

PHILADELPHIA PENNSYLVANIA, USA

A CITYWIDE STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ON FOOD

This case study is based on an interview with three representatives from the City of Philadelphia: ASH RICHARDS, Director of Urban Agriculture at Philadelphia Parks and Recreation and FPAC member; MOLLY RIORDAN, Coordinator for Good Food Purchasing and FPAC member; and AMANDA WAGNER Program Manager for the Department of Public Health and FPAC Co-Chair.

GLASGOW
FOOD AND
CLIMATE
DECLARATION

The City of Philadelphia has had an active FOOD POLICY ADVISORY COUNCIL (FPAC) since 2011, but the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, activism led by the Black Lives Matter movement, and pressure from the community, led the City government to embark on a more ambitious strategic initiative on food. FPAC was charged with coordinating across municipal departments to develop food system strategies focused on sustainability, public health, economic and racial equity, transparent communication, and equitable community engagement. Though FPAC has been working on the ground for a decade to create a more just, healthy, and sustainable food system, 2020 marks a significant shift in the acknowledgment and coordination of that work by the City of Philadelphia.

“Over the course of 2020, because of the coronavirus pandemic, food was raised into the purview of a lot of people who were not previously focused on food policy. Our new citywide strategic initiative on food is an understanding that the City really has a role to play.”

ENABLERS

CENTERING JUSTICE IN FOOD POLICYMAKING

FPAC's mission, to create a more just food system where all people can access and control their food, land, and labor, comes with a recognition of the interconnected and systemic nature of injustices in the food system. When designing food policies, FPAC takes a food system approach and targets root causes. FPAC advocated for the development of an urban agriculture plan, GROWING FROM THE ROOT, that exemplifies this approach. The urban agriculture plan will address food security and historic issues around land-use politics and access, while centering cultural diversity. This ambitious plan includes community building and healing for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Growing from the Root will examine links across the urban agriculture food chain: from production and transportation to consumption and waste. Based on the needs and wishes of the community, the plan will identify resources, policies, and programs necessary to sustain and grow urban agriculture opportunities in Philadelphia.

“There needs to be major unlearning and re-shifting in the ways we think about food systems... We need to be real about the history of food apartheid by structural and institutional racism, exploitation of human beings and labor, climate injustice and climate apartheid, and the history of stolen land and genocide. My vision is that we totally retell the story, not from a frame of pathologizing BIPOC communities, but from the perspective of resistance and collective action.”

CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MECHANISMS

Since its inception, FPAC has served as a vehicle for public engagement between residents and the City, and its members continually assess communication mechanisms for improvements. Food system issues were particularly highlighted by residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, encouraging the City to embark on its strategic initiative on food. Though the pandemic complicated traditional public engagement processes, FPAC found ways to maintain an equitable and inclusive public process. For example, public engagement around Philadelphia's URBAN AGRICULTURE PLAN had to move online, but real-time assessments and improvements were made. FPAC employed online surveys, tracked demographics, and then worked directly with constituencies not captured through digital platforms. FPAC has also started offering stipends to appointed community members, to acknowledge their engagement and ensure participation regardless of income.

INTEGRATED AND COLLABORATIVE POLICYMAKING ACROSS CITY GOVERNMENT

From its inception, FPAC was housed within the City's Office of Sustainability, enabling an environment for integrated food and climate policies. Though the City has considered appointing a Food Policy Director, it currently spreads responsibility across departments through FPAC ex-officio membership. To further increase cross-departmental dialogue and collaboration the City established a CHIEF RESILIENCE OFFICER and an ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ADVISORY COMMISSION. These entities are mandated to work across departments and with frontline communities to ensure progress is made toward the Administration's goal of a more resilient and equitable city. Philadelphia's decentralized approach to food and climate policies builds in cross-departmental cooperation by design, creating a more holistic and equitable policymaking environment and further legitimizing integrated food policies.

BARRIERS

FOOD ELEVATED AS PRIORITY BUT LACKING RESOURCES

While the citywide strategic initiative on food elevates food as a priority, adequate resource allocations have yet to follow suit. Much of FPAC's work is not funded by the City, and when it is, the funding does not provide for the staff needed to execute its strategies. These resource constraints create an environment where food policymaking is more reactive than proactive. FPAC has overcome funding challenges in the past through state grants, private funding, and creative grant reallocations. For example, FPAC leveraged a city public health initiative that invests in community-led priorities to fund some of their food justice priorities through COMMUNITY FOOD GRANTS. Furthermore, FPAC is seeking federal funding by placing Philadelphia-based food advocates on state committees where strategic policy changes can open up new federal funding streams.

DISCONNECTED METRICS AND DATA COLLECTION MECHANISMS

In Philadelphia, each municipal department measures the success of its programs differently. For FPAC, it has been challenging to measure the impact of integrated food policies that tackle multiple food system challenges. For departments across the city to effectively monitor and evaluate success on shared food, climate, and equity goals, there is a need to develop appropriate metrics and indicators. These clearly defined indicators are currently under development through the citywide strategic initiative on food, but Philadelphia also looks forward to learning from the experiences of other Glasgow Declaration signatory cities.

After a global pandemic and national race-related social upheaval, the City government in Philadelphia is starting to acknowledge and institutionalize integrated food, climate, and equity policies. The Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council was recognized as a leader in this work and was placed at the helm of a citywide strategic initiative on food. Since 2011, FPAC set ambitious food policy goals, but they also quickly gained buy-in and visibility by prioritizing “low hanging fruit,” policies with a strong existing consensus and that were easily achievable. Through FPAC's robust public engagement mechanisms community members can substantively engage with and shape food policies. Further, Philadelphia's decentralized and collaborative food governance structure creates a more holistic and fair policymaking environment. The citywide strategic initiative on food has elevated food as a priority and its completion may enhance resource availability for Philadelphia to meet its ambitious food system goals.



THE PHILADELPHIA FOOD POLICY ADVISORY COUNCIL (FPAC)

- FPAC is an initiative housed in the City's OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY.
- FPAC and the Mayor's Policy Office work toward cross-departmental cooperation, as well as collaboration between the municipal government, non-profits, residents, business owners, urban growers, farmers, distributors, and other food advocates and experts.
- FPAC centers justice in its policymaking process, engaging with and responding to the needs of community members most impacted by injustices in the food system.
- FPAC's membership includes up to 35 appointed community members and several non-voting members who hold positions across city government (ex-officio members), from the Department of Public Health to the Office of Children and Families.

