting should incorporate those who attended the movie night and their feedback

September

• Resource building time! Staff, and anyone else on the council interested in creating a booklet/pamphlet that shows and lists grocery stores, gardens, farms, and food organizations should get started on it
• The development of an official Hot Line? This is for people who run into trouble with the Detroit Food System, (expired/bad quality food in their local stores) there is a number to call that can advise an individual how to get access to healthy food fast/connect people to other food resources. In this process, we should keep track of the convenient/grocery stores reported
• By this time, work groups should be either doing work in their work groups according to the strategic plan or making more connections around the survey
October-November

- Visioning for 2015 summit—look at trend of surveys
- Possible tabling for DFPC at the Harvest Festival (can someone exhibit the tangibility of policy to festival attendees? Or can council members commit to somehow collaborating and giving back to the original founders of the DFPC?)—Event 4
- Continuation on survey and website development

December

- Close survey opportunity mid/end of December
- Prioritize and have council members decide which issues
- Work groups get busy and decide how they would like to resolve the found issues under the strategic plan and build their ideas into the summit
- Winter Dinner Reception at Colors again! Invite mayor and city council too; invite the volunteers who have been helping out with surveys and attending the meetings—Event 5

January-February

- Anti-Racism training
- Gather, evaluate, and post all data
- Work groups solidify their plan for the year 2015, and working on something they could present at the next summit that would empower community members to do something in response to the survey results, and letting community members do the work (more events could come out of the work groups too)
- More visioning and collaboration for summit

And with a few more months left on this plan, the Detroit Food Policy Council manages to stay active and relevant all year, ready to give community members access to resources it would be difficult to find otherwise. From the community input received, the council would be given direction guided by and for the people of Detroit. Reflecting on the research, interviews, and resources of this report, it is clear that the Detroit Food Policy Council has an incredible opportunity to do significant and sustainable work within the city. The more council members get to know one another, obtain staff, and interact with and involve community input in their decisions, the more likely their efforts and expertise can be used to improve the food system of Detroit. Connecting community to policy is challenging, however with the right resources, creativity, and commitment, the connection is possible. I look forward to seeing the ways in which the council embraces these recommendations, enabling and empowering community members to transform their food system for the better.
Citations


Resources:

- datadrivendetroit.org/MAPAS: on this site one can “create maps of indicators by topic to use in reports, create custom reports for any neighborhood or geography, and explore how data varies at different scales for geographies throughout Michigan”

- http://beta.groundsourcing.com/: on this site one begins conducting a survey so long as they have questions to ask

- http://foodsecurity.org/category/home/: North American Community Food Security Coalition

- www.foodfirst.org : Food First, Institute for Food and Development Policy

- http://www.jhsph.edu/: Database, Johns-Hopkins School of Public Health

- http://www.fierceallies.com/-Fierce Allies