

NESAWG 2015 *It Takes A Region* Conference

Food Policy Councils - Engaging the Community and Building Diversity - Mark Winne and Anne Palmer

Inclusivity, diversity, community engagement in food policy work

Food Policy Councils are a way to build a local and state food coalition largely around public policy but programs as well.

Jim Hanna, Liz Sheehan Castro, Martha Page are co-presenting

foodpolicynetworks.org

Where did the food movement come from?

-organic food/farming, local food, earth day/environmental movement, survival and renaissance of regional agriculture, anti-hunger and food banks, anti-poverty: Great Society, office of economic opportunity, and community action agencies.

Mostly a white movement with exception of poverty movement

Community Organizing:

Hartford Food System

- white, black and hispanic led organizations
- food organizations were white-led, neighborhood development and anti-poverty organization led by people of color
- coalition fell apart over different values, agenda, and funding

Food Policy Council = Food Coalition - with diverse stakeholders and issues

From the Ground Up! - Gillian Kaye and Tom Wolff, 1997 - worth purchasing for historical purposes, understand community engagement

Challenges

- impatience with process: people want action now!
- lack of cultural competency: trainings are useful investment of time, gives stronger sense of how to engage community.
- The Tyranny of the Clock: always looking at the clock and talking about how much time we are devoting to topics on the agenda. Working in communities you

need to take time to listen to people. The clock doesn't matter.

Relationships may be the most important piece but we don't put enough emphasis on it.

What we measure matters:

- farmers market advocates: type of goat cheese
- food pantry managers: pound of food distributed
- farm to school advocate: heads of locally grown lettuce sold to schools
- parent activist in lower income school district: how many bathrooms are working in the school

Bridging divide

- little funding for coalition development/maintenance
- coalition to oversee the system not valued in comparison to single issue organization
- no capacity for or value assigned to planning: people and agencies tend to act more on demand or in crisis mode - means just as important as outcome, process of planning can give it a better chance of being implemented.
- lack of alignment around values and issues: ban drive through windows at fast food place in lower income community but not across the city - community revolted over the idea.

Coalitions:

- should be coordinated, collaborative, holistic, planned, accessible, preventative, comprehensive, culturally relevant
- collaboration is a serious commitment, along the lines of a marriage, so it should be taken seriously
- look at the entire community, issues that effect them

- Consider: are lower income community interests reflected in the mission? is there equity?
- formal appointments for seats and prescribed agendas associated with government embedded in Food Policy Councils can limit inclusion
- FPC tend to be dominated by professionals and can overlook value of local knowledge
- Make meeting location (can be out in community), time of day (make it accessible to all), language (bilingual, multilingual?) more accessible
- uneven distribution of power between groups, agencies, organizations, and citizens

Outreach Techniques and Strategies:

- Meet face to face with community leaders
- Hold public and house meetings
- Go door to door
- Street outreach: community centers, faith centers, parks
- Tabling at community events

Key Points

- Understand why grassroots leaders and residents become involved
- Credibility in the community - who is involved
- Take time to identify/understand interest, perspectives, values, leadership that exists

Liz Sheehan Castro, Worcester Food and Active Living Policy Council:

Worcester county food bank is fiscal sponsor of the coalition

Stats on Worcester Co.:

- 182,000 people
- #6 in nation for direct farm to consumer sales
- 60% white
- 20% poverty rate, 18% food insecurity
- 65% adults are overweight or obese
- 75% of kids qualify for free or reduced lunch

Liz came to Worcester from Vermont in 2009 - at the time, the group only had white people representing the county on the Council

Council meets on third Thursday morning of the month in geographic area that is isolated/hard to get to - who is excluded from that?

Important to think about not who is at the table but who is setting the table

What we have tried over the past 6 years:

- meeting others where they are, literally and figuratively - go out and meet people in their organizations and in their work, whether it was related to food or not. Wanted to get a sense of social change work. Opportunity to build relationships as a new person in Worcester. Didn't know why there was an all white food policy council and needed to dig in to understand that - history of work in city, neighborhoods, etc. What are other groups working on and how can we support them even if it isn't directly related to the food policy council, create relationship to work together, show that trying to take relationship seriously.
- Cultural competency and diversity training - see where members of council are

at during the training, and who didn't show up. Organized around Black Lives Matter movement by attending events since racial equity is important to them.

- Youth policy council - tried but didn't work. Very time intensive to prepare the youth before the full council meetings so that they could fully participate. Could be a great model to foster leadership in the community but need to make the space and time to devote to keeping it going.

- Events: quarterly meetings - tried to turn them into more broad community events to allow for networking, speakers, etc. Food Day Festival every year at the farmers market - good community building, multi-cultural event.

Jim Hanna, Cumberland County Food Security Council

Program director, also social entrepreneur, food community organizer

Council began in 2010 when they noticed that a lot of people were coming to get food from the food pantries. Created a Task Force to create the council in Cumberland and conduct an assessment of issues. Worked with United Way. Maine is a very white state with lots of poverty. Council connected with Food Bank to receive fiscal sponsorship.

When considering diversity of a council need to do a cost/benefit analysis of sorts to make sure participation is beneficial for all at the table. Are you inviting people to only have diverse representation or for them to be fully, intentionally engaged? Is it worth their time to be present? How do you make it so that members' time is best utilized by participating in the council?

Martha Page, City of Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy

Hartford Food System founded in 1978 focused on program, policy and advocacy work

- integrates agencies in a effort to improve availability of nutritious food for all residents

- seeks to eliminate hunger; ensure a wide variety of safe and nutritious food for city residents; ensure that access to food is not limited by economic status, location, and other factors

Launched a study to understand to what extent is the commission's model/approach effective and to what extent has the commission's work led to desirable outcomes for the community it serves.

- To answer these questions, employed commissioner interviews, meeting observations, review of commission records, Hartford resident survey, city official

survey, nonprofit org survey

Strive for Community Engagement through:

- Evaluation survey
- Commission breakfast event
- Collaboration with library on film/lecture series
- Potential development of working groups related to recommendations
- Making meetings more available
- Want to revisit ordinance to make sure language is inclusive
- Hoping to make it the people's commission

Questions

How do you know who are the right people to be at the table?

- Ask the people
- Lehigh Valley (PA) received funding from United Way to conduct a change identification process to identify the right people. Council meets twice a year all together and have workgroups that meet more often
- Survey of Food Policy Councils by Center for a Livable Future provides examples of policies council structures