

Evaluation of the Healthy Hampshire Food Access Advisory Planning Process

October 6, 2017

Introduction

The Healthy Hampshire Food Access Advisory Committee design and planning process involved many people who generously gave their time and ideas to create an action plan for a more just and healthy Hampshire County. The process is by no means complete, rather, it has coalesced into clear action steps which provide a roadmap for resident organizers and organizations to work together towards improving access to affordable healthy food in Hampshire County. This evaluation, built from the words and ideas of the participants, summarizes the innovations of the process and offers insights to multistakeholder collaborative food systems change.

Background

In the last two decades, food policy councils, networks, and coalitions have emerged in the Pioneer Valley (and beyond) to build multistakeholder planning processes for food access change. Our Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan convened listening sessions across the state with community food project organizers, farmers, health and hunger agencies to assess priorities and create an action plan for the state. Holyoke's Food and Fitness Policy Council assembled residents and agencies for nearly a decade to break down structural barriers to affordable healthy food access and safe places to exercise. The Springfield Food Policy Council and LiveWell Springfield have organized for a full line grocery store for the past decade. The Food Bank of Western MA gathered a task force on hunger to create a plan of action. Food Solutions New England has brought together partners to design for an inclusive, sustaining food system. All these multistakeholder processes have engaged community residents with agency representatives and policymakers, and some have been more successful than others at achieving a sense of collaboration and equitable processes.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active, healthy life.¹ The Food Access Advisory Committee noted in their meeting process that food access is problem in Hampshire County because of food cost, transportation, time, health complications/physical limitations, store locations, education, and competing basic needs. The root causes are low wages, skeletal public transportation systems, working 40+ hours per week, and national subsidies of wheat, corn, and soy which

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization. The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2001. Rome, 2002. Cited by The Food Bank of Western MA in A Plan to End Hunger in Western MA, 2016.

results in an over abundance of cheap processed food. Our food safety net does not catch a significant number of people. We miss people who are isolated due to age or mental/physical ability, who do not meet income requirements (they get too much money to qualify for help) or they do not speak English as a first language.

Healthy Hampshire Food Access Assessment

Healthy Hampshire (HH) has been designing and implementing food access strategies since 2012. In 2016, when HH identified a need for a comprehensive food access assessment in Hampshire County, Cooley Dickinson Hospital's Community Health Needs Assessment was nearly complete and had noted food access as a priority. HH and Cooley Dickinson Hospital were already partners on a grant awarded to HH by the MA Department of Public Health. HH used dollars from that grant to fund a county-wide food access assessment that would examine the shape and scope of food insecurity in Williamsburg, Amherst, Belchertown, Northampton and the Hilltowns. HH also contracted with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to help with analysis of policy, systems, and environmental challenges in Hampshire County, as well as an action plan to address those challenges.

Data collected by Healthy Hampshire during 2015-2016 attempted to capture a picture of what food insecurity looks like in these towns. The team researched individual and family challenges, viability of healthy retail, and how well food pantries, markets, and farmers markets address food insecurity. The research showed barriers of transportation, income, and minimal availability of affordable fresh produce in small retail stores.

The Food Access Planning Process and Advisory Committee

With the food access assessment nearly complete, Healthy Hampshire decided to bring partners together in an innovative and rapid food planning process to share the data and collectively generate an action plan.

Healthy Hampshire Coordinator Caitlin Marquis was the primary staff member on the project. HH contracted a tenant organizer and health advocate, Edgar Cancel, who served as a co-facilitator for the committee and community engagement consultant. HH also contracted with Dillon Sussman from PVPC to provide design and facilitation expertise and to create a food access map of Hampshire County.

To form the Food Access Advisory Committee (FAAC), Healthy Hampshire reached out to roughly 35 professionals and 20 residents that would review the county-wide food assessment data and create an action plan with special consideration to the towns of Amherst, Belchertown, Easthampton, Northampton, and Williamsburg. HH and Cooley Dickinson worked together to identify professionals from these towns who were actively working on addressing food insecurity in their communities, with a focus on professionals who occupy decision-making roles relevant to food access.

It was important to Healthy Hampshire to include and empower residents from the community who experience food insecurity to become part of the FAAC. Edgar Cancel helped HH recruit residents who live in public and subsidized housing in Northampton (recruitment efforts also targeted Amherst, Belchertown, and Williamsburg, but yielded no interested participants). Other food insecure residents were recruited to the group through direct referrals from organizations and word-of-mouth between residents. The resulting committee included roughly 15 professionals working on food insecurity and 8 residents experiencing food insecurity. They met 5 times over 5 months to review the research data, develop and identify food access strategies, and prioritize them into an action plan.

The 8 residents formed the Food Access Organizing Group (FAOG). They received stipends—as well as childcare and transportation as needed—and attended 5 additional monthly meetings of their own to discuss immediate food access needs, background on food access and food systems, and advocacy. These meetings were facilitated by Caitlin Marquis and Edgar Cancel. Stipends were provided by Cooley Dickinson Healthcare as a means to develop leadership among food insecure residents who could go on to address the food access challenges they were seeing and experiencing in their communities.

This rare opportunity brought these two groups together and gave needed support and empowerment to food insecure residents. The conveners hoped that the process would not only produce recommendations for policy, systems, and environmental change, but also develop community among a group of people who can continue to work together on shaping and advancing healthy food access strategies.

The facilitators were inspired by “Collaborating for Equity and Justice” principles, a model which goes beyond the popular Collective Impact model in a more time-consuming, community development approach ensuring a process centered on equity, justice, and systems change.² The facilitators felt that collaborative multi-sector approaches toward equity and justice must include and prioritize leadership by those most impacted by injustices in order to sustain and create systematic change for healthy communities.³ The facilitators discussed those principles (outlined below) during the initial meeting with the FAAC participants, and used them to guide their process.

Collaborating for Equity and Justice Principles

1. Explicitly address issues of social and economic injustice and structural racism.

² Wolfe, T., Minkler, M., Wolfe, S., Berkowitz, B., Bowan, L., Butterfoss, F., Christens, B., Francisco, V., Himmelman, A., Lee, K. (2017) Collaborating for Equity and Justice: Moving beyond Collective Impact. *Nonprofit Quarterly*.

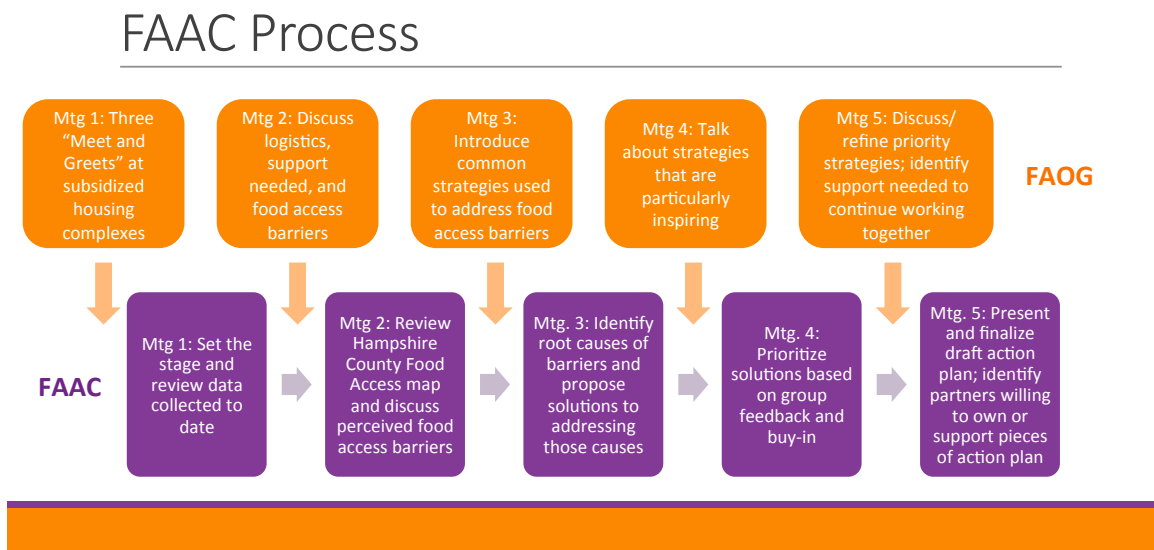
https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2017/01/09/collaborating-equity-justice-moving-beyond-collective-impact/?utm_source=BHPN+Website+Newsletter+List&utm_campaign=1d3a6027f2-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_01_30&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c39fafc581-1d3a6027f2-325379717

³ *ibid.*

2. Employ a community development approach in which residents have equal power in determining the coalition’s or collaborative’s agenda and resource allocation.
3. Employ community organizing as an intentional strategy and as part of the process. Work to build resident leadership and power.
4. Focus on policy, systems, and structural change.
5. Build on the extensive community-engaged scholarship and research over the last four decades that show what works, that acknowledge the complexities, and that evaluate appropriately.
6. Construct core functions for the collaborative based on equity and justice that provide basic facilitating structures and build member ownership and leadership.⁴

FAAC Goals and Process

The FAOG met separately to lift up community based innovations to surviving health, food access, and poverty challenges, as well as to identify community needs. They joined agency professionals at the five FAAC meetings to analyze data, discuss perceived barriers, identify solutions and finalize a plan. The meeting structure of the FAAC and FAOG is described in the image below:



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⁴ ibid

⁵ slide from 2017 Mass in Motion report developed by Caitlin Marquis, Healthy Hampshire

In the beginning of the process, Healthy Hampshire made clear that the intent of the process was to develop an action plan, and that the actions in the plan would be shared and community-owned.

To achieve this action plan and a shared responsibility for success, the facilitators used a dimensions of success framework by the Interaction Institute for Social Change (www.interactioninstitute.org) to set goals for results (action steps), process (how the work gets done), and relationships (how people interact). Those FAAC goals are summarized below with the IISC image.

FAAC Goals

Results: Our goal is to come to agreement on a set of actions that will address food access gaps in our region.

Process: We will do this by bringing together people with many different perspectives on food access and valuing the unique set of views and experiences each person brings to the table.

Relationship: Get to know one another across our different experiences and roles so that we may build trust and mutual understanding.



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Outputs (immediate results) of the FAAC Planning Process

The FAAC arrived at a 17-item priority list by developing a large priority list (40+ actions), informed by innovative ideas proposed by group members, PVPC’s “Municipal Strategies to Increase Food Access” toolkit, the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, and ideas and knowledge brought forth by the group facilitators. The facilitators condensed the 40+ item list into 27 items and then led the FAAC group in an interactive exercise to prioritize and narrow to 17 actions.

The top three actions, which Healthy Hampshire included in its work plan, are:

- Initiate a mobile market to serve communities in need;
- Support the roll out of the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) by collaborating with on the ground partners to invite more low income people to participate in HIP; and

⁶ slide from 2017 Mass in Motion report, developed by Caitlin Marquis for Healthy Hampshire

- Establish a Hampshire County Food Policy Council to support food access efforts for and by low-income people and people of color.

Two items on the 17-item list fit within existing strategies that Healthy Hampshire was working on and were also included in its work plan:

- Support the Northampton Food Rescue project, which is in its infancy and involves bicycle delivery of produce discarded by retailers to public housing complexes; and
- Bringing funding partners together to support upgrades for small retailers that would allow them to sell more fresh foods and produce.

During the last FAAC meeting, participants were asked to share specific ways that they would be interested in supporting items in the action plan, and some organizations expressed interest in funding or owning some of the other 12 strategies.

Evaluation Results

Methodology

This document summarizes evaluation findings. The evaluation proceeded with the following goals:

- *Determine if we accomplished our goals*
- *Give feedback to funders at the Department of Public Health about what good community engagement can look like*
- *Understand why people became involved, what kept them there, what they might need to continue (priorities and interests).*
- *What might multistakeholder collaboration look like moving forward?*

Fertile Ground/Catherine Sands was contracted to conduct a mixed methods evaluation. She was joined by Catherine Brooks and Karen Auerbach, Healthy Hampshire's internal evaluation staff, to take notes, code, and analyze data. We used the following qualitative methods for the evaluation:

- Designed an evaluation exercise to do with the full FAAC group during the last meeting – list of questions to discuss in multistakeholder small groups (see below)
- Reviewed an online FAAC survey used to prioritize strategies
- Staffed in-depth interviews
- Conducted focus groups of FAAC professionals and resident organizers
- Conducted additional phone interviews of FAAC participants who could not attend
- Reviewed meeting notes and action plan
- Coded and arranged responses in a spreadsheet
- Read, identified, discussed and summarized themes
- Reviewed themes with staff, who have access to un-identified spreadsheet responses (all staff remained identified for their purposes). Received feedback from some staff.

- Wrote and delivered this report.

Snapshot Initial Feedback:

Fertile Ground designed a quick evaluation activity for the final FAAC meeting, asking participants to discuss amongst their tables three questions and report out to the group their findings. The initial feedback revealed participants’ reasons for doing food access work, which spanned shared values, career enrichment, financial incentives, and community networking. Participants described supports that made their engagement possible: physical supports provided by Healthy Hampshire (basic needs of transportation, stipends, meals, childcare), support from their own organization, and efficient facilitation. Participants outlined their needs moving forward: essential logistical needs (compensation and skill based training); anti-racist training; to be involved in implementing the action steps; and the need of a convening organization. These elements were further developed in the interviews and focus groups.

Initial Feedback

What keeps you in the work?	What supports do you have to be here?	What supports do you need to keep doing the work?
Stipends	Well-organized logistics	More subject matter education
Being in the room with decision-makers	Basic needs met: transportation, childcare, stipends, food	Compensation
Caring about the subject; wanting to make change	Encouragement	Communication
Integrity	Recognition	Anti racism/classism training
Clearly spelled out process	Deepening connections with community	Stronger relationship-building upfront (intimidating for food insecure residents)
Important for job	Organizational support	Organizational backbone
Opportunity to contribute		Moving from talk into action
		Technical skills

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In the analysis that follows, we have used the Dimensions of Success triangle (results, process, relationships) and the questions asked by the facilitators to organize the evaluators’ observations about the project innovations and challenges. We provided “insights” or analysis/recommendations on these observations after each segment.

⁷ slide from 2017 Mass in Motion report, developed by Caitlin Marquis for Healthy Hampshire

Goal # 1: [Results] Our goal is to come to agreement on a set of actions that will address food access gaps in the region.

Outcome: A list of prioritized actions was produced through an extensive participatory process.

Innovation 1: An Action Plan achieved:

- Consensus-based action plan achieved through a weighted scoring/analysis of feasibility, strength of impact, size of population impacted, FAAC enthusiasm level, time needed to carry out the strategy. Three priorities were established.
- Action plan represents inclusive process. Planning process was representative of the people involved. FAOG felt their priorities were heard. Staff narrowed the list and designed an interactive priority narrowing process (stand on the line) that worked very well and participants found it enjoyable. The activity broke down barriers and allowed for immediate discussion about and selection of action items.

Innovation 2: Some initial implementation begins

- Readiness to implement. Several agencies voiced readiness to take the lead with and implement some of the low hanging fruit.
- Resident organizers engage in their community. FAOG members are already doing actions in their community; the process inspired a resident organizer to launch a garden at their affordable housing unit; trained a resident organizer to provide peer to peer support at farmers markets about the Healthy Incentives Program; linked another to a community gardening conference.

Innovation 3: New partnership opportunities emerge

- New opportunities for partnership. Professionals noted new opportunities for partnerships emerged, forming collaborative strategies in a time of lean funding.

Challenges:

- Unclear delegation of next steps. A set of priorities exists, but the action list does not have clear implementation delineations or funding for next steps.
- Attrition of some professionals. While we did not collect supporting data, several professionals and facilitators noted the attrition of a handful of agency folks.
- Resident organizers less clear about next steps. The professionals were more clear than FAOG members about the action steps perhaps because the residents have a less clear pathways and resources to work with.
- Resident organizers desire additional facilitated meetings. The residents are enthusiastic to continue the group, and due to daily life challenges may not have the capacity to do this on their own.

Insight:

- An inclusive process drew an action plan with concrete steps but an unclear implementation strategy, due to lack of funds and Healthy Hampshire's lack of capacity to be the convening entity for all the strategies.

Goal #2: [Process] We will bring together people with many different perspectives on food access and valuing the unique set of views and experiences each person brings to the table.

***Outcome:** The evaluators observed that people felt they were involved in something different, special. A majority of participants noted the value of strong facilitation and creative, inclusive design.*

Like many food policy coalitions, a multistakeholder group was convened to ensure that a broad range of viewpoints were represented at the table. Fifteen professional experts and eight resident experts in food, health, SNAP, WIC, community benefits, were at the table. The four facilitators, experienced community organizers and planners, designed a planning process that built community resident strength, while creating a space for multistakeholder dialogue and shared process. Innovations and challenges presented as follows:

Innovation 1: Focus on resident empowerment as experts

- Residents are problem solvers. The structure of five separate additional FAOG meetings broke isolation experienced by residents struggling with poverty. In those meetings residents built a common language, identified shared values, felt heard, and developed more impetus to speak up in the FAAC meetings. The tone was set by the first meeting, in which the Healthy Hampshire facilitator asked "How are you solving the issues you have? What have you tried that works/doesn't work?" The residents preferred this to the typical service interview question: "What are the problems or difficulties you face?" because the question placed them in the center of creating their own solutions, assuming that residents are experts of navigating systems and managing stress, unlike many engagement processes which typically begin with assessment of barriers and needs.
- Provide residents opportunities to shine as leaders. The facilitators ordered lunch from area restaurants for FAAC meetings. One resident organizer was paid to prepare a meal for the FAAC group, which one professional described as "an unbelievable spread," which she designed on a limited budget with local food acquired from the survival center, demonstrating her "proactive resourcefulness." Several FAAC participants remarked on her ingenuity, how she was able to prepare a healthy, delicious meal within the system. This is also an example of the facilitators' ability to recognize leadership opportunities.

- Resident compensation. FAOG group was paid to participate, and received childcare, convenient meeting times, email communication, capacity building opportunities. Receiving money was a motivator and made them feel valued for their time. One resident organizer's service dog died suddenly and because she was receiving the stipend, she was able to afford to replace it with another service dog.

Innovation 2: Deliberate bridges were built between the professionals and resident organizers.

- Facilitation for shared values. The facilitators developed interactive ice-breakers focused on shared values and deemphasizing professional affiliations. For instance, the first day, they asked FAAC participants to introduce themselves without work titles or affiliations, but by interest, name, and home town. This allowed for casual conversations amongst group members about personally-relevant issues. All the professionals noted the effectiveness of this process – by avoiding affiliation, they avoided preconceptions. Both groups noted that these conversations can lead to positive actions, plans, collaboration.
- Engaging effective processes. The facilitators designed an effective, engaging and popular process to identify and narrow suggested actions, with a grid/matrix weighted dimensions and actions, and used a participatory prioritizing structure some call “Lay it on the Line”. FAAC members voted with their feet, by standing on a line in relationship to one or the other end (agree or disagree). Individuals were asked to stand in a place on the line representing their viewpoint and to discuss with each other their prioritizing decisions. In this way the group physically represented a collaborative process.
- Mutual Respect. People said the process was “thrilling,” “satisfying,” made them proud.”

Innovation 3: Careful attention to designing a process that met funding and time constraints and made good use of participant time.

- Excellent facilitation and communication. Very careful attention to planning was an asset. People appreciated the facilitators' flexibility, spontaneous adaptability, and remarked on inclusiveness and fun of meetings. The four facilitators brought a diverse skill base and point of view to the process. Communication with both groups was thorough and timely, with meeting reminders, notes, agendas.
- Value people's time. A clear structure of five meetings made commitment predictable and manageable for professionals, helping many to agree to participate.
- Shared tools. Sharing the GIS mapping for SNAP participation was useful, as well as the equitable process for input and participatory “Lay it on the Line” structure for narrowing action steps.

Challenges:

- Lack of diverse participants. The facilitators tried to reach a group more varied by age, gender, race, ethnicity, and location. The challenges they faced point to the relative homogeneity of white-staffed food related organizations and public agencies, as well as the logistical challenges of transporting residents to meetings. It was also noted that the perspectives of funders, physicians, legislators, veterans, and elders could be strategic.
- Focus less on process. A handful of agency people noted that the process was not balanced (prefer less effort on community building and more on outcomes). Facilitators spent a lot of time planning. Multiple facilitators with a wide array of wonderful experiences and perspectives complicated and elongated the processing time. Facilitators noted the tension of process with efficiency –asserting it was not sustainable or replicable at this level.
- Avoid unnatural add-ons. One of the structural exercises (fishbone to illustrate systems), which was part of Department of Public Health curriculum on systems seemed out of place or too rushed to achieve intended value of systems thinking exercise.
- Awareness of potential photo-sensitivity. Resident organizers requested more clarity in the moment about intended use of photos and agreements.

Insight:

- Careful attention to needs and experiences of different groups is critical to building an action plan that represents all involved. Facilitators provided resident organizers with opportunities to build and catalyze their own leadership and with the essential tools and training to succeed (based on personal needs).⁸ Providing resident organizers with the Collective Impact concept of “handrails for action,”⁹ tools to succeed in their identified goals, builds leadership.

“This process was meaningful on a personal and professional level. It’s hard to bring people together from different places but it was a breath of fresh air. There’s a realness to people when they don’t have their game faces on” (facilitator)

Goal #3: [Relationship]: Get to know one another across our different experiences and roles so that we may build trust and mutual understanding.

⁸ Wolfe, et al. Collaborating for equity and justice: Moving beyond Collective Impact. January 9, 2017. Nonprofit Quarterly. https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2017/01/09/collaborating-equity-justice-moving-beyond-collective-impact/?utm_source=BHPN+Website+Newsletter+List&utm_campaign=1d3a6027f2-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_01_30&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c39fafc581-1d3a6027f2-325379717

⁹ Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective Impact. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Retrieved from https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

Outcome: The FAAC brought together people from different sectors in a deliberate and carefully facilitated way. A facilitator noted, “We did a good job in valuing the unique set of experiences people bring to the table.”

Innovation 1: The FAAC multistakeholder process exposed people to different ways of thinking

- Revealed barriers. Professionals do not always see obstacles /barriers to programs they administer. For example, a professional spoke of a new perspective gained at a meeting in which she “had a discussion with folks upset about losing the farmers market double up program, and this helped me to talk about HIP with my communities” (and explain how HIP replaces double up). The agency folks heard first hand stories of challenges of poverty, which opened eyes in new ways.
- Potential new collaboration. Professionals saw new avenues for collaboration across counties and sectors.
- Residents empowered to approach agencies. The stigma surrounding food insecurity is powerful and real. One FAOG member noted that a facilitator had stood up to a vocal professional critic of a FAOG suggested action step that consisted of SNAP members buying discounted food directly from stores. This gave her inspiration to stand up for her priorities. Another noted that together they felt strong enough to dare to stand up or approach agency professionals who manage their nutrition and assistance programs.

Innovation 2: People commented on connections made across class and between professionals and resident organizers.

- No “them and us” (agency staff vs community residents), but there was mutual respect and everyone worked together. One professional offered: *“I liked the early activity of introductions in a circle, saying something you liked and clapping or joining. This leveled us all. I haven’t been part of a process where people do not ask my affiliation.”*

Innovation 3: Representatives from a food-insecure population mostly felt valued and heard by the larger professional group.

- Residents felt heard. While some resident organizers felt tentative to speak up in the full group meetings, they said they felt heard when they did. The intentional structuring of mixed seating, activities that moved people around, icebreakers and the initial introductions without affiliation created a lack of distinction and built bonds between residents and professionals.
- Community residents want to self organize. Professionals noted that they saw that community residents want to organize, and began to see the ways that they are and can, despite challenges.

Challenge

- Different sense of time amongst groups. The planning time for relationship building was extensive. Some professionals felt too much time was spent developing relationships. The FAOG residents expressed contentment with the number of meetings, and further, expressed a need for continued structural support to continue organizing together.
- Lack of diversity. The majority of the people involved were white and from Northampton. People missing from the mix: people of color, veterans, state representatives/municipal government, elders, Amherst agencies. People offered strategies to engage a more diverse group in the next phase.

Insight:

- Multistakeholder groups require time and funding and careful thoughtful facilitation to build trust and relationships.
- Professionals don't necessarily understand the lived obstacles to food access that poverty entails. Hearing firsthand from residents opened their eyes to new challenges they hadn't imagined.
- The model of additional resident organizer meetings enabled this group to generate confidence, build knowledge and identify action steps to present at larger meetings with agency professionals. Well-facilitated process activities with the FAAC group built trust.

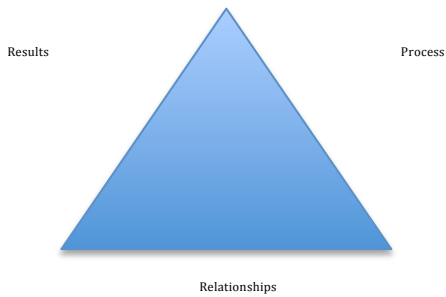
Conclusion

The FAAC process accomplished its three stated goals:

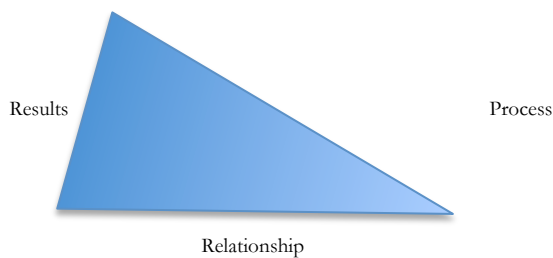
- Producing an agreed set of actions (Results);
- Bringing together people from different perspectives and valuing their points of view (Process)
- Providing all participants to get to know each other across different experiences and roles and to build trust and mutual understanding (Relationships).

From the focus groups, interviews, and surveys, we heard that people are involved because they share a common value that healthy food should be affordable and within reach of everyone; and that participants stayed for concrete structural design reasons. The second triangle below illustrates the success of the Relationships and Process goals of the FAAC. The diminished side of the Results reflects less clarity about what a multistakeholder collaboration might look like moving forward largely due to lack of clarity around funding for an anchor organization to take the lead. Where Healthy Hampshire can take the lead (the mobile market), energy is converging. Whether individual participating organizations can lead select parts of the action plan remains to be seen.

Attempted:



Reality:



Most participants reflected on the palpable sense of community and demonstrated gratitude for time to strategize together. Clearly the time period was long enough to accommodate collaborative process and achieve action steps, efficiently used for the professional agencies, but it was not clear whether the duration of the five meetings was long enough for the residents to dig in and then continue leading. While residents agreed that their capacities to work towards change in their communities were bolstered, they were less certain that they would be able to internally organize to continue together as a group without funding and an outside facilitator.

The facilitators achieved their design goal in constructing a vibrant planning process that reflects Collaborating for Equity and Justice model: explicitly addressing social and economic injustices, employing a community development approach in which residents had equal power in determining the action plan, building resident leadership and power, focusing on structural and policy change. The FAAC identified “low hanging fruit” as the immediate action steps – projects that already have anchor institutions and funding. The implementation will be decentralized, and therefore, generated by individual agencies and residents. Overall the participants considered it an excellent process. The FAAC process created a framework for equitable multi-sector collaboration which dismantles centuries of food system injustices experienced by African Americans, Native Americans, immigrants and

other marginalized groups. The FAAC process provides a foundational structure for collaborative process in Hampshire County and beyond.

Testimonial

We purposely didn't tell people at the beginning who everyone was. We didn't go into titles. That was really new. We didn't want folks from the community to feel less than [professionals] so we decided to leave that piece out at the beginning. It was really cool it wasn't about who is who or who has more power; instead it was a beautiful coming together of ground people and people who have decision making power.

It showed at the end. One person – a professional - said “I have a hard time talking about food insecurity without those people in the room.” Immediately one of the community folks said “What are you talking about we're right here!” She became really excited. The professional thought she was sticking up for folks who aren't in the room, and she was right; this normally happens. The fact was she hadn't connected the dots: she had been working with people with food insecurity, for five months. We saw we did a good job mixing folks.

The biggest thing that brought us together: each one of us understood so well how much food insecurity there is right here in Northampton, where there are so many resources and [so much] money. I don't think a lot of people in Northampton understand how much food insecurity there is here. Our shared understanding of how critical the issue is here, and how important, brought a lot of passion from all of us, ending in concrete results.

Everyone felt important. Everybody felt what they said was heard.

This was really about listening to the folks who are experiencing food insecurity, their concerns and ideas. Folks who have the power to create change did a great job bringing their own experience to the project, but also being willing to help with creating solutions. It didn't feel like a meeting of professionals about how to make this happen. It was more like how can we work together to fix it. Never “I know better than you, leave it up to me I've got you.” There was a whole lot of intentional listening. Professionals took the time to process, and came prepared for the next meetings with ideas to offer.

I also liked the early activity of introductions in a circle, saying something you liked and clapping or joining. This leveled us all. I haven't been part of a process where people do not ask my affiliation.

I appreciated [FAOG member's] meal. She prepared an unbelievable spread. Concrete, proactive, resourceful.

Evaluation by Catherine Sands/Fertile Ground, with support from Collaborative for Education Services evaluators, Catherine Brooks and Karen Auerbach.

The dimensions of success model works well. Visuals were great, and I'm using them more and more – especially the GIS mapping.

This area is more creative and thoughtful than Central MA. I didn't know so many individuals think about these issues. Hampshire County is so spread out and challenging with geographic dissonance. I saw new possibilities for partnerships. Organizations experience competition for the same resources – we need forums like this to work together. Confirmed to me that residents want to self organize. It's where the change happens.

Where my money goes matters to me. I choose to buy healthy food that has been fairly harvested. So I pay more and eat fewer bananas, for example. It's intimidating to be in a room with people who decide the benefits I get. Can I trust the process?

I wanted to be in a room of people who cared about what I care about.

It's embarrassing to talk about these hard issues.

Fascinating to meet people at state, city, who have power, whom we could influence.

I can feel the toll stress takes on me.

I like to come to meetings. It's something I can do well. I like to volunteer and do specific things.

It gave me permission to have a voice.

I learned about a broader food network. We know how to survive on the street - The breadth of that network and how to navigate it.

Caitlin asked at the first meeting, what are you doing that works to access healthy food? What are the obstacles? It's important to ask people struggling, "What have you tried?" people tend to want to fix it first...Other programs haven't asked me what I'm doing.

I felt authentic reactions from people. Genuine interest. People dropped their professional roles in the space.

Email reminders are great.

Positive feedback when I get things right.

Willingness of people to read my email suggestions

Being paid is essential.

Rides, convenient location, child care, food,

No fakeness! This was so important.

I am not a professional. When we spoke they wrote it down, were invested in what we were saying. I liked the other people there. We bonded, and hung out outside the meetings. Saw

each other at farmers markets. This gave us the empowerment to bring things up at the meetings. I haven't experienced this before.

We ended up going to other things. To resilience meetings. Branched out into trauma work and how to bring more awareness into our community.

The only thing I'd say is to try to diversify the residents. There weren't many people of color. That was missing. Having everybody represented. Diversifying even the resident group. I would have liked to hear more from people who eat differently: Halal, Muslim background. Kosher food, for instance.

We saw our recommendations brought forward into the process.