

Food System Dashboards

**An Analysis and
Recommendation for
the Pittsburgh Region
and Beyond**

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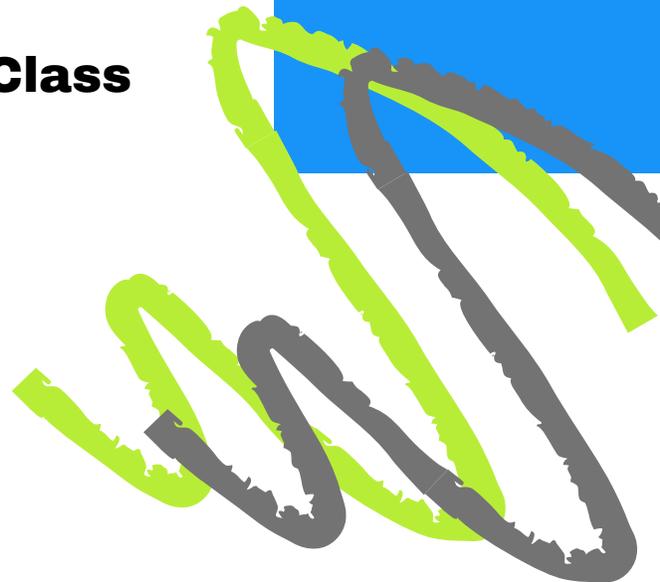


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About the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council

The Pittsburgh Food Policy Council's (PFPC) mission is to build a just, equitable and sustainable food system that supports our communities, economy and environment. As a collective impact organization, our members are our most important asset, and include various government, non-profit, food business, co-operative, university, and farm entities from Southwestern Pennsylvania who have decided to support each other's individual missions and goals.

Introduction and Purpose

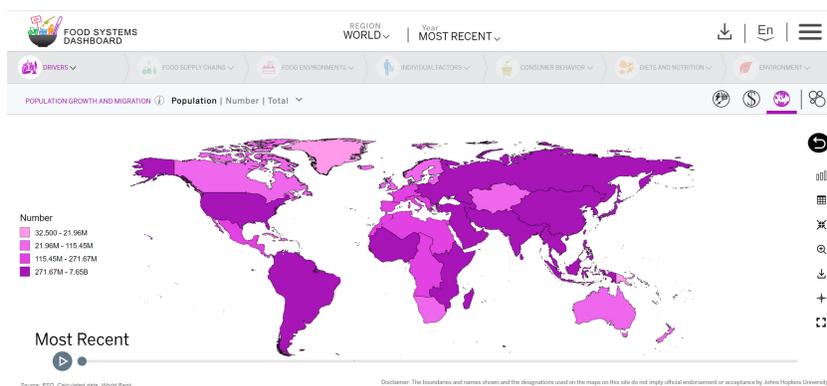
My hope is that this report and series of recommendations will assist the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council as we set goals for and design our own dashboard, build a community engagement strategy around the dashboard and our food action plan, and move with a racial equity lens throughout the entirety of this work. Outside of our organization, I hope this report can be a resource for those wanting to learn about the types of food system dashboards, reference and visit existing dashboards, understand the Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan (GPFAP) and food action plans more generally, and model the work being done here in their own communities.

Food Systems and Dashboards

A food system is the total of all inputs, actors, and participants that influence the way a community produces, processes, distributes, consumes, and disposes of food. When it comes to food justice and improving community health outcomes, looking holistically at the food system and creating policies that improve all areas of it will produce the improved community health outcomes desired by all. Food policy has a much larger impact than just improving nutritional outcomes of a community—these policies have major economic and environmental impacts. More urgently, racism and COVID-19 have created major challenges to food systems that require thoughtful policies to combat.

Food system dashboards are resources that can be used to analyze, measure, report facts, and support existing efforts to improve the state of a food system. There is no exact blueprint for a dashboard, and they can go by many different names. Some food policy council's websites even serve the function of a regional food system dashboard.

A quick Google search for "food system dashboard" will likely take you to a resource developed by Johns Hopkins University, The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, and collaborators at The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (a full list of collaborators can be found on their website: <https://foodsystemsdashboard.org/food-system>).



Population total, worldwide
Source: The Food Systems Dashboard Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and Johns Hopkins University
<https://www.foodsystemsdashboard.org>.

This is one of the more comprehensive dashboards in existence, with over 150 indicators that measure components, drivers, and outcomes of food systems at the country level. Users can view a country's profile, download key indicator information, and make comparisons to food systems around the world. There are several other dashboards for cities, metro areas, and states in the US, each with specific uses. A couple types of dashboards and links to examples are discussed in the following pages.

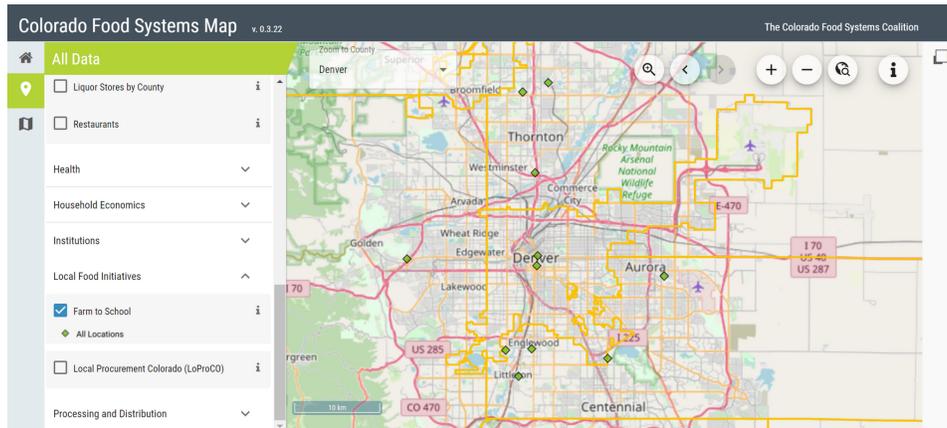
Examples of Food System Dashboards

Type 1: Spatial Data Dashboards

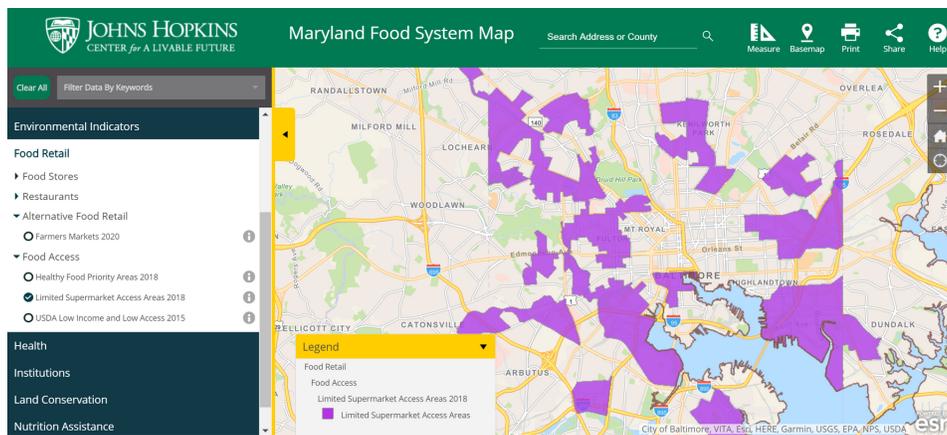
Resources like the “The Taste of Home: Local Food in North Idaho”, the Colorado Food Systems Map, and the Maryland Food System Map are composed entirely of spatial data. The Colorado and Maryland resources contain isolated census data by county that you can filter and see visually on a map. There is also spatial data related to food access like the locations of farmers markets and SNAP-accessible grocery stores. The North Idaho resource has many data points identifying community assets related to food systems, including small farms and ranches, food banks, farmers markets, community gardens, and farm-to-table restaurants. You can click an arrow on the map, and a pop up window appears with a small description as well as a link to a website or Facebook page, if available.

This type of dashboard can be an effective tool for policy makers, activists, organizers, and government officials. Resources and assets in the community can be easily filtered and identified. This data can provide insight to how policies are affecting neighborhoods or counties as well as identify key demographic information including the race, gender, and class status of these places.

The following are a few examples of these types of dashboards:



Farm to School Programs in Denver County Colorado
 Source: The Colorado Food Systems Coalition
<https://cofoodsystemsmap.org/>



Areas with limited supermarket access in the Baltimore, MD area
 Source: Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
<https://gis.mdfoodsystemmap.org/map>



Locations and web addresses of farmers markets in the North Idaho region
 Source: University of Idaho Extension
<https://arcs.is/1zLGB0>

Type 2: Food System Assessments

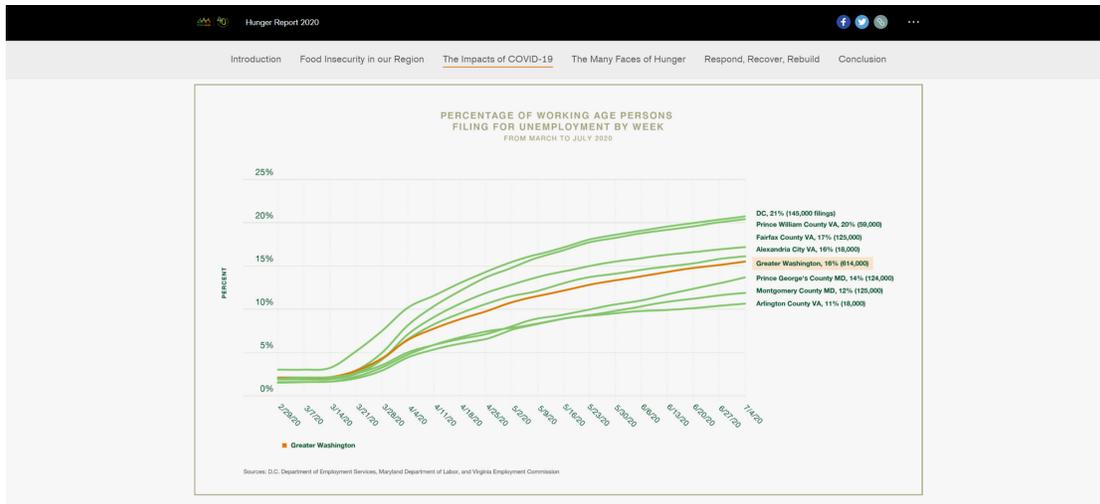
Some of these resources, like the 2020 Hunger Report in Washington DC and the Los Angeles Food Policy Council 2020 Food System Dashboard, provide a multi-faceted assessment of the food system, with interactive GIS maps, key indicators such as wages and transit usage, and data on COVID-19's impact on food security. Some of these dashboards go a step further and propose actions and recommendations outlining their plan to build a stronger and more equitable food system.

Whereas the previous type of dashboard was more of a tool, this type of dashboard can be used as a reference and data collection resource to inform justice-minded organizations and government leaders. It equips them with relevant data and key indicators to observe trends over time as they consider the effectiveness of policies and community programming.

While availability and affordability of produce seem to either be stable or increasing slightly, it is important to realize that 1 in 8 people in LA County are unable to find fresh fruit and vegetables in their neighborhood, while 1 in 5 are unable to afford them. This burden falls most heavily on people of color.

Indicator	2013	2017	2020	Trend
FOOD CONSUMPTION IN LA COUNTY				
Adults often able to find fresh fruits and vegetables in neighborhood ⁶	86.7%	86.5%	86.5%	→
Adults often able to afford fresh fruits and vegetables in neighborhood ⁶	76.5%	75.7%	79.2%	↗
Adults who consume 5+ servings of fruit and vegetables/day ⁷	16.2%	12.7%	12.1%	↘
Teens who consume 5+ servings of fruit and vegetables/day ⁶	24.1%	26.7%	32.4%	↗
Children (2-11) who consume 5+ servings of fruit and vegetables/day ⁶	25.8%	31.2%	24.6%	↘
Adults and children who consume fast food at least once/week ⁶	68.5%	71.5%	72.5%	↗
Adults who drink at least one soda or sweetened drink/day ⁷	35.5%	31.4%	NOT UPDATED	↘
Children who drink at least one soda or sweetened drink/day ⁷	38.3%	39.2%	37.2%	↘

Food Consumption in LA, Change from 2017-2020
 Source: LA Food Policy Council
 State of the Food System 2020
<https://www.goodfoodla.org/foodsystemdashboard>



Percent of Working Age Persons Filing for Unemployment by Week
 Source: Capital Area Food Bank Hunger Report 2020
<https://arcg.is/1LXqGW>



Stage 1 Phased Recovery Plan for Washington State's Food System After Covid-19
 Source: Capital Area Food Bank Hunger Report 2020
<https://arcg.is/1LXqGW>

For framing purposes to show where we are as an organization, and to educate those not affiliated with the PFPC, the next few pages will give a brief overview of the Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan. Advancing the goals of this plan is the primary purpose for our food system dashboard.

About the Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan

The Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan (GPFAP) is a community-centered approach to a policy roadmap and an action plan of strategies that prioritize healthy, affordable, and sustainable food for all. This plan is the product of over 3 years of research, reporting, and community engagement throughout Allegheny County. Creating the GPFAP was a deeply collaborative process, with input from over 600 county residents and over 100 people who work throughout the food system. More can be read on our website: www.foodactionplan.org

Timeline

Fall 2017 to Fall 2018

Developed project and leadership structure, learning from other food plans across the country. Developed specific goals for this food plan

Fall 2018 to Fall 2019

Released Allegheny County Food Policy Audit in Spring 2019 and the State of the Food System Report in Fall 2019

Spring 2019 to Fall 2019

Held roundtable discussions with stakeholders and community engagement sessions. Identified strategies for action to improve the food system

Fall 2019 to Fall 2020

Drafted and released GPFAP for public comment

Organizing the Food Action Plan

There are five total goals which provide the overall structure and framework for the vision of the plan. Each goal includes 3 to 15 recommendations all listed under their corresponding goal. For each recommendation, there are specific strategies that detail various ways the recommendation can be achieved.



Goals of the Food Action Plan

1 Enhance coordination and communication among existing food systems' resources and agencies 	2 Center the roles of equity, sustainable agriculture and environmental stewardship in a healthy food system 	3 Support a robust regional food economy that benefits all 	4 Improve food security and public health by increasing availability and accessibility of nutritious, high-quality, affordable and locally sourced food 	5 Build community power based on the principle of food sovereignty for all residents
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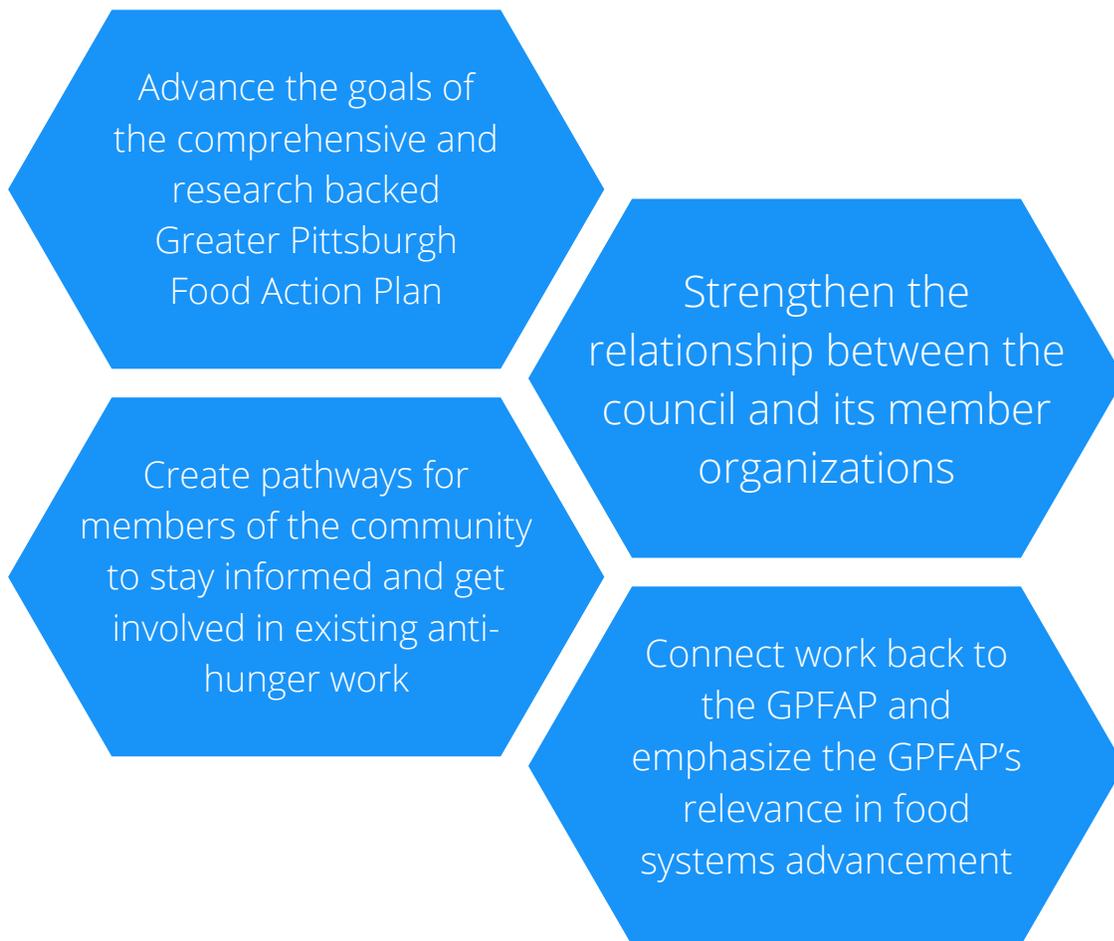
Priorities of the GPFAP

Of the 150 strategies outlined in the plan, steering committee members, working group members, and PFPC staff have identified the following priority areas for immediate action:

- Support community-led efforts to address food apartheid by building resilience, community leadership, and food sovereignty.
- Evaluate food access impact of decision making at public agencies across all levels of government.
- Advocate for more affordable public transportation.
- Maximize the scope and impact of governmental anti-hunger programs.
- Support food entrepreneurship by addressing the barriers faced by women, immigrants, people of color, and other marginalized communities.
- Advocate for living wages and for the human rights of food systems workers.
- Leverage the purchasing power of large institutions to support regional producers, a valued workforce, and environmental stewardship.
- Improve access to land, land ownership, land security, and capital for farmers, especially new and beginning farmers, farmers of color, and farmers of other marginalized communities.
- Secure financial support for regional and community food systems development.

Goals for a Pittsburgh Area Food System Dashboard

Given the unique nature of PFPC's Mission and our organization's current priorities, a food system dashboard for the region has the following specific goals:



Our food system dashboard will incorporate some elements of already existing dashboards. The final product will be a tool for the council, our member organizations, and the community to understand the GPFAP, the work being done to advance its goals, and current opportunities for getting involved.

A Recommendation for the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council

What We Can Learn From Others

The food policy audit conducted for the drafting of the GPFAP is similar to existing dashboards like the LA Food Policy Council's and the Capital Area Food Bank's in Washington state. Currently, our food action plan is solution-heavy, with over a hundred recommendations and suggestions for policy improvements. This is a strength of our organization compared to other food policy councils. Other dashboards have more data assessing the food system. The GPFAP itself is fine, and although some key findings are available in large downloadable documents, our strategy for creating a dashboard would be strengthened by sharing publicly these key findings in more accessible formats.

There is a lot for us to learn from the Rhode Island Food Policy Council's web engagement strategy. Similar to us, they outline 5 main goals for the food system on their website's homepage. Viewers can click to read more about each goal, sending them to a new page with a brief summary the goal's importance as well as significant facts and figures to support the relevance and urgency of the goal.

The screenshot shows the Rhode Island Food Policy Council website. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for CONTACT, ABOUT, FOOD SYSTEM, POLICY, INITIATIVES, RESOURCES, NEWS, and EVENTS. Below the navigation is a header for the 'RI FOOD SYSTEM' section. The main content area features a goal titled 'Preserve and Grow Agriculture & Fisheries Industries'. The goal description states: 'Thriving farms, aquaculture, fisheries, and food businesses are the foundation of our state's food system. Our state food plan, Relish Rhody, sets out activities designed to retain and expand land in agriculture and enhance technical assistance and coordination of resources. The plan emphasizes the importance of growing markets for Rhode Island seafood products and expand seafood processing capacity and infrastructure. For both land and sea food, our state food plan calls for strengthening job training opportunities, supporting innovative practices, and lowering regulatory barriers.'

Below the goal description is a 'KEY INDICATORS' section with a line graph titled 'Acres of Land in Food Production in Rhode Island'. The graph shows the number of acres from 1980 to 2020. The y-axis is labeled 'Acres' and ranges from 0 to 80,000. The x-axis is labeled 'Census Year' and shows years from 1980 to 2020. The data points are approximately: 1980: 60,000; 1985: 65,000; 1990: 60,000; 1995: 55,000; 2000: 50,000; 2005: 55,000; 2010: 65,000; 2015: 70,000; 2020: 55,000.

Below the graph, there is a caption: 'Acres of land in food production hit a low point in the early 1990s, then rose through 2012. The 2017 data indicated a significant dip.' and a source note: 'USDA Census of Agriculture (multiple years)'.

RI FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

CONTACT [social media icons]

ABOUT FOOD SYSTEM POLICY INITIATIVES RESOURCES NEWS EVENTS

Promoting a more equitable, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable food system in Rhode Island.

REAL FOOD JOBS RHODE ISLAND

The Real Food Jobs program (RFJ) creates a ready, flexible, and enduring workforce for Rhode Island's food industry sector by taking an employer-driven approach to identify current and future industry demand. RFJ works to promote a strong workforce infrastructure throughout the state by closing workforce skill gaps and creating dynamic industry pipelines.

CORE OBJECTIVES

- Convene employer cohorts to pinpoint industry need
- Build relationships that advance high impact initiatives
- Provide targeted workforce trainings
- Create strategic pipelines into and through the food industry
- Inspire youth to explore diverse career opportunities in food
- Aggregate and share value-add resources

While our core objectives remain the focal point of our work, we are taking the necessary steps to respond to the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on the local food economy. Whether you are a food business owner, worker, or community organization, we are here to support you.

UPCOMING TRAININGS & EVENTS

Fish Cutting Training
 In-person classes are currently on hold in order to comply with gathering restrictions. Please register if you are interested in future classes.
 Location: Herengracht
 Cost: Free!

The Fishing Industry is in need of a workforce with the skills to hand-process a wide range of species. Master the art of fish cutting through this hands on training program.

[SIGN UP HERE](#)

"Real Food Jobs Rhode Island" Initiatives Page
 Source: Rhode Island Food Policy Council Website
<https://rifoodcouncil.org/real-food-jobs/>

Additionally, the "Initiatives" tab on their website promotes current programs and events that members of the community can learn about and sign up to join. We can take this approach of sharing initiatives a step further. The initiatives and programs on their website are organized by the Rhode Island Food Policy Council. We have existing working groups and sub-committees that folks could join, but we would also boost the projects of our member organizations and relate them to the goals of the food action plan. This supports all four of the goals for our food system dashboard.

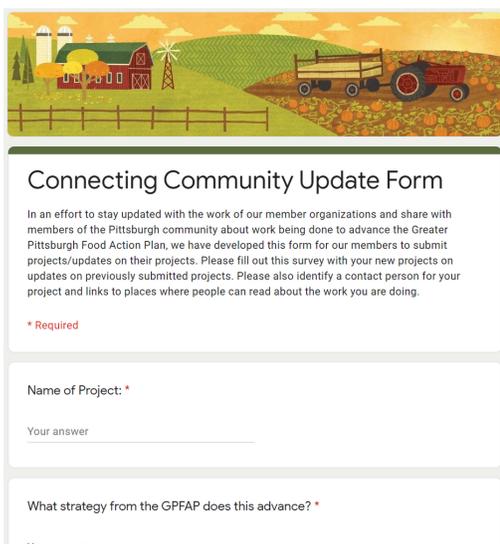
Creating our Dashboard

Incorporating the approaches from other organizations with the goals of this project, there are three steps we should take to build a successful dashboard for the Pittsburgh region:

- 1. Create a clear pathway for members to share their projects**
- 2. Design a transparent mechanism for sharing information**
- 3. Develop outreach and engagement strategies**

1. Create a clear pathway for members to share their projects

In order to direct members of the community to projects and initiatives that support the goals of our food action plan, we must first identify and highlight in detail the ongoing projects our member organizations are completing. The discussions from our core meetings have guided us to two possibilities. The first option is having our members access the new website and create entries on the designated pages. The second option is sending out a form to members every 3-4 months giving them the option to share any new projects they are working on related to the goals of the food action plan. The first option gives members control to share projects when they choose, while the second option gives us more control to ensure projects are filtered into the right category on the website.



Connecting Community Update Form

In an effort to stay updated with the work of our member organizations and share with members of the Pittsburgh community about work being done to advance the Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan, we have developed this form for our members to submit projects/updates on their projects. Please fill out this survey with your new projects on updates on previously submitted projects. Please also identify a contact person for your project and links to places where people can read about the work you are doing.

* Required

Name of Project: *

Your answer

What strategy from the GPFAP does this advance? *

Your answer

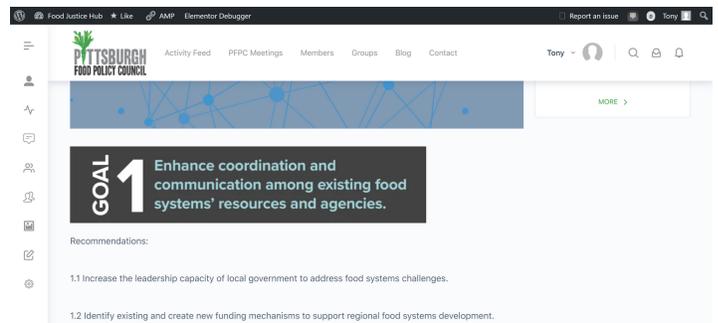
Link to member project update form
<https://forms.gle/BNU9zeerMXBgy986>

We should also ask our members how their projects use a racial equity lens specifically to target racial and class disparities in their implementation. Even if the answer to this question is not directly shared out with the community, asking this is good for our members, getting them to think through how their project should be helping those most often left out, and it reinforces our commitment to social justice in the work that we do and promote.

2. Design a transparent mechanism for sharing information

The most important part of this process is designing the forum to share projects with the community. Currently, our new website is the best vehicle to do this (*pittsburghfoodpolicy.com*). Once the site is built we can link it from our main site (*pittsburghfoodpolicy.org*). The main site will focus on biographical information about who we are and what we do, while the new site will house our ongoing projects and committee work.

The communications director at PFPC designed this potential layout on the new website. This is a great start, and similar to the style of the Rhode Island council. Taking this a step further, a few key findings and details around the importance of the goal would strengthen this page. Specifically, key findings related to racial disparities and the impacts of COVID-19 are of the utmost importance to include.



Until this website is ready to go public, our food action plan's website (*foodactionplan.org*) should be updated. Currently the GPFAP, the Food Policy Audit, and the State of the Food System are available for download, but these are very large documents. Furthermore, an executive summary, top priorities, and key findings are not visible on the page itself. Until this data can be displayed on the new website, having these visible on the food action plan page, or making these smaller files available for download, will improve the accessibility of our work and make sharing our goals easier.



3. Develop outreach and engagement strategies

To have a dashboard with our members' projects as well as our own opportunities is just the start. We need a strategy to actively share the resource we will build with the community. We can incorporate this dashboard into our already existing community engagement channels, starting with social media. This may look like a few introductory posts describing what the dashboard is and how people can use it, followed by regular posts highlighting one of our member organizations and a project they have shared, with a link to the page on our new website providing more details. Our bi-weekly newsletter is another avenue to promote the new dashboard. The same language from posts made on social media can be used in the newsletter for promotion. Folks already attending PFPC meetings are more likely to take interest in engaging with the dashboard. Sharing the resource at the start or conclusion of meetings is a great way to build a following as well. Meaningful relationships are built with intentional communication. Scheduling small meetings with our members about the dashboard and how they can use it falls in line with this project's goals of strengthening our relationships.

The dashboard will be an important tool to advance the goals of the food action plan, but there should also be a community engagement strategy for the GPFAP itself. Priority strategies could be highlighted in the newsletter and on social media. The social media posts can advise viewers to sign up for The Scoop to learn about the next strategy that will be shared.



Interviewing community leaders who were involved in the creation of the plan and are already doing work around the plan is another strategy for GPFAP engagement. These people already have a good understanding of the food action plan and have the industry knowledge to explain in detail why each priority strategy is important. At the end of each interview the interviewee can suggest policies that viewers should be advocating for to support the food action plan and projects or organizations that viewers can plug into if they are interested in joining the work. Recording 9 interviews, one for each priority strategy, and releasing the videos on a regular schedule would help the community better understand the plan, boost our social media presence, and strengthen our own relationship with our members/leaders in the community. This engagement strategy advances most of the goals of our food system dashboard as well.

A final recommendation: communication with other councils early and often throughout this process is key to our success. As discussed during the writing of the GPFAP, food action plans are not common and are a new tool used by others around the country. There is not exactly a blueprint for how to implement these plans or build engagement strategies around them. Communicating with other food policy councils around the country in similar situations as ours, or councils that have also created food action plans, will give us valuable insight moving forward.