



SPRING

ADVANCED POLICY ANALYSIS

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California Food Access and Security: How to Improve Food Council Support to Increase Equity

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Executive Summary

Food policy councils are notoriously underfunded¹ which limits their capacity to improve local and state food systems, support community food access and security, and create socially and environmentally just food systems. This problem is extended by limited collaboration between councils which then further damages council efficiency and effectiveness. Ultimately, these two issues perpetuate inequities experienced by marginalized California communities. This report aims to both provide data informed funding strategies and approaches for council collaboration for the California Food Policy Council.

To inform the recommendations of this report, extensive literature review were conducted, as well as the distribution and analysis of the California Food Policy Council Survey: Priorities and Structure, and several informational interviews were conducted. A case study on community engagement has also been included to exemplify methods for sustainable change. The analysis of this data led to several recommendations across the categories of funding and collaboration which are summarized in the table below.

Recommendations	
Funding	
Understanding Funders' Priorities	Engage funders with a variation of lenses and understand their priorities to expand the funder pool.
Diversifying Structure of Funding	Build support from a variety of funder types to lessen financial risk.
Increasing Perceived Legitimacy	Attract additional funders and members by ensuring organizational legitimacy.
Expanding the Network	Raise awareness of CAFPC and its members and identify new partners.
Leveraging Existing Membership for Funds	Impose a minimal fee to increase funds and create an incentive for engagement.

¹ "Funding Food Policy Councils: Stories from the Field." Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, 2015. https://assets.jhsph.edu/clf/mod_clfResource/doc/FundingFPCsStoriesfromtheField_6-12-15.pdf

Collaboration	
Creating a Grant Warehouse	House a digital warehouse of grant opportunities to aid councils in identifying funding and partnership possibilities.
Expanding Initiatives	Expand initiatives across various borders to increase opportunities for collaboration.
Developing an Environment of Collaboration	Increase the number of CAFPC calls and create a space for member councils to share their work, updates, and opportunities for collaboration.

Food Policy Councils: Goals, Structures, and Variation

Food policy councils (FPCs) are still relatively newly established organizations, with many in California being founded in the early 2000s². A report by Harper et al suggests that “[t]he central aim of most FPCs is to identify and propose innovative solutions to improve local or state food systems, spurring local economic development and making food systems more environmentally sustainable and socially just.”³ This aim comes from the need for change due to inequitable practices and policies. Examples of these issues include high costs of healthy food which can exclude certain groups from purchasing, policies negatively affecting viability of local food production, processing, and distribution⁴, and policies negatively affecting communities’ ability to grow, process, distribute, and recycle food in environmentally sustainable ways⁵.

FPCs improve food systems by focusing on projects and programs like school or community gardens and developing food hubs as well as through their policy advocacy to establish more equitable food outcomes. John Hopkins Center for a Viable Future, explains that food policy is a way to “help ensure that all people have access to safe, affordable, healthy food; protect our air, water, and land; support the farmers and workers who put food on our tables; and uphold rigorous standards for the welfare of animals

² Rachel Emas & John C. Jones. “Setting the table for policy intrapreneurship: public administrator perspectives on local food system governance.” Policy Design and Practice, 2021.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25741292.2021.1978691>

³ Harper, A et al. “Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned (Development Report No. 21)” Food-First, 2009.

<https://archive.foodfirst.org/publication/food-policy-councils-lessons-learned/>

⁴ “DNPAO State Program Highlights Food Policy Councils” Center for Disease Control, 2010.

<https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/foodpolicycouncils.pdf>

⁵ Los Angeles Food Policy Council - Sustainability Page.

<https://www.goodfoodla.org/foodsystemdashboard/sustainable>

used for food.⁶” The ultimate goal of FPCs is to support their communities' well-being through food access, security, and effective policy.

That being said, these food organizations vary greatly within the state of California with regard to their names, missions, activities, programs, staffing, and other prominent characteristics. For example, the names of the food organizations in California include descriptors such as councils, coalitions, alliances, systems, task forces, or none of the above. Although The Food Policy Network at Johns Hopkins considers food councils to be "organized groups of food system stakeholders who seek to influence food policies at the state, local or organizational level to create a more just, sustainable and healthy food system⁷", some of these organized groups in California suggest they have nothing to do with policy influencing. This is because they differ in the emphasis of their institutions; some may focus on advocacy while others center their projects and programs and yet others value their collaborative facilitation above all else. Many organizations are volunteer led while some are able to maintain stable staffing. Staffing differences are often due to the variance in structure; some are their own independent nonprofit while others may be fiscally sponsored, just to name a few of the FPC structures in California. Complicating these differences even further is the variation in culture which is often dependent upon geographic location, particularly differences between urban and rural areas. Food policy in itself seems to mean different things to different food organizations across the state as well. For example, one interviewee suggested that food policy is,

“identifying opportunities to change modernized or improve public and private policies ... I think the one thing it boils down really is food freedom in a lot of ways...it's easing up restrictions on local food production and access as well. [I]t's usually public and private policies, not just one or the other. Sometimes it's making a big change, sometimes it's actually just urging to modernize a policy or code.⁸”

Some interviewees provided definitions that were much broader, such as,

“Any policy related to food systems. So any part of the system, including ... production and consumption and ...waste and everything in between, and that policies can happen at many different levels. It can happen in government at different levels, but also can take place within institutions and corporations.⁹”

⁶ “Food Policy Primer; Food Policy” Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
<https://www.foodsystemprimer.org/food-policy/>

⁷ Calancie, L. “Measuring And Testing How Food Policy Councils Function To Influence Their Food Systems” University of North Carolina at Chapel, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.17615/47fr-sh93>

⁸ Participant APA14 Interview. Conducted by Samantha Smith, March 24, 2022.

⁹ Participant APA32 Interview. Conducted by Samantha Smith, March 21, 2022.

While another interviewee suggested that,

“Sometimes it's under economic development... it gets kind of put under different areas. The problem is that it intersects with everything. Like if we are not out there supporting and advocating for fair wages and working conditions and we're not aligning ourselves with those campaigns, nothing else we care about in the food system matters. So there's a lot of intersections that matter. And so the policy could be about wages and fair working conditions. And to me, that's food policy and intersects with what we're doing.”¹⁰

Alongside these many differences across organizations and perspectives, is the ongoing debate about whether or not these groups should include the word policy in their organization's name. As mentioned, some organizations have left policy out of their titles altogether, while others have stuck with the traditional FPC title. Some of those organizations, with or without policy in their official organizational titles, are adamant about the importance of their policy work and its influence while others mentioned their purposeful avoidance of policy related work. Interestingly, a number of California FPCs also noted the strategic absence of the policy word in their organization's name due to funding reasons; many seem to think that funders avoid providing support to organizations with the word policy in their title.

Regardless of their title, these food organizations are tremendously important to both the communities they serve as well as for the food policy environment of our state. Perhaps one of the most obvious benefits of FPCs is their ability to create and sustain a healthy and stable food environment for their communities. By increasing access to good foods, raising awareness of healthy food habits, and aiding in community wide food security, these FPCs play a massive role in supporting the health and well-being of their community members.

Many find that these FPC and other food organizations also bring the community closer. This is partly due to the fact that FPCs often can consist of farmers, distributors, retailers, food service operations, government agencies (public health, county social services and county agriculture departments), and other local community organizations that work in or with the food system. Some FPCs also develop close partnerships with county-based UC Cooperative Extensions to help facilitate their work¹¹. In other words, the FPCs who are supporting and representing these communities, are made of community stakeholders and residents of that specific community. This creates a space

¹⁰ Participant APA21 Interview. Conducted by Samantha Smith, March 23, 2022.

¹¹ Gupta, C. “Food policy councils are emerging as a model to address gaps in local policies” FOOD BLOG; Food news from the UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2019.
<https://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=29361>

for those in the community to get together, advocate for themselves, and create actionable and sustainable change through supporting their own neighborhoods.

Another benefit, of course, is supporting equitable policy change and creating policy aimed at things like food justice, improving food access, and leveraging and increasing access to land use. Again, while some FPCs avoid policy, others focus much of their energy on their capacity to influence policy. This level of benefit can be community specific, but often goes beyond city or county level and can be applicable across the state. FPCs are critical for moving the agenda forward with regard to equitable policies and sustainable change.

Despite all of the dramatic differences between these organizations, there are two commonalities among many of California's FPCs; the first is the common challenge of the lack of funding and its consequences and the second connection is the tie to the California Food Policy Council (CAFPC). This project will analyze existing FPC, funding, and collaboration literature. It will also analyze and draw upon survey and interview responses as well as a case study on community engagement. All methods help to inform final recommendations for the CAFPC to improve their own and their member councils' capacity. The recommendations will primarily cover topics of funding and increased collaboration between councils, but touch on other capacity expanding subjects as well.

Background, Principles, and Functions of the California Food Policy Council

CAFPC was established in February of 2013 when the first four councils became ratified members¹². Roots of Change, a "think and do" tank organization who helped create CAFPC, described the organization as "a collaborative of local food policy groups working to ensure that California's food system reflects the needs of all of its communities¹³." Since its formation, the number of ratified CAFPC member councils has risen to 29 throughout the state of California. These member councils sometimes represent entire regions such as Northern California or the Central Valley, or they may represent counties, or perhaps cities and towns. Of their 29 ratified members, very few councils represent rural regions, counties, or towns in California.

The process to become a ratified member council is rather simple and seemingly informal. The interested food organizations must first agree to CAFPC's ten principles, which are in the table below. Following the stated agreement, they must also appoint a

¹² California Food Policy Council - home page. <https://cafpc.net/principles/>

¹³ Roots of Change; California Food Policy Council. <https://www.rootsofchange.org/projects/california-food-policy-council/>

representative to the group as well as a backup representative. They then are added to CAFPC's listserv and included in the quarterly calls.

California Food Policy Council Principles
1. Ensures access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food as a basic human right .
2. Supports equity enhancing policies and practices that strengthen opportunities and benefits for disadvantaged farmers, workers, businesses and communities that experience disproportionate environmental, economic and health hardships.
3. Supports policies and practices that promote health and result in food environments that provide access to an abundance of affordable, fresh food choices, incentives to consume healthy, humane, local and California grown foods.
4. Protects and restores our environment and vital natural resources, such as air, water, soil, biodiversity, climate, and wildlife and eliminates waste wherever possible.
5. Supports a vibrant and diverse food and agriculture economy comprised of businesses of multiple scales that sell into local, regional, state, national and international markets, while creating strong linkages and benefits for our local and regional economies.
6. Recognizes that a fair food system requires functional immigration and labor policies that uphold the dignity, safety, and quality of life for all who work to feed us.
7. Recognizes the vital role of education in preparing our youth to become the next generation of informed eaters, producers, and food chain workers.
8. Values our farmland and fisheries and the hard work and commitment of our farmers, fisherfolk, and ranchers.
9. Operates within a global food system that generates economic, political, and market realities that impact the choices of California producers, food businesses, policymakers and consumers.
10. Requires that all food system stakeholders are engaged and collaborate in the political process and in vigorous dialogue with each other at the local, regional, state and national level.