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Food Democracy: Public Participation in New England Food Policy Councils

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FOOD DEMOCRACY: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN NEW ENGLAND FOOD POLICY COUNCILS

BY

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THESIS

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CCFSC: Cumberland County Food Security Council

FPC: food policy council

MA FPC: Massachusetts Food Policy Council

MAPC: Metropolitan Area Planning Council

MDAR: Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

PFC: Portland Food Council

PPS: Portland Public Schools

RFR: request for responses

SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
ABSTRACT

FOOD DEMOCRACY: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN NEW ENGLAND FOOD POLICY COUNCILS

by

Cathryn Porter

University of New Hampshire

Food insecurity is a persistent issue in New England. In 2016, food insecurity levels in New England ranged between 9% in New Hampshire and 13.8% in Maine (Feeding America, 2018). Food policy councils (FPCs) are one method to bring together community members and food systems stakeholders to address inequities in the food system, such as food access. However, implementing food democracy and, in particular, engaging under-represented groups in food systems decision-making remains challenging for FPCs. This research surveyed all 26 FPCs and networks in New England to identify how councils engage the public. Interviews and document analysis informed in-depth case studies of two food policy efforts: the Portland, Maine School Food Security Assessment and the MA Food Systems Plan. Public participation opportunities in these two cases are analyzed based on four elements of effective public participation identified from the literature: process and fairness, representation, information and resources, and outcomes. Finally, attributes of FPCs and the policy process that influence effective public participation are analyzed.

The landscape of New England FPCs is crowded and heterogeneous. Just over half of the councils, 15, work on policy efforts, which include school policy, food access, production,
distribution and processing, and plans and assessments. Of these 15, most operate at the municipal or county level, about half are housed in government, and many include multiple food system sectors and underrepresented groups in public participation opportunities. Like most of the New England FPCs, in both Massachusetts and Portland, Maine, policy efforts engaged diverse stakeholders through multiple methods. However, the case studies highlight interesting differences in how diverse stakeholders were engaged in the policy efforts, which had more of an impact on the public participation effectiveness than the FPC attributes. These differences include who was engaged (e.g. professionals working in organizations providing services or underrepresented individuals themselves), the method by which they participated (e.g. working groups, leadership team, interviews, surveys), and their level of engagement (e.g. consultation or empowerment). These findings highlight important questions for FPCs to consider about representation and empowerment of underrepresented audiences in food policy efforts.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Significance

Food insecurity is a persistent issue in the United States and New England. In 2016, the nationwide rate of food insecurity was 12.9% (Feeding America, 2018). In New England, rates ranged from 9% in New Hampshire to 13.8% in Maine (Feeding America, 2018). Access to food is one example of an inequity in the food system. Other inequities include lack of access to land and lack of livable wages in many food systems jobs (Harper et al., 2009). These inequities disproportionately impact under-represented groups, including people of color, low income individuals and food insecure individuals. Food democracy is the concept that community members should be involved in shaping their food system. All members of the food system must have equitable access to participate so that no groups are excluded from healthy food systems (Hassanein, 2003; Harper et. al, 2009; Purifoy, 2014). Agyeman (2013) asserts that the food movement is led by white, upper-middle class members, and is also catered to the needs of the white upper-middle class, further marginalizing minority and low income populations. There is concern that the local food movement has ignored some groups of community members at the local level, leading to a lack of participatory democracy in food systems decision-making (DeLind, 2011). The very people who are suffering from the “failings” of our current food system, such as lacking access to food, land or a livable wage, have little political or economic voice (Harper et al., 2009). Those with grievances in the food system must participate if meaningful change is going to take place (Allen, 2010; Hassanein, 2003).

First started in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1980, food policy councils are one tool designed in theory to engage food systems stakeholders and community members, including under-represented groups, around food systems decision-making. The purpose of a food policy council
is to gather stakeholders that represent different sectors of the food system (production, consumption, processing, distribution and waste) and community members together to discuss issues around food, evaluate and advocate for policies, and implement programs to educate the community about food systems (Harper et al., 2009). However, there is some debate whether food policy councils actually do, in practice, engage a broad group of stakeholders and the public, including under-represented audiences. There is evidence in the literature that there are two opportunities for councils to improve. One criticism is that membership of food policy councils is homogenous; many are comprised of educated white professionals that do not reflect their constituency (Horst, 2017; Packer, 2014). Another issue identified is that councils have a desire to work on engaging diverse member of their community, but view public participation as a challenge (Agyeman 2013; Blackmar, 2014; Packer 2014).

This research analyzes the following questions:

1. In what ways do New England FPCs (focused on policy) engage the public?

2. Are the strategies implemented by FPCs effective at engaging under-represented groups?

3. What FPC attributes contribute to whether FPCs effectively engage under-represented groups?

1.2 Literature Review

In the following literature review, I first focus on deliberative democratic theory and defining public participation and its benefits and pitfalls. Deliberative democratic theory is premised on the need to include citizens in decision-making. Policy processes that include public participation have several benefits such as transparency, building credibility, educating policymakers and citizens, increasing social capital and improving outcomes and decisions. However, not all public participation opportunities are effective. For example, a common
problem is lack of connection between citizen input and decision-making. Another challenge is a decline in citizen engagement. Based on the literature, I then develop a framework to assess public participation, which includes process and fairness, representation, information and resources, and outcomes. Next, I connect public participation and food systems through the concepts of food democracy and food justice, which focus on the need for people, especially under-represented groups, to participate in food systems decision-making. Finally, I examine the connection between food policy councils and public participation. Common challenges food policy councils experience include lack of diverse membership and barriers to implementing community engagement. Based on the literature, I identify attributes of food policy councils that may influence the effectiveness of public participation, such as scale, structure, capacity, membership and focus on food justice.

**Deliberative Democratic Theory**

The early 1990s presented a shift from expert-based policy making toward the inclusion of citizens in decision-making, and even more recently there has been an increase in the occurrence of citizen juries, panels and conferences held by governments and foundations interested in engaging citizens in decision-making and policymaking. Many scholars agree that “public deliberation is essential to democracy” (Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004).

Deliberative democratic theory provides the foundation for understanding why it is important and recommended that citizens be involved in decision-making and policymaking. Deliberative democratic theory suggests ways in which democracy can be enhanced, and criticizes institutions that do not measure up to the normative standard (Chambers, 2003). Deliberative democratic theory claims that for decisions in democracies to be legitimate, they
must be deliberated (Ankeny, 2016). We see two dominant approaches, “voting centric” democracy where citizens select predetermined preferences or interests and compete through a fair process; “talk centric” democracy provides the opportunity for discussion at the beginning of the process, before the interests and preferences are determined for voting (Chambers, 2003). Many theorists claim that voting as a mechanism does not support the theory of deliberative democracy because voting does not require discussion and deliberation. There is value in discussion about an issue before voting; discussion allows participants to share views, communicate preferences, and brainstorm a wider range of solutions or alternatives (Abelson et al., 2003). Deliberation is defined by Chambers (2003) as a discourse in which the goal is for participants to produce reasonable opinions based on the conversation, differing perspectives and new information. There is not consensus amongst scholars on the definition of deliberative democracy, but many agree that it includes debate, listening, and decision-making (Carpini et al., 2004).

Public Participation

Public participation is a process where public input is gathered and integrated into decision-making (Creighton, 2005). Public participation is an organized process and scholars agree that it involves two-way communication and interaction; not simply informing or educating the public (Creighton, 2005). Public participation can include deliberation or not. Methods of public participation range from those that gather input through surveys, opinion polls, focus groups or public hearings to those that include deliberation to ultimately come to a decision, such as citizens’ juries, consensus conferences or citizen/public advisory committee (Abelson et al., 2003; Rowe & Frewer, 2000).
Proposed Benefits of Public Participation

Scholars claim many benefits of public participation. Chambers (2003) and Creighton (2005) state that deliberative processes build legitimacy and credibility through public participation. Allowing community members to participate facilitates transparency in the process. Deliberation through public participation can also build consensus amongst participants who many have a difference in opinion and can help to promote mutual respect amongst participants (Creighton, 2005; Chambers, 2003). Ankeny (2016) asserts that beyond learning about the public’s concerns, interests and values, additional benefits of public participation include educating the public on the topic at hand.

While public participation can increase the time spent deliberating over a solution to an issue, using public participation shortens the implementation time because the public feels some ownership over the solution and is less resistant (Creighton, 2005). Scholars generally agree that public participation leads to more effective outcomes and decisions that are respected (Ankeny, 2016; Chambers, 2003; Creighton, 2005).

Beyond better decisions and policies, another proposed benefit of deliberative processes is that participation will lead to an increased number of citizens engaged and active in the community, leading to an increase in the community’s social capital (Carpini et al., 2004). The premise of social capital is like that of other forms of capital: an investment in social networks or relationships will result in a return or profit (Lin, 2001). Social capital is defined by networks and connections that give rise to the norms of reciprocity and trust, leading to cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 2000). Further, the opportunity to engage in decision-making processes educates citizens about the process therefore building capacity for new community leadership (Creighton, 2005).
Public Participation Pitfalls and Challenges

While there are many positive claims of public participation and deliberative democracy, there is debate about the practicality and essentiality to provide these opportunities in order for decision-making to be democratic. One complaint is that opportunities for citizen participation are offered too infrequently or too late in the process to provide meaningful input (Carpini et al., 2004). Another issue is the idea of a “gated democracy” in which affluent citizens use their money to influence politicians, so engaging citizens has no impact in the decision-making process; similarly, some participation opportunities are designed in such a way that the citizen input is disconnected from the decision-making (Carpini et al., 2004). Specifically related to deliberative processes is the limitation of the number of citizens who can meaningfully participate and deliberate; by design this approach is exclusive (Abelson et al., 2003). There are also challenges in determining how to select people to participate and dealing with issues of representation (Abelson et al., 2003).

A challenge of public participation is explained by Skocpol (2003), who argues that citizens are also less engaged now in comparison to previous decades. The shift from membership based organizations in the 1830s to 1950s to professionally managed groups that are focused on narrow topics serving “memberless constituents” has eroded democracy (Skocpol, 2003). In the past, these membership based groups engaged groups of people across social classes and Skocpol (2003) contends that returning to membership groups will lead to more relevant policymaking and revitalize civic engagement in the country. There is a need to strengthen democracy by reforming civic life. Skocpol (2003) argues that civic life has transformed from shared values and vision to the pursuit of specialized interests, and to revitalize democracy, it is necessary to address issues of economic inequality and power disparity.
Empirical research also states that a central idea of deliberative democratic theory is that through deliberation, there is the potential to change peoples’ opinions and perspectives; however, few scholars adhere to the idea that deliberation inevitably leads to consensus and instead propose that there are certain ideal conditions that help the process lead to more amicable, collaborative results (Carpini et al., 2004; Chambers, 2003). Group polarization theory also challenges this idea, suggesting that in a group with individuals with differing opinions, deliberation will lead these individuals to have even more polarized views (Chambers, 2003).

Assessing Public Participation Opportunities

Scholars and practitioners have developed frameworks for assessing and categorizing public participation opportunities. There is some discussion in the literature about the lack of evaluative tools to assess public participation, and that it can be very subjective as there is debate of what constitutes “effectiveness” (Beirele, 1999; Rowe and Frewer, 2000). Rowe and Frewer (2000) also describe the literature as having little consideration for “good” outcomes, as most criteria in the literature is focused on the process and not measuring outcomes. There are challenges with assessing outcomes from a public participation process because ultimately, depending on the issue, there are likely multiple groups or individuals who may consider the outcome as positive or negative.

Scholars who have developed assessments for public participation opportunities primarily study environmental decision-making processes, and include Webler (1995), Beierle (1999), and Rowe and Frewer (2000). Abelson et al. (2003) draw on the framework developed by Webler (1995) to create a slightly different framework. The International Association of Public Participation has a list of core values for the practice of public participation and also categorizes
public participation on a Public Participation Spectrum to assess where the public participation opportunity falls on the spectrum (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower) (2014). The Ladder of Citizen Participation presents another method of assessing the quality of public participation (Arnstein, 1969). There is also the concept of thin, thick, and conventional methods of public participation as another method of classifying public participation (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015).

Webler’s (1995) framework builds off of Habermas’ ideal speech theory. The main components of framework include fairness and competence. Fairness refers to the opportunity for participants to act meaningfully. When people come together to make a decision about an environmental issue, there are four fundamental actions:

1. Attend (be a participant)
2. Initiate discourse (make speech acts)
3. Discuss (challenge and defend claims)
4. Decide (have an influence on collective consensus) (Webler, 1995).

Agenda and rulemaking are important and there should be fair access for participants to play a role in setting the agenda and making the rules; there should also be a facilitator or moderator to enforce the rules. Discussion is another crucial piece under the criterion of fairness: everyone must have the opportunity to participate and it is necessary to strike a balance between experts with higher credibility and community members. The second meta criterion in Webler’s (1995) evaluative framework is competence, which refers to knowledge. Crucial to competence are access to knowledge, meaning access to appropriate information but also the ability to interpret and understand the information; and how information is selected, providing participants the opportunity to have a say in evaluating and selecting information (Webler, 1995).
Rowe and Frewer (2000) identify two different meta criteria in their assessment of public participation: acceptance and process. Acceptance refers to whether the public perceives the process to be fair and democratic. Included under acceptance are representativeness and that the participants should comprise a representative sample of affected populations and independence, and organizations conducting public participation opportunities should be unbiased and should consider hiring a facilitator. Also included in the criteria of acceptance are early involvement, whereby there are opportunities to participate early in the process and that the public debate should be about problem definition and agenda setting rather than discussion on a set of predetermined problems; influence, meaning that the input should have some weight in decision-making and outcomes and the public should be informed how their input was considered and used; and transparency, that participants should be able to see what is going on and how decisions are being made. The second meta criterion described by Rowe and Frewer (2000) is process. Process criteria includes access to resources (information, human, material, time) to complete tasks and define tasks, meaning that the task for participants is clear, and participants understand the scope, outputs and the overall procedure. Finally, process criteria also includes structured decision-making, or that appropriate structures are used to make decisions in a transparent way, showing the reasons for the outcomes; and cost effectiveness, whether or not the particular event was the best way to gather public input given cost (Rowe & Frewer, 2000).

Abelson et al. (2003) draw on the framework developed by Webler (1995) to develop a slightly different framework, which includes four criteria: representation, procedural rules, information and outcomes. Similar to the representation criteria defined by Rowe and Frewer (2000), Abelson et al. (2003) describe representation as comprising a representative sample that considers geography, demographics and politics and that participants are selected fairly.
Procedural rules represents the idea that participants should have the opportunity to set the agenda, establish rules, and select information; procedural rules also encompasses the idea of credibility/legitimacy of process, at what point in the process is input sought, the amount of time for deliberation, the opportunity to challenge experts and information, and who is listening (Abelson et al., 2003). Information is another criterion presented by Abelson et al. (2003), which is defined as the types of information presented, selected, and interpreted; who chooses the information presented; and whether there is sufficient time to review, discuss and challenge the information. The final evaluative criteria are outcomes and decisions, which refers to the legitimacy and accountability of decisions, communication of decisions and how input informed decisions, the degree to which the authority responded to citizen concerns, whether the participants are satisfied with the process, achievement of consensus or broad-based understanding, and better or different decisions (Abelson et al., 2003).

Beierle (1999) focuses on assessing public participation based on five social goals: informing and educating the public; incorporating public values, assumptions and preferences into decision-making; increasing substantive quality of decisions; fostering trust in institutions; and cost effective decision-making. Beierle (1999) points out that his assessment is not narrowly focused on outcomes, as only referring to outcomes misses other important results of participatory processes. The first social goal, informing and educating the public refers to the importance of educating the public to build a strong and well-functioning environmental regulatory system where the public understands tradeoffs of various solution. Goal two, incorporating public values, assumptions, and preferences into decision-making, refers to educating public agencies on the public’s values and preferences. Beierle (1999) also points out that stakeholders and the public have different opinions and views, and thus, it is important to
involve all stakeholders, because there is no “common good”, only a relative common good that arises out of deliberation and negotiation. Beierle’s (1999) third goal, to increase the quality of decisions, refers to the idea that the process spurred new knowledge, ideas, solutions that may not have otherwise come up, although this is challenging to measure. Another social goal identified by Beierle (1999) is the goal of increasing trust in institutions, referring to the idea that an effective way to regain trust is through involvement and transparency. The final goal is cost effective decision-making, referring to the cost of the participation in relation to the benefits gleaned (Beierle, 1999).

While the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) has not published criteria for evaluating public participation opportunities, the association has published core values as well as a spectrum for measuring the level of public participation. Many of the core values are very similar to the criteria presented by scholars assessing public participation opportunities. The core values include the idea that those impacted by a decision have the right to participate in decision-making and that these individuals should be sought out and have a role in determining how they will participate (International Association of Public Participation Federation, 2018b). It is necessary that public input will have some influence over the decision. Additional core values are that public participation promotes sustainable decisions, the public will have information necessary to participate in a meaningful way, and that the public will be informed as to how their input affected the outcome (International Association of Public Participation Federation, 2018b).

The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation is a tool which categorizes public participation opportunities on a scale. The level of public participation increases from left to right, moving from inform (the lowest level of public participation), consult, involve,
collaborate, and finally, to empower (the highest level of public participation) (International Association of Public Participation Federation, 2018a), shown in Figure 1.1. While this spectrum is not necessarily used for evaluative purposes, the association recommends the spectrum be used for determining the level of public participation required for a particular decision or project (International Association of Public Participation Federation, 2018a).

**Figure 1.1: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation** (International Association of Public Participation Federation, 2018a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inform</th>
<th>Consult</th>
<th>Involve</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>Empower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Participation Goal</strong></td>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.</td>
<td>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.</td>
<td>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.</td>
<td>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promise to the Public</strong></td>
<td>We will keep you informed.</td>
<td>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how the public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Ladder of Citizen Participation presents another method of categorizing public participation that is focused on outcomes (Arnstein, 1969). The ladder has eight rungs which show the many levels of citizen participation, shown in Figure 1.2. Levels of nonparticipation describes public participation aimed not at engaging participants in decision-making, rather to educating or to “curing” participants. Degrees of tokenism, informing and consulting, where participants have a voice but lack power to make a change. Placation describes participation in an advisory capacity. At the top of the ladder, degrees of citizen power describe partnership in negotiations or empowerment to make decisions. (Arnstein, 1969).

**Figure 1.2 Ladder of Citizen Participation** (Arnstein, 1969 p. 217).

- **Degrees of Citizen Power**:
  - 8. Citizen control
  - 7. Delegated power
  - 6. Partnership

- **Degrees of Tokenism**:
  - 5. Placation
  - 4. Consultation
  - 3. Informing

- **Nonparticipation**:
  - 2. Therapy
  - 1. Manipulation

Public participation can also be categorized into three forms: thick, thin, and conventional (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). Thick public participation is defined by the opportunity for deliberation, or for groups of people to gather, discuss and make decisions on a topic. Examples of thick public participation include study circles, world café, citizen juries, planning charrettes, as well as some online activities. Thin public participation is classified as individuals versus
groups participating and generally requires less of a time commitment. Thin public participation varies widely and includes activities like surveys, petitions, polls, and booths at events. Thin and thick forms of public participation each have strengths. Thick public participation is considered more valuable because of the level of deliberation and input, but thin participation opportunities are valuable because of the limited time commitment required and the ease and convenience of participating. It is important to have a mix of both thin and thick public participation.

Conventional participation is the most common form of public participation and takes place at most meetings or hearings of public bodies; this type of public participation usually includes advance notification, “audience-style room setup”, a pre-set agenda and opportunities for the public to provide comment during a segment of the meeting. Conventional participation is problematic for several reasons. Conventional participation is not participatory in nature and participants often attend public meetings when they are angry or in opposition to something and only have two minutes at the podium to share their thoughts; this doesn’t actually result in any change or impact in decision-making. This exchange can result in decreased trust in government and make citizens feel powerless (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015).

Nabatchi & Leighinger assert that “good” public participation means “treating citizens like adults” (2015). Essentially, this means providing factual information to participants; using group process techniques and considering using a facilitator and well-planned agenda; providing participants an opportunity to share why the issue matters to them and to make connections with others; provide policy choices; ensure that participant input has an impact on the decision; offer multiple ways for people to participate; making participation enjoyable; and making participation easy (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). Both thin and thick public participation opportunities should aim to meet these criteria for good public participation.
Common themes identified in the literature as presented above, include representation, process and fairness, information and resources, and outcomes. The definitions of these criteria are represented below by author in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2. Elements of Effective Public Participation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Process and Fairness      | - Involving public early in the process (Abelson et al., 2003; Rowe & Frewer, 2000)  
- Participants have opportunity to participate in setting the agenda and rules (Abelson et al., 2003; Webler, 1995); participants have opportunity to design how they participate (International Association of Public Participation Federation, 2018a)  
- Clear definition of task (Rowe & Frewer, 2000)  
- Equal opportunity for participants to speak (Webler, 1995)  
- Multiple opportunities offered and different types of opportunities (both thick and thin) available (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015)  
- Ample time for discussion (Abelson et al., 2003; Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015)  
- Participants have opportunity to challenge information presented (Webler, 1995)  
- Effective moderation and enforcement of rules (Webler, 1995)  
- Sound group process techniques (agenda, facilitator) (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015)  
- Structured decision-making process (Rowe & Frewer, 2000)  
- Public understands how decisions are made (Rowe & Frewer, 2000)  
- Cost effectiveness (Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Beirele, 1999) |
| Representation            | - Participants comprise a representative sample of the affected population (International Association of Public Participation Federation, 2018b; Abelson et al., 2003; Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Beirele, 1999)  
- Individuals affected by the decision are sought out to participate (International Association of Public Participation Federation, 2017) |
| Information and Resources | - Access to information and interpretation of information (International Association of Public Participation Federation, 2018b; Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015; Webler, 1995)  
- Access to human resources, material resources, finances, time (Webler, 1995)  
- Participation in procedures for knowledge selection (Abelson et al., 2003; Webler, 1995)  
- Time to sufficiently review information (Abelson et al., 2003) |
| Outcomes                  | - Increase quality of decisions – process added knowledge/ideas that wouldn’t have otherwise come up (factual information, discovering mistakes, generating new ideas and alternatives) (Abelson et al., 2003; Beirele, 1999)  
- Participants are satisfied with the process (Abelson et al., 2003)  
- Participants become more educated on topic and learn about tradeoffs of various proposals (Arnstein, 1969; Beirele, 1999; Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015)  
- Public agencies are educated on the public’s preferences and values (Beirele, 1999)  
- Increased trust in institutions (Beirele, 1999)  
- Increased social capital (Carpini et al., 2004; Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000).  
- Input has influence on decision-making (Arnstein, 1969; International Association of Public Participation Federation, 2018b; Abelson et al., 2003; Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015; Rowe & Frewer, 2000)  
- Participants are empowered to make decisions (Arnstein, 1969; International Association of Public Participation Federation 2018a).  
- Influence of input in decision-making is communicated to the public (International Association of Public Participation Federation, 2018b; Rowe & Frewer, 2000)  
- Improved policies (Abelson et al., 2003) |
Several scholars promote the need for public participation in food systems decision-making. Food democracy is the idea that community members should be involved in shaping their food system (Harper et al., 2009) and that all members of the food system have equitable access to participate (Hassanein, 2003) so that no groups are excluded from healthy food systems (Purifoy, 2014). Because participation is crucial to democracy, food democracy is described by Hassanein (2003) as one of the most promising approaches to moving towards a more sustainable food system. There is some skepticism around the idea of creating a “democratic food system” but a need to democratize the food system through the collective effort and participation of citizens at the local level (Ackerman-Leist, 2013). The American public needs to have more involvement in decision-making about their food system, and food policy councils offer an opportunity for community members to engage and have a voice (Sova McCabe, 2011).

Another reason to involve the public is because food systems decisions are values based and often, the consequences of choices are uncertain, and thus, food system advocates cannot rely solely on experts to make decisions (Hassanein, 2003).

Beyond the fact that public participation is fundamental to democracy, there are many reasons why it is necessary to engage community members, especially under-represented populations, around food systems decision-making. This is an important component of working on food justice. Food democracy literature especially highlights the need for under-represented groups to participate in decision-making. One reason is the fact that people who are suffering from the “failings” of our current food system, such as lack of food access, have little political or economic voice (Harper et al., 2009). Those with grievances in the food system must participate if meaningful change is going to take place (Allen, 2010; Hassanein, 2003). There is a need to be
creative about finding ways to incorporate vulnerable and under-represented populations into deliberative processes (Allen, 2010). Many scholars agree that there is a need for the public to be engaged in food policy, however, there is not consensus on the appropriate mechanisms for doing so (Ankeny, 2016).

Food Justice

The food justice movement is in direct response to the negative impacts of the global industrial food system on health, environment and equity (Purifoy, 2014). The movement was born out of reframing food security movements from the 1980s (Weckerle, 2004). Food security and anti-hunger movements focused on emergency food assistance, whereas the food justice movement shifted to focus on the right to food and the need for systemic change to eradicate disparities and inequalities (Horst, 2017; Weckerle, 2004). Food justice activists advocate the prioritization of dismantling institutional racism and debating policies and programs that support inequalities in the food system (Horst, 2017). The 2012 Food + Justice = Democracy conference attendees defined food justice as “the right of communities everywhere to produce, process, distribute, access and eat good food regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, ability, religion, or community” (Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, 2012).

Some scholars debate whether organizations that claim to be focusing on food justice are “doing” food justice work or are simply part of the alternative food movement. Cadieux and Slocum (2015) have developed a framework for assessing whether organizations are, in fact, working on food justice. This framework includes four characteristics of food justice, the first being “trauma and inequity”, which is defined as recognizing and debating social trauma and historical gender, race and class inequities and recognizing power as necessary to confront these
inequities. The second characteristic, “exchange” is defined as creating mechanisms for cooperation and trust to achieve communal reliance. Another characteristic of food justice, “land”, is focused on providing access to land and creating innovative ways to use and own land. The final characteristic, “labor” is focused on labor that guarantees a minimum income that compensates fairly for the value of labor. The authors also discuss the process of practicing food justice, describing that this includes understanding the role of power and bringing power into the conversation; analyzing policies and programs for their ability to impact systemic change; and focusing on equity in democratic participatory processes (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015). Cadieux and Slocum (2015) do not explicitly name food access as a component of food justice, arguing that food justice goes beyond food access to address systemic inequities. Even if food access is considered a temporary solution to hunger, it is necessary to include food access under the umbrella of food justice in order to forge a solution to hunger before systemic inequities are dismantled.

**Food Policy Councils**

Food policy councils are one example of a way to increase citizen participation in food systems decision-making. Hassanein (2003) describes food policy councils as a concrete attempt to put food democracy into practice. The councils bring together community members and food systems stakeholders to discuss issues in the food system, implement programs, educate the community, and advocate for policy change (Harper et al., 2009). Food policy councils provide an opportunity to bring together a group of diverse stakeholders together to take a food systems approach to solving issues in their community, county or state. Some examples of projects that food policy councils take on include writing a food charter, making recommendations for local
zoning and land use policy to support agriculture, increasing access to local produce through SNAP (supplemental nutrition assistance program) incentives at farmers markets, or writing a school food policy that includes local food procurement (Harper et al., 2009).

According to a 2016 survey conducted by Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, there are 262 active food policy councils in the US, with the greatest number of councils in the states of California and North Carolina (Sussman & Bassarab, 2016). Councils in the US are active at different jurisdictions, including state, county, county and city/municipality, city/municipality or Native American Tribal Council. Over half of the states (28) have a state-level food policy council, 17 states do not have a council at the state level, and one state (Wisconsin) has three councils operating at the state level. There is at least one food policy council in each state except for South Dakota, Wyoming, and New Hampshire. The most common type of council in the United States is a grassroots council that operates at the county level; other types of structure include non-profit, housed in another non-profit, housed in government, housed in an Extension office, or embedded in a college or university. In terms of policy priorities, the most common priority selected was healthy food access, followed by economic development and food procurement. The top two responses for organizational priorities included community engagement and inclusion, and strategic or policy planning. The survey also reported that councils claim to be engaging politically and civically a great deal or a moderate amount, however, the report does not define engagement (Sussman & Bassarab, 2016).

**Food Policy Councils and Public Participation**

While there is consensus that one of the purposes of food policy councils is to provide an opportunity for diverse stakeholders to work together and for community members to provide
input, there is some debate whether food policy councils actually do, in practice, engage a broad group of stakeholders and the public. A handful of authors have addressed the issue of public participation and food policy councils, including Agyeman (2013), Blackmar (2014), Horst (2017), and Packer (2014). In general, the studies found that there is opportunity for increased public participation in food policy councils.

Structure of Food Policy Councils and Public Participation

The structure of a food policy council is a factor towards public participation (Packer, 2014; Agyeman, 2013). Agyeman (2013) identifies that public participation is a challenge because most councils’ structures are not conducive to community inclusion. Structure includes membership and how roles are filled, and refers to where and when meetings are held. Food policy councils can be structured in many ways, including as a grassroots coalition, non-profit organization, housed in another non-profit or embedded in government. There is some sense that relationship with government may be a barrier to public participation (Agyeman, 2013). Another issue is where councils have been established privately. For example, the Rhode Island Food Policy Council was formed behind closed doors, where a small group of individuals determined the mission, vision and goals, and later reported this to the general public (Packer, 2014).

Capacity of Food Policy Councils and Public Participation

Capacity of food policy councils is also listed as a factor in effective public participation. Capacity refers to paid staff and funding available to the food policy council. A lack of staff and reliance on volunteers and a lack of funding can negatively impact a food policy council’s ability
to offer public participation opportunities (Agyeman, 2013). Lack of staff and capacity were also cited by Blackmar as a limiting factor towards effective community engagement (2014).

Membership of Food Policy Councils and Public Participation

The membership of food policy councils contributes to the challenge of increased public participation. There is an acknowledged need for wide citizen participation in food policy councils, and this is recognized as a challenge (Horst, 2017; Blackmar, 2014). Out of five city food policy councils studied, Blackmar (2014) found that only one council was deliberately strategizing ways to involve the general public beyond food systems stakeholders and experts.

There is a concern that membership of food councils lacks diversity and is primarily white professionals (Horst, 2017; Packer, 2014). While increased diverse participation is a goal of a council, those from affluent, educated communities have greater access and opportunity to participate in the policy arena, whereas lower income communities are faced by barriers such as lack of time and education. Culture and language barriers are other issues (Agyeman, 2013). There is a need to focus on attaining diverse representation and participation on food policy councils.

Scale of Food Policy Councils and Public Participation

Generally, these authors identified above shared the challenges food policy councils face in engaging diverse members of the community and food system on the council and make some recommendations to increase public participation. However, one variable not discussed in the studies about food policy councils and public participation is the consideration of the scale of the food policy council (municipal, county, regional, state) and if scale plays a role in impacting
opportunity for public participation. In terms of scale playing a role in opportunities for public participation there have been few efforts to investigate participatory processes by geographic scale (Fung, 2015). As such, studying the opportunities for public participation in food policy councils at varying levels of scale, and their impacts on food justice action will contribute to the literature.

There is some debate in the literature about the role of scale in food systems decision-making. Allen (2010) believes that achieving social justice in food systems requires empowering those marginalized by current arrangements through a democratic process, and that this is most effective at the local level. Like Allen’s perspectives, in discussing rights-based food systems, Anderson (2008) states the importance of localization in decision-making: “localization makes democratic decision-making understandable and achievable, particularly for people who have little experience with active political participation in food systems choices”. There is also the notion that people are interested in engaging at the local level where there is a perception of more tangible change, where working at the national level may be too distant or frustrating (Allen, 2010). While it is possible for democratic decision-making processes to exist at the national level in the US, it is more likely a smaller geographic scale where there are opportunities for face-to-face interaction as well as a greater understanding of food system impacts at the community and regional levels (Anderson, 2008). However, it is necessary to work beyond the local level in order to work on issues of food justice and inequity, as localization has the capability of further marginalizing those who are treated unfairly (Anderson, 2008).

There is also the issue of “the local trap”, or the assumption by local food activists and researchers that the local level is inherently better or more desirable (Born & Purcell, 2006). The
local trap can be applied to assumptions about the quality of foods produced locally, as well as local democratic processes; neither are inherently more desirable. This is not to imply that local is inherently negative, either, rather that there is nothing inherent about scale; the outcomes are contextual. If the goal is to achieve social justice, it is necessary that social justice, not localization or globalization, is the focus (Born & Purcell, 2006).

Despite debate from scholars that believe community food security movements should not be limited to the local and community scale, but focus on policy at the state level, Wekerle (2004) describes two agencies at the local level that have supported policy change through networks. Wekerle (2004) describes food justice movements as translocal, creating networks that operate at the local, national and international levels to challenge the global food system and make change. The food security movement in Toronto, specifically the Toronto Food Policy Council, a collaboration of city agencies and local organizations, is an example of civic participation from the bottom up to create policy change with ties to the state as a partner. Wekerle (2004) describes the networks created in Toronto as operating at multiple scales, from the neighborhood level to the global level. Incremental change is possible through starting at the grassroots level, building support at the community level, and then making change in policy at a governmental level (Wekerle, 2004). Sova McCabe (2011) describes the best food system reform as utilizing federal, state and local power in order to provide citizens with the ability to participate and influence food system policies.

**Recommendations for Improving Public Participation**

There are some recommendations to bolster public participation offered through food policy councils. Some recommend using community forums and focus groups to gather
representative input in order to strengthen outcomes and effectiveness (Agyeman, 2013; Packer, 2014). Agyeman (2013) makes recommendations for fostering inclusion on food policy councils, including what he terms council based techniques and project based techniques. Council based techniques include structuring the council to be more inclusive of diverse members, including considering the location and time of meetings, using inclusive language in the mission statement, ensuring diverse representation on the council through setting aside seats or designating professionals or organization representatives to represent different groups (Agyeman, 2013). Other strategies include implementing working groups and committees to engage a larger number of people, adding a standard public comment period at each meeting or attending other organizations’ meetings in order to gather input rather than asking stakeholders to attend another meeting (Agyeman, 2013). In terms of project based techniques, Agyeman (2013) recommends working within existing community processes, offering incentives to participants, offering public education and planning events and projects strategically in order to bolster participation, for example, engaging the community in a community food assessment.

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

Research Questions

1. In what ways do New England FPCs (focused on policy) engage the public?
2. Are the strategies implemented by FPCs effective at engaging under-represented groups?
3. What FPC attributes contribute to whether FPCs effectively engage under-represented groups?
Research Design

This research study is a multiple case study of New England food policy councils, with two cases: the Portland, Maine School Food Security Assessment, a collaboration between the Portland Food Council and the Cumberland County Food Security Council; and the Massachusetts Food Systems Plan, initiated by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council. Case studies are useful for investigating contemporary events, especially when the context and the phenomenon being studied are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003). Case studies are a particularly good fit for exploring “how” and “why” questions in a natural environment that cannot be manipulated, which corresponds with my research questions (Yin, 2003). While single case studies are useful for examining extreme or unique cases, representative or typical cases, revelatory cases or longitudinal cases, evidence from multiple case studies is often considered more compelling and robust (Yin, 2003). Employing a multiple case study approach allowed me to select two food policy councils that represent different independent variables, including focus on food justice, scale, diversity of membership, structure and capacity, as well as different levels of public participation opportunities.

I used a mixed-methods approach to gather qualitative data, which included a survey of all New England food policy councils to identify policy efforts and public participation activities. I conducted semi-structured interviews with FPC members and food system stakeholders. I analyzed the survey data to identify what policy efforts FPCs are working on and how the food policy councils were engaging affected populations and under-represented groups (Research Question 1). I analyzed interview data to identify and assess the effectiveness of public participation opportunities for under-represented groups using the public participation assessment framework I developed based on the literature (Research Question 2) and analyzed
which FPC attributes contribute to the effectiveness of public participation opportunities
(Research Question 3).

Food Policy Council Attributes

Drawing from the literature around food policy councils and public participation, I
developed a list of attributes of food policy councils that may impact effective public
participation, demonstrated in Table 1.3 below. These attributes informed my case selection and
I analyzed the impact of these factors on effective public participation.

Table 1.3. Food Policy Council Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>municipal, county, state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>grassroots coalition, embedded in government, non-profit organization,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>housed in another non-profit (identified through Johns Hopkins Center for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a Livable Future Food Policy Network survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>budget, paid staff (identified through Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Future Food Policy Network survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership</td>
<td>representation of food systems sectors, representation of diverse individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(age, gender, income-level, race and ethnicity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on Food Justice</td>
<td>policy priority, working group, or in mission statement (identified in my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>survey of New England Food Policy Councils)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public Participation Assessment Framework

Drawing from public participation literature, I developed a public participation
assessment framework to assess the effectiveness of each food policy council in gathering input
from stakeholders and the public to inform food policy and decision-making for the particular
policy or planning process that I researched. Based on the literature and experience with public
participation, I developed metrics for each of the criteria, demonstrated in Table 4 below. These
metrics informed my interview questions as well as the codes I developed to analyze the
interview data.
### Table 1.4. Elements and Metrics of Effective Public Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements and Metrics of Effective Public Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Process and Fairness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How the Process Began</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Process is initiated by an affected group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Public participation sought early, ex: before the formation of task force or during the problem identification stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy for Public Participation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear definition of the purpose of the public participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leaders have a plan for the public participation process and for using the input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods of Public Participation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There are a variety of methods of public participation employed, both thick and thin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessibility of Public Participation Opportunities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The event is held at a location that is accessible and comfortable for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitation during Public Participation Opportunities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of a facilitator or moderator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of an agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion &amp; Deliberation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organizers of the event ask participants if they have anything else to add to the agenda; organizers ask participants how they would like to participate (or give multiple options such as survey, listening session, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Public participation opportunity is more than a presentation; there is allotted time for discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Representation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outreach Effort</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Multiple forms of outreach to different populations; strategy to identify and conduct outreach to all affected populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representation in Public Participation Opportunities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Representation from all affected groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Information and Resources</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Necessary information provided to have an informed discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adequate time to review information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence on Outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Report is published documenting public input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participant input has shaped the report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leaders perceive stakeholders and people who participated in the public participation opportunities to be satisfied with the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leaders are satisfied with the process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Methodology

I conducted a survey all New England food policy councils. This survey builds upon survey data from a survey of all food policy councils in North America that is conducted by the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future’s Food Policy Networks project annually since 2013. The survey is distributed to contacts via email, marketed on the Food Policy Networks website and e-mail list serv. The purpose of the survey is to systematically collect information about food policy councils to update or add their information to the Food Policy Networks online directory of FPCs and to understand trends of FPCs in North America (Sussman & Bassarab, 2016).

The Food Policy Networks survey includes questions about FPC attributes like structure, jurisdiction, connections to government, year of formation, funding, staffing, membership, organizational priority, policy priority and civic and political engagement. The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future’s Food Policy Networks project team provided me with the identifiable survey data for 28 food policy councils, including two state networks located in New England from 2016. The survey that I conducted builds upon this survey data, honing in on questions about policy initiatives and public participation opportunities offered during these policy initiatives.
I derived my target audience of New England FPCs from the 28 councils provided to me through the Food Policy Networks project and through internet searching to ensure my list of councils was comprehensive. Because there were two state networks (Vermont Farm to Plate Network and Maine Network of Community Food Councils) already included in the Food Policy Networks dataset, I elected to include the state food systems network in New Hampshire: New Hampshire Food Alliance.

Using contact information for each food policy council/network derived from the Food Policy Networks survey data, I sent a recruitment email followed by a Qualtrics email with the survey link. To participate, survey respondents must have been a member of their FPC for at least one year. Over the course of 10 weeks, I repeatedly reminded the contact person for each FPC via email correspondence and telephone calls, and sent requests to the second contact person (if applicable) by email or phone. Following a final survey reminder, I closed the survey at the end of 10 weeks.

The survey included a mix of open and closed-ended questions to learn more about the formation of the council, council policy priorities, structure and capacity, the membership of the council, the policy efforts the council has worked on, what type of public participation opportunities have been offered, and the perceived satisfaction of the participants and council members regarding the public participation opportunities (Appendix C).

Case Selection

I used survey data from the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future’s Food Policy Networks survey and my survey of New England food policy councils to select two cases. I used the data to select variable cases in terms of food policy council attributes (scale, structure,
capacity, membership, and focus on food justice). My goal was to select two cases that exemplified variation in the effectiveness of public participation opportunities, which I measured using data collected in my survey, for example, the methods of public participation implemented, the diversity of participants engaged, and the level of satisfaction of the public participation amongst food policy council members and participants. Unfortunately, the food policy councils that had implemented less effective public participation opportunities were very difficult to communicate with, as these councils did not have paid staff members available to answer my requests for more information about the process. The lack of capacity of some councils affected my ability to select those councils as a case for research. The two cases that I selected are the Massachusetts Food Policy Council’s development of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, and the Portland Food Council and Cumberland County Food Security Council’s partnership to assess food security in the Portland Public Schools.

Interview Methodology

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 participants who were members of a food policy council, task force, or otherwise participants in a food planning process being implemented by a food policy council from March 2018 to June 2018. Participants were selected through a combination of purposeful sampling and snowball sampling. Purposeful sampling is a useful tool when the researcher seeks participants that possess certain qualities (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). I used purposeful sampling to identify food policy council members and to identify food systems stakeholders that work with or represent under-represented groups. I also used snowball sampling to help identify food systems stakeholders to interview. At the end of each interview, I asked the interviewee who else they recommended I speak to in order to learn
more about the process. Interviews lasted between 30-90 minutes and were conducted on the phone or in person. With the interview participant’s permission, I audio recorded each interview in addition to taking handwritten notes during the interview.

Prior to interviewing participants, I tested and revised the interview protocols with two practitioners experienced in qualitative research and food systems. Two interview protocols were used; one was structured for the Massachusetts Food Systems Plan case and another for the Portland, Maine School Food Security Assessment case. Interview protocols were also adapted for each interviewee. Sample interview protocols can be viewed in Appendix D and Appendix E.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with food policy council members, including individuals in various positions and representing various sectors of the food system in the food policy council, such as: Chair; general members; and local government. The purpose of each interview was to learn more about the specific policy process, the opportunities for public participation during the process, and specifically how under-represented groups participated or were represented during these opportunities. This included investigating how the decision was made to pursue the specific planning process or policy change, what considerations were made, who was involved initially, who was involved during later steps, who participated, and if there were participation opportunities outside of council meetings to gather public input. Interview questions facilitated understanding the opportunities for public participation and assessed the accessibility and effectiveness of the public participation: at what point in the process were public participation opportunities introduced, how were the opportunities marketed, who attended, whether people were provided an opportunity to deliberate, whether there were multiple opportunities to participate in various ways (in-person versus written feedback) and if the input gathered then informed decision-making.
I also conducted semi-structured interviews with other food systems stakeholders, particularly those representing under-represented groups, who participated in the policy effort in some way. These interviews facilitated understanding of those who represent under-represented groups and how they perceive the food policy council to engage under-represented groups both in the process (through public participation opportunities) and through outcomes of the process (plans and policies). To learn more about the public participation opportunities, questions included asking about the opportunities to provide input into the planning and policy process, asking the individual to reflect on how the opportunities were marketed, their perception of if under-represented groups (or those who represent these groups) were interested or felt welcome to attend, and if they attended, their level of satisfaction with the public participation opportunity. Finally, interview participants were asked about their perceptions of the outcomes (plan or policies) and how the outcomes were shaped by input gathered by affected populations and under-represented groups.

Other Data Collection Methods

In addition to the survey and semi-structured interviews, I also conducted document analysis for each case, which included reviewing pertinent reports and final plans. For the Portland, Maine School Food Security Assessment case, I was able to conduct participant observation. This policy process was currently taking place, so I had the ability to observe three task force meetings in the spring of 2018. I also participated in assisting the task force members with thematically coding and analyzing survey data from open-ended response questions as a way to provide value to their participation in my research study.
Using a variety of methods, including a survey, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participant observation enabled me to triangulate my findings.

*Data Analysis Methods*

I developed a codebook with preset codes based on the food policy council attributes (see Table 3), the elements and metrics of effective public participation (see Table 4), and codes based on emerging themes from the data. I tested the codebook with one other researcher and inter-coder reliability was tested with one interview transcript. Following the inter-coder reliability test, I made changes to the codebook for clarity. I transcribed all the interviews and I coded all interview data by theme using my codebook. I used QSR International’s NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software to code and analyze the data. Interview data were analyzed to understand the effectiveness of public participation in each planning process.

1.4 Thesis Outline

The following chapters in this thesis are organized as described. Chapter 2 analyzes food policy and public participation in New England Food Policy Councils. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 analyze the Portland, Maine School Food Security Assessment and the Massachusetts Food System Plan cases respectively. Chapter 5 provides a cross case analysis of both cases and provides discussion, recommendations, and my reflections on this research study. In the following chapters, I will present the data and the analysis together.
Chapter 2: Analysis of New England Food Policy Council Survey

2.1 Introduction

Little is known about food policy councils in New England, including their policy priorities and how they engage the public. My survey builds upon an annual survey conducted by Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future Food Policy Networks, which surveys all FPCs North America to learn about attributes like budget, staff, membership and priorities. The purpose of my survey of New England FPCs is to understand their policy priorities, learn about the types of policy and planning processes the councils have recently undergone, and learn about how public participation was incorporated into these processes. This chapter analyzes data I collected through a survey of all New England FPCs, with the focus of answering my first research question, in what ways do New England FPCs (focused on policy) engage the public?

2.2 Survey Response Rate

Out of 29 New England councils or networks that were requested to complete the survey, there were a total of 18 respondents to the survey. I contacted an additional five councils to learn whether their organization is working on policy. There were six councils that did not return telephone calls or emails and I deduced through internet research that one was no longer operating, one was likely working on policy, and four were likely not working on policy. To determine whether a council was working on policy, I examined their website for the terms “policy” or “advocacy” in their mission or goals, the existence of a policy subcommittee, or a report indicating policy goals.
2.3 Data and Analysis

The following analysis includes data from the 12 food policy councils that responded to the survey and state that their food policy council was engaged in policy efforts. The analysis is separated into the following categories: 1) Characteristics of New England Food Policy Councils, 2) Policy Priorities & Efforts, and 3) Public Participation.

2.3.1 Characteristics of New England Food Policy Councils

There is a great amount of variation between the 12 food policy councils in New England that are working on food policy. They are distributed throughout the New England states and the structure of each council varies, in terms of their geographic area and their organization type.
During the time that this research survey was administered, there were FPCs working on food policy dispersed throughout New England in every state except for New Hampshire. The state of Maine has 5 FPCs that stated their council was working on policy, in addition to several other councils and a network that are focused on networking and programming.

As shown in Figure 2.3, amongst the 12 councils, there is variation in the geographic area, whether the council is in a city/municipality, county, or state. Many councils are categorized as municipal, located in either a city or town (7). There are 3 councils that operate at the county level, and these are all located in the state of Maine. There are 2 councils that operate...
at the state level. There are food policy councils working on policy efforts at each level of government.

**Figure 2.4. FPCs by Organization Type**

![Bar chart showing the distribution of FPCs by organization type.](chart.png)

Source: Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future Food Policy Networks Survey, 2016.

Another way that the councils vary is their organization type. Organization type refers to how the council is structured, and again, there is a great deal of variation among New England FPCs. As shown in Figure 2.4, many of the councils are embedded in another structure, such as government (5) or another non-profit (1). Only one council is considered its own non-profit organization.
The number of paid staff working for a FPC is an important characteristic when considering the capacity of a council to work on food policy efforts. The majority of FPCs that answered this question (n=9). More than half of the councils have at least one part-time paid staff member, and one council has more than one paid staff member. Two of the councils do not have a paid staff member.
One of the purposes of a food policy council is to bring together a broad group of stakeholders and community members to discuss food systems issues that encompass a variety of topics and issues. Generally, the New England FPCs are have a diverse group of stakeholders serving on their councils. Figure 2.6 references the diversity of members in terms of demographics like age, gender, income, race and ethnicity, and by sector or affiliation. The majority of councils are engaging individuals of different demographics as members of their FPC. In terms of sectors, all councils have a person representing both public health and food access. Other well represented sectors include government, farmers, nutrition, economic development, and concerned citizens. Less represented sectors include fisheries (only one council has a member representing this sector), Extension (4) and food processing (5).
A tactic to ensure diversity and that particular sectors are represented on the council that some FPCs use is to reserve a certain number of seats for different groups of people. However, the majority (7) of these New England FPCs do not reserve membership seats. All of the councils that do reserve seats (5) are embedded in government. The seats on these councils are reserved for a variety of sectors and groups, including government, food access, nutrition, public citizens, agriculture, and processing and distribution. No seats are reserved for groups representing different demographics, like age, gender, income level, or race and ethnicity.

**Figure 2.7 Membership Seats Reserved by Food Policy Council**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>Seats reserved for sectors/stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Agriculture, Public Health, Education, Environment, Economic Development, Farmer, Food Distribution, Marketing &amp; Processing, Nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Residents, city officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Food access, Processing &amp; Distribution, Nutrition, Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>Production &amp; Distribution, Food Access, Nutrition, Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>City Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Another strategy to increase representativeness of a council is to recruit specific groups of people, including different genders, age, income levels and racial and ethnic backgrounds, without the formality of reserving seats. More than half of the FPCs claim to recruit members from historically excluded groups. One council does not recruit these groups of people, and the 3 remaining councils are not sure of their recruitment strategy. As shown in Figure 2.8, for those councils that are recruiting specific groups, half (4) are specifically recruiting people of different races and ethnicity and age. No councils are specifically recruiting individuals of different genders.

One council identified a challenge in determining which demographic groups to recruit, To be honest, we don’t have enough conversations about race, inclusion, and demographic representation, so I can’t point to a specific instance of demographic groups being identified (without thinking about scenarios where [white-dominant-approach-to-diversity] things like tokenization occurred) (Council 8).

A variety of recruitment strategies to historically excluded groups were identified by the FPCs. Two councils commented on their recruitment strategy as connecting with other organizations or attending other community group meetings to target different demographic
groups already involved with other organizations. Four of the councils identified their recruitment strategy as personal outreach or invitations to existing contacts. One council described the strategy as “mostly self-selected by interest in the food system” (Council 10).

While half of the FPCs claim to recruit under-represented audiences, it is not clear how effective these efforts are. Council 8’s comment about their council not actively discussing diversity and membership is concerning, because without identifying demographic groups to recruit, it is unlikely that there is active recruitment taking place. In terms of strategies for recruitment, the council that claimed that members were self-selected is truly not active recruitment.

**Figure 2.9. Food Policy Council Workgroups**

![Bar chart showing the number of workgroups by theme.]

The majority of the FPCs (10) stated that they have workgroups. Workgroups allow a council to take on multiple foci and also to recruit members of the public who may want to participate in a workgroup but not necessarily be a member of the council. For all of the councils that have a workgroup, except for one council, any interested individual is invited to join the
group. The councils have a wide variety of interests and these are represented in the great variation in the topics of the workgroups. The other category includes: community gardens, food recovery, transportation, cooperative procurement, growing healthy food, food waste, planning & development, lead team, recruitment, and communications.

2.3.2 Policy Priorities & Efforts

Policy is not something that all food policy councils and networks are actively working on. For the councils that are working on policy, there are a number of different priorities and efforts identified.

**Figure 2.10. Food Policy Councils and Policy Efforts**

![Chart showing engagement in policy efforts among FPCs]

Of the 29 councils and networks in New England, it is striking that just under half (14) of the councils are not actively working on policy efforts, given that many councils have the word “policy” in their name. The state networks are not engaged in policy efforts and are rather focused on peer-to-peer sharing.
Figure 2.11. Food Policy Councils and Policy Priorities

Of the councils that are working on policy, there are a wide variety of policy priorities. It is interesting to observe that all of the councils are prioritizing food access policy work. Many of the councils are also working on or are interested in working on public health, economic development, land use/planning, food waste/recovery, food justice/equity, food procurement, and land access.
Figure 2.12. Food Policy Council Policy Efforts

Figure 2.12 portrays the specific policy efforts that the FPCs reported working on recently, aggregated by category. The majority of FPCs (8) have worked on plans and assessments, which include food action plans, community food assessments, chapters in master plans or climate action plans, community food charters and strategic plans. These plans and assessments have been conducted by councils operating at all three geographic areas: state, county and municipal. Councils of a variety of organization types have also written these plans, including those embedded in government, operating as a grassroots coalition and as an independent non-profit organization. Many of the councils also identified policy efforts to change food access and school policy. Councils also seemed to define the term policy effort broadly, and included a couple of examples that would not typically be considered policy efforts like a food policy forum or a food system summit. This further contributes to the idea that many food policy councils and networks in New England are not working on food policy, and even for the councils that do identify working on policy efforts, perhaps they are not actually working on policy change.
2.3.3 Public Participation

This section on public participation is specific to the policy efforts already identified in the survey. Generally, survey respondents report a great deal of public participation opportunities for the stakeholders and community members to provide input to the process. For the most part, survey respondents report that they are satisfied with the public participation offered.

Figure 2.13. Public Participation Methods

Each FPC indicated all of the methods that they utilized for gathering input throughout their planning or policy process. All of the councils reported gathering input from the affected populations for at least one out of the three policy efforts. Overall, totaling the methods for gathering input for all three policy efforts, the most reported methods were attending meetings of other organizations/groups (n=32), listening sessions or face-to-face discussions (n=30), and interviews (n=17). This is notable because all three of these methods provide opportunity for a higher level of engagement using deliberation and discussion versus other methods for primarily one-way dialogue, such as through a survey or social media.
In Figure 2.13, the methods of public participation are in order from “thick” to “thin”. Thick engagement involves more deliberation, generally people working together in groups discussing an issue such as in a listening session, whereas thin engagement tends to be individual-focused and shorter-term, including social media or surveys. It is important to offer both thick and thin engagement tools throughout a policy process to provide a variety of ways for people to engage.

In order to most effectively gather input from affected populations, it is also important that food policy councils offer multiple methods for people to participate. For each policy effort where food policy councils engaged the public, all of the councils but one used at least three different methods.

**Figure 2.14. Sectors & Stakeholders Engaged by Food Policy Councils**

![Bar chart showing sectors/stakeholders engaged by FPCs](image)

Figure 2.14 represents which stakeholders and sectors were represented in at least one of the policy efforts. The sectors engaged by all of the FPCs in at least one policy effort are food...
access and public health. The stakeholders engaged by less FPCs include Extension, colleges & universities and fisheries. Figure 2.14 is very similar to Figure 2.6 which depicts FPC membership. Food access and public health are well represented as members and are also engaged by the FPC. Similarly, fisheries, Extension and colleges & universities are not well represented as members of FPCs and are also not engaged by many of the FPCs through public participation. It is possible that there is a connection between FPC membership and who they FPC then chooses to engage through public participation.

**Figure 2.15. Under-represented Groups Engaged by Food Policy Councils**

![Under-represented Groups Engaged by FPCs](image)

Figure 2.15 represents the FPCs that engaged historically excluded groups during at least one policy effort. All FPCs claim to engage at least one historically excluded group. Overall, the majority of the councils have engaged members of each one of the historically excluded groups, though the least number of councils (9) have engaged with individuals from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds.
Figure 2.16 aggregates responses from the survey respondents about their satisfaction, their perception of satisfaction of the FPC members and their perception of satisfaction of the public participation participants for all of the policy efforts indicated.

Generally, there is the most variation in the satisfaction of the survey respondent and the participants. Survey respondents perceive participants in public participation opportunities to be very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. However, survey respondents state that there are cases of public participation where they are somewhat dissatisfied and that they also perceive their fellow council members to be somewhat dissatisfied too. This is explained in part by some comments from survey respondents explaining that they know that they could have done more public participation and have more work to do moving forward.

We talk about the lack of robust participation regularly in our meetings – we are well aware that council members and the subgroups that are leading these policy efforts need to do better in this area and are actively strategizing to do so (Council 2).
In terms of participant satisfaction, a survey respondent explains that those who are around the table and participating are likely satisfied, but that those who are experiencing food insecurity, for example, are not represented.

I think in general the system actors who have the capacity to advocate and work programmatically around policy issues and goals are "at the table" in the sense that organizations and other stakeholders who operate in a top-down fashion have representation on the Council. There is also grassroots representation in many instances, which offers a sense of satisfaction in representativeness. However, the culture of representation by organization creates a dynamic where people speak on behalf of others (e.g. a food bank operator speaking on behalf of a "patron" or "client" of that food bank) in a way that potentially only pays lip service to the idea that the voices of those who experience food insecurity are being represented (Council 8).

This explains the idea that people who participated in the public participation opportunities are mostly satisfied, but that there are likely other important voices who were not represented in these opportunities.

Another comment provides some insight into the perception of participants just being happy to participate in something. “Those that were able to participate I think they were excited to see this progress happening but also acknowledged that there is more we can do” (Council 2).

Figure 2.17. Shaping Outcomes and Decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did the input gathered shape the outcome or decision made?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Bar chart showing distribution of responses]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of policy efforts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of input gathered through public participation opportunities impacted the outcomes or the decisions made (Figure 2.17). Many comments stressed the importance of using input gathered from community members and stakeholders, and that public input shaped the decisions.

Another council also recognizes the importance of public input but questions which stakeholders and community members are not being included.

Public input is at the cornerstone of our policymaking process. Worth greater scrutiny is what is considered "public" input and who is bottlenecked out of the input-gathering processes. Our current policy agenda, for example, is entirely sourced from participants on the council and its network (Council 8).

So, while public input has been gathered, it is imperative to also consider whose voices have not been heard or who have been left out of the process.

Survey respondents who were not sure if public input had shaped an outcome or decision explained in comments that outcomes or decisions have not yet been made or that the outcomes are still a work in progress. The one “no” response is explained by a council that had gathered input to conduct a community food assessment and then also used this information to write a community food charter (but did not gather any new input).

2.4 Discussion

The purpose of this survey was to build upon the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future Food Policy Networks annual survey to learn more specifically about policy priorities, policy efforts, and public participation opportunities offered by New England food policy councils and networks.

There is a great deal of variation amongst the New England FPCs and networks. No food policy council is exactly alike based on their organization type, geographic area, staff capacity
and councils vary from state to state. Some states have multiple councils, where some states have one or none. The survey data revealed that only about half of New England FPCs and networks are actively working on policy efforts. Councils and networks that are not focused on policy are interested in peer-to-peer sharing and networking and programming opportunities.

Food access proved to be a theme across the survey data. All of the FPCs listed food access as a policy priority, and half of the councils had recently worked on a food access policy effort. Food access as a sector is well represented in the membership of the FPCs and in the sectors engaged through public participation opportunities. Most of the data obtained about public participation opportunities was largely positive. Generally speaking, the councils are employing a number of different ways to engage with stakeholders and the public. All of the councils but one used at least three methods for gathering public input. In order to most effectively gather public input, it is necessary to provide multiple options and opportunities for people to share their opinions. It is also important to consider what types of public participation are being offered – whether they are “thick”, meaning offered in person where dialogue takes place, or “thin”, meaning one-way dialogue often taking place through social media, through a survey or interview. Survey data reveals that the top two utilized methods by FPCs are listening sessions or face-to-face discussions, or attending meetings of other organizations/groups. Many of the councils also engaged with a number of different stakeholders and historically excluded groups. With regards to satisfaction, survey respondents perceived public participation participants to be mostly satisfied, and most of the respondents were also somewhat satisfied and perceived their council members as also satisfied. There were a few instances where there was some dissatisfaction with council members and survey respondents. While generally, the survey data indicate that public participation offered by food
policy councils is strong, the next two chapters build upon these data and analyze two case studies to further explore public participation in food policy councils.
Chapter 3: Portland, Maine School Food Security Assessment

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter analyzes the Portland, Maine School Food Security Assessment. Section 3.2 provides an overview of the case, detailing the purpose of the process, the attributes of the two FPCs that partnered to lead the process, the organization of the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force, and an overview of the public participation activities implemented by the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force as part of the policy process, organized by the following four elements: process and fairness; representation; information and resources; and outcomes. Section 3.3 presents my data and analysis together and analyzes the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities, answering my second research question. Section 3.4 analyzes the food policy council attributes and policy process attributes and identifies attributes that influenced the effectiveness of public participation, answering my third research question. Section 3.5 provides a discussion of the findings.

3.2 Portland, Maine School Food Security Assessment Case Overview

The focus of this case is the school food security assessment of the Portland Public Schools led by the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force. The Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force was established in August of 2017 to address concerns about food security in the Portland Public Schools. Food insecurity is an issue in the public schools as more than half of the students in Portland’s schools are eligible for free and reduced lunch (Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force, 2018).

The goals of the task force were to “gather information on existing food security programs in PPS; develop and distribute a food resources guide; design needs assessment and
action groups based on community and stakeholder input; conduct a comprehensive needs assessment; and develop full report and executive summary with implementation plan based on assessment” (Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force, 2018). The focus of this research is analyzing the effectiveness of the community and stakeholder input for the needs assessment of school food security.

Attributes of the Food Policy Councils

The Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force is a partnership between two food policy councils: the Portland Food Council and the Cumberland County Food Security Council. Attributes of each of the councils is described below in Table 3.1. Data for this table were gathered through my survey of New England food policy councils, the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future Food Policy Networks annual survey, personal interviews and website research.

Table 3.1. Attributes of the Portland Food Council and the Cumberland County Food Security Council.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Council</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Focus on Food Justice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portland Food Council</td>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>Grassroots coalition</td>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>Representation of many food systems sectors</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland County Food Security Council</td>
<td>County</td>
<td>Transitioning to 501c3 non-profit, was housed in another non-profit</td>
<td>Budget, Multiple paid staff</td>
<td>Representation of many food systems sectors, diverse members (age, gender, income level, race &amp; ethnicity)</td>
<td>Yes – policy priority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Portland Food Council is a municipal level grassroots council, whereas the Cumberland County Food Security Council operates at the county level and is currently working
on transitioning its own 501c3 non-profit organization. The Cumberland County Food Security Council has a bit more structure and has greater capacity due to its multiple paid staff. According to the Food Policy Network annual survey, both councils do have an annual operating budget, however, the Portland Food Council does not have any paid staff members. Based on answers to my survey of New England food policy councils, the Cumberland County Food Security Council has a diverse membership with representation of many food system sectors and representation of members of differing age, income level, gender, race and ethnicity. Based on the Portland Food Council’s website, it is evident that there is representation on the council from several different food system sectors, however, it is uncertain whether there is diversity members in terms of age, income level, gender, race and ethnicity. In my survey of New England food policy councils, a representative from the Cumberland County Food Security Council identified food justice as a policy priority; based on the Portland Food Council’s website, it is not evident whether food justice is a priority.

Attributes of the Policy Process

The task force is comprised of a leadership team, task force members and action groups, shown in Figure 2.1. The task force is convened by the leadership team which is composed of multiple members of the Cumberland County Food Security Task Force, one member of the Portland Food Council, and community organizations in Cumberland County.
Throughout the school food security assessment, the leadership team convened monthly meetings open to stakeholders and the public, and held regular leadership team meetings to move the process forward. Members of the leadership team are listed below in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Members of the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force Leadership Team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jim Hanna</td>
<td>Executive Director of the Cumberland County Food Security Council, Chair of the Portland Food Council’s Food Security Working Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather McIntosh</td>
<td>Chair of Resource Development Action Group, Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program, parent advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristina Kalolo</td>
<td>Chair of the Assessment Action Group, Research &amp; Outreach Administrator of the Cumberland County Food Security Council, Markets Manager for the Somali Bantu Community Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily Chaleff</td>
<td>Chair of the Outreach &amp; Organizing Action Group, Schools &amp; Youth Program Coordinator for Cultivating Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Morrissey</td>
<td>Qualitative research consultant, public health practitioner specializing in maternal and child health through local foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla Jones</td>
<td>Local Foods Coordinator VISTA for the Cumberland County Food Security Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force, 2018)

Three action groups were formed to work on specific projects. The purpose of the assessment group was to conduct surveys and interviews to map and evaluate food security
programs in the Portland Public Schools. The assessment group engaged several volunteers to interview staff members and volunteers engaged in food security programming in the Portland Public Schools. The outreach and organizing group worked to raise awareness and engage the community around the work being done by the task force. The group conducted surveys and held a focus group to help engage different members of the community around the topic of food security. The purpose of the resource development group was to seek out support like volunteers or funding to help increase food security programs in the Portland Public Schools.

It is evident that the Cumberland County Food Security Council had the role of organizing the process and leading the process, as demonstrated by the presence of its members and staff on the leadership team. There was no budget identified to implement the Portland Public Schools food security assessment, however, there were some funds allocated from the Cumberland County Food Security Council’s budget.

The Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force has been in operation for over a year, first beginning in August 2017, presenting results of the school food security assessment to members of the Portland School Board in August 2018, and now currently working to implement recommendations. See Figure 3.2 for an overview of the process.
Portland Public Schools Food Security Assessment Public Participation Activities

The task force used various methods to engage with the school community, including a variety of surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups.

The task force distributed four different surveys to reach different audiences: a food security information survey sent to all school principals, a general support survey distributed to
school staff, a parent survey, and a survey distributed by teachers to all of the seventh graders at King Middle School.

Interviews were conducted by members of the task force and volunteers engaged in the assessment action group. All interviewers were trained prior to conducting interviews and all interviewers followed the same interview guide generated by the leadership team. Interviews were held for one hour and were audio recorded; often, there was a note-taker in addition to the interviewer to capture detailed notes from the discussion. Some interviews conducted were one-on-one, and in some cases, multiple people were interviewed in a focus group style discussion.

Following data collection, the leadership team analyzed the data. Qualitative data gathered through open-ended survey questions and interviews were analyzed and coded by theme. These data were then used to write a report and recommendations for the Portland Public Schools, titled *Food Fuels Learning*. Members of the leadership team then gave a presentation about the school food security assessment to the Portland School Board in August 2018.

### 3.3 Data and Analysis of Effective Public Participation

As part of this research, I interviewed seven members of the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force. This included three members of the leadership team and four members of the task force.

To analyze the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities offered through this process, I analyzed the interview data using the elements of effective public participation, identified in my literature review. These elements are process and fairness, representation, information and resources and outcomes. The strengths and challenges of these elements are summarized below in Table 3.3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process &amp; Fairness</strong></td>
<td><strong>How the Process Began</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Process was initiated by a parent experiencing and witnessing food insecurity in the schools.</td>
<td>• Initial strategy for public participation was limited to a survey distributed to all school principals in the district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A meeting took place early in the process bringing a number of stakeholders to the table along with the superintendent before developing the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strategy for Public Participation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Methods of Public Participation</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• After conducting surveys with school principals, the leadership team decided to go deeper and engage with more members of the school community.</td>
<td>• Variety of public participation opportunities offered: surveys, interviews, focus groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Initial strategy for public participation was limited to a survey distributed to all school principals in the district.</td>
<td>• Lack of a large community forum to gather input.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Accessibility of Public Participation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Facilitation during Public Participation Opportunities</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Surveys were accessible to participants with internet access.</td>
<td>• Interviewers and focus group leaders were trained and used agendas/interview guides to lead the discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interviews took place at locations convenient to the interviewee.</td>
<td>• Lack of translation services for immigrant and refugee families to be able to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The task force was not able to offer stipends to make it accessible for food insecure individuals to participate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Discussion &amp; Deliberation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Discussion &amp; Deliberation</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunities for discussion and deliberation during three focus groups.</td>
<td>• Limited opportunities for discussion and deliberation (during three focus groups).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Representation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Representation in Public Participation</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Task Force members were recruited through personal invitations, targeted outreach to community organizations &amp; school community, general outreach on websites &amp; social media.</td>
<td>• Task Force members include a wide variety of food security organizations, food council members, and school food director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Targeted outreach to different groups for public participation opportunities (principals, teachers, parents, students, other members of the school community).</td>
<td>• Full participation of all school principals in survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interviews and focus groups conducted with several different members of the school community, including teachers, nurses, social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Membership of Task Force lacks food insecure individuals and limited participation by school community (teachers, staff, parents)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participants in the task force and public participation opportunities were largely professionals and community practitioners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some amount of information was provided to participants in each public participation opportunity about the task force and food security assessment taking place.</td>
<td>• All input gathered through surveys, interviews and focus groups directly informed the recommendations outlined in the Food Fuels Learning report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limited information about the process provided during each public participation opportunity.</td>
<td>• Task Force members are generally satisfied with the process of conducting the food security assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Task Force members perceive that the school community is satisfied with the process of conducting the food security assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• During an August 2018 presentation to the Portland School Board, members express their appreciation and support for the food security assessment and resulting Food Fuels Learning report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Task force members are dissatisfied with the number of food insecure individuals that they engaged in the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Task force members have mixed feelings about if students will be satisfied with the process, mostly because they perceive there were not enough opportunities for students to have their voices heard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Task force members report increased networking and collaboration amongst members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relationship building between individuals who participated in the focus groups, for example the nutrition educators group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The process educated participants about both the Portland Food Council and the Cumberland County Food Security Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Process raised awareness of food insecurity issues and helped organizations prioritize their work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The Food Fuels Learning campaign has recently launched and there have not yet been any policy outcomes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- workers, nutrition educators, school garden affiliates, etc.
- • One survey offered to 7th graders at King Middle School.
- • One survey offered specifically to parents.
- • Limited engagement in public participation opportunities with food insecure individuals, parents, and students.
- • Limited opportunities for the general public to participate – opportunities were targeted to school staff, students and parents.
3.3.1 Process and Fairness

How the Process Began

The process of conducting a school food security assessment in Portland was initiated by a parent experiencing and witnessing food insecurity in the schools. The topic of food insecurity in the Portland Public Schools has been a long-time issue. According to interviewees, the impetus for finally working on this issue is that a parent who was experiencing food insecurity and witnessing other members of the school community also experiencing food insecurity approached the superintendent and the Portland Food Council’s food security subcommittee. Following this discussion, a meeting was scheduled with the superintendent and community partners, and during the meeting the superintendent provided his support for a group to work on the issue of school food insecurity. One interviewee recounts,

I went and I feel like the catalyst was [the superintendent] saying ‘I hear you, and you guys are the experts and figure out what to do’ and I think we all kind of said, ‘well, I think it sounds like we should have another meeting to figure out what we should do (ME02).

While the task force was initially started by a member of the school community and strongly supported by the superintendent, many members of the leadership team were not members of the school community.

The partnership aspect of the task force between the Portland Food Council and Cumberland County Food Security Council was also discussed by interviewees and is somewhat complex and a bit contentious. While the issue originated in the Portland Food Council’s food security subcommittee, many members of the Cumberland County Food Security Council formed the leadership team of the task force. A member of the leadership team describes,

The [PPS Food Security Task Force] leadership team has consisted of six people, including three CCFSC staff, two volunteers managed by CCFSC and the Schools &
Youth Program Coordinator for Cultivating Community, a member of CCFSC and PFC. This group has managed and completed the work of the assessment report. (ME01).

While there has been some participation by members of PFC, based on the composition of the leadership team, it is evident that the CCFSC has taken the lead on this project. Members of the task force include a couple of PFC members, CCFSC members, as well as many community partners that are members of neither council. Other interviewees acknowledged that it is confusing how this partnership works and questioned whether it is truly a functioning partnership. It is interesting that the county-level council chose to take the lead on this project, and members of the leadership team stated that they were reacting to a need in the community (ME01, ME02). In the future, the CCFSC would like to implement the school food security assessment in other communities in the county as resources allow.

*Strategy for Public Participation*

The strategy public participation was initially limited to food security information survey completed by school principals. Initially, the task force began by working on the food mapping project, gathering data on the five different categories (charitable food, federal nutrition programs, school gardens, cooking and nutrition curriculum, sustainable and local foods) which included a survey of all principals in the school district. An interviewee recounted that once the food mapping project was completed a member of the leadership team wanted to do more data collection, saying, “we need to go deeper, we need to talk to people, we need to get more input” (ME02), which is when the leadership team began to consider key informant interviews and other ways to gather input from the school community. A community volunteer on the task force happened to have qualitative research skills, and this likely influenced the leadership team’s interest in pursuing interviews with members of the school community.
Methods of Public Participation

The task force implemented several public participation opportunities, including both thick and thin methods, demonstrated below in Table 3.4. As discussed in Chapter 1, the primary difference between these methods of participation is that thin participation is an individual activity, where thick participation is a group activity that engages a group of people together in discussion and deliberation. For this reason, surveys have been categorized as thin, focus groups have been categorized as thick, and interviews have been categorized as both thin and thick. Interviews are not categorized as either thin or thick in the literature, however, I am choosing to categorize them as both because while an interview does not engage a group of people, there are two people taking part in an interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Participation Opportunity</th>
<th>Type of Method</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Security Information Survey</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>School principals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Support Survey</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>School community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Survey</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Middle School Survey</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>Middle School Students</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Leaders Focus Group</td>
<td>Thick</td>
<td>High School Students</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition Educators Focus Group</td>
<td>Thick</td>
<td>Nutrition Educators</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Garden Affiliates Focus Group</td>
<td>Thick</td>
<td>School Garden Affiliates</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant Interviews</td>
<td>Thin/Thick</td>
<td>Social workers, principals, assistant principals, program directors, food service workers, nurses, teachers, coordinators, PTO member</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were numerous thin public participation opportunities for people to provide feedback, including different surveys and interviews. There were few thick public participation
opportunities (3) for individuals to engage in discussion and deliberation around the topic. It is interesting to note that there was no large community forum or additional focus groups open to all community members. The majority of these public participation opportunities were targeted to a specific audience, and there was really only one opportunity for someone in the general public to provide input which was the “General Support Survey”.

As described below, there were four different surveys distributed and targeted to different audiences.

- **Food Security Information Survey.** This purpose of this survey was to learn about food security programs and people working on food security issues in the schools and was distributed to all school principals.

- **General Support Survey.** The general support survey was distributed to school staff through the district’s monthly newsletter. The survey was designed to garner support for the task force and its goals. The survey provided participants an opportunity to share their support for the task force and share any feedback on the topic.

- **Parent Survey.** The parent survey was designed to gather feedback from parents of students in the Portland Public Schools, geared towards those parents whose first language may not be English. The surveys were distributed at the Locker Project food distribution tables and Learning Works after school program in order to reach families experiencing food security.

- **King Middle School Survey.** Teachers at the King Middle School distributed a survey to 70 seventh grade students to learn about their perceptions of food insecurity in the schools, their ideas, and their general feedback on the topic of food security. This survey
was implemented because a group of seventh grade teachers decided that they wanted to engage their students around this topic. The survey was not available to other students.

Key informant interviews were used to target individuals in the schools who were working on food insecurity to learn more about their programs. Table 3.5 provides a list of interview participants; a variety of members of the school community were interviewed. Focus groups also targeted groups of people to learn more about their programs in the schools, for example, the school garden affiliates focus group and the nutrition educators focus group. The youth leaders’ focus group was held with an existing group of youth leaders hosted by Cultivating Community, a local organization, and the purpose was to gather input about food insecurity from high schoolers.

Table 3.5. Portland Public Schools Food Security Assessment Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social workers</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals and assistant principals</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program directors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food service workers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinators</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTO Member</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there were several public participation opportunities implemented, there were plans for other opportunities that never came to fruition. These opportunities included focus groups specifically with school cafeteria service workers and parents. A member of the leadership team commented, “I do feel like they were really good ideas. So maybe [we needed] a
little more time and capacity to execute those” (ME02). Lack of capacity was a barrier in implementing additional public participation opportunities.

Accessibility of Public Participation Opportunities

The public participation opportunities were accessible to most, however, there were also challenges with accessibility, like not having the funding to offer stipends to participants and lacking translation services for immigrant and refugee families. By offering a number of online surveys, individuals had the opportunity to easily participate as long as they had internet access. Regarding the key informant interviews, task force members stressed that they tried to be as accommodating as possible regarding the time and location of each interview, and often traveled to the schools to conduct the interviews. The leadership team acknowledged that they understood that school staff are stretched thin and so they were cautious about what they asked of school staff. One interviewee stressed,

    So, any time we did reach out to the school where it was kind of an announcement or an ask, for example the survey or the interviews, we had already done a ton of work so that their involvement could be as limited as possible. So, we were pretty intentional about that strategy (ME03).

    The leadership team was careful to engage with the school community in a limited way that worked best for the schools.

    Some interviewees highlighted challenges around the actual task force meetings. Despite changing the time of the meeting to later in the afternoons, one interviewee stated that as a member of the task force, the meetings were challenging to attend, stating “I attended the meetings when I could. They often conflicted with my work schedule so I had to take off work to attend them” (ME04). Other members of the task force were concerned highlighted that City Hall might not have been the best place to hold the meetings due to parking issues as well as that
the building might not be perceived as a welcoming environment (ME05, ME06). An interviewee wondered why the meetings had not been held at a school to encourage more participation from the school community (ME06).

A member of the leadership team commented that they had hoped to make participating more accessible to food insecure individuals through providing stipends, “I was advocating from day one to have resources raised so that we could be paying food insecure people to be there, and we never did that.” (ME02). Lack of funds impacted the ability to provide stipends to low-income individuals, and there were no specific efforts made to make the public participation opportunities more accessible to low income individuals. There were also no translation services available to make participating accessible for non-English speakers (ME03).

Facilitation during Public Participation Opportunities

All three focus groups had a facilitator leading the discussion and a note taker recording the information. The facilitators, note takers, and interviewers were also trained by a qualitative researcher for best practices in conducting interviews and focus groups. Each interviewer used an interview guide to lead the discussion. A task force member explains, “…Every interview or focus group that we went to we had a carefully designed interview guide. I had my interview guide with me and kind of went through the questions step by step” (ME03). Different interview guides were used for interviewing different people, for example, there was an interview guide specific for wellness coordinators and another specific to someone working on summer meals. These interview guides were developed primarily by the leadership tea, which included a qualitative researcher. An interviewee described the interview materials provided as a “very detailed document” that helped them conduct the interview in a professional manner (ME04).
There was also a facilitator guide or agenda specific to each of the three focus groups utilized to ensure that the discussion was well-led.

Discussion & Deliberation

There were limited public participation opportunities that provided a chance for participants to discuss and deliberate. The surveys and interviews offered one-way communication between the interviewee and the interviewer or the survey participants. The opportunities that included discussion and deliberation were limited to the three focus groups. An interviewee discussed facilitating the youth leaders’ focus group. During this focus group, there was great opportunity for students to share their thoughts and opinions about food insecurity. A member of the leadership team explained that some topics were easier to discuss than others,

It was difficult to talk about food insecurity and stigma. That wasn’t an easy thing to get a lot of information on. I think there were some interesting nuggets but it was more about what food we don’t like, why we don’t like it, how there’s not enough time, how it makes them feel sick or they have to go to the nurse’s office to get something more plain that they enjoy eating. (ME02).

Much of the discussion revolved around the issues, and not necessarily the solutions. The facilitator did asked students to write something down in case there was something they wanted to share that may have been sensitive.

3.3.2 Representation

Outreach Effort for Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force Membership

Task force members were recruited through personal invitations, outreach to community organization, the school community, and the public. The idea to work on school food insecurity began with a few people, and this group invited and recruited a number of people to start the task
force. A member of the leadership team described the recruitment as “a general invitation to anyone who is interested in getting involved and then targeted outreach to people who are relevant to this sort of food security programming and schools” (ME03). The open invitation for membership was posted Cumberland County Food Security Council’s webpage and social media. Direct outreach to partner organizations was through personal invitations. A member of the leadership team commented on recruiting members of different organizations, “We reached out to many other partners that were involved in those initiatives and some that were not necessarily active [in the food council] but had different roles in the schools as well” (ME01). In addition, targeted outreach to the school community was through inviting teachers and staff to participate through a weekly newsletter from the superintendent. There were efforts to recruit individuals from a variety of groups to join the task force.

Membership on Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force

Task force members included a wide variety of food security organization, food council members, and the district school food director, but lacked adequate representation of food insecure individuals and teachers, school staff, and parents. Task force members represented the food policy councils and various Portland area organizations that provide services to food insecure individuals, like Good Shepherd Food Bank, Locker Project, 5210, Wayside Food Program, and Preble Street. A few of the task force members were identified as community volunteers interested in food systems and food insecurity issues. Some members of the Portland Public Schools community like teachers and social workers participated, as did the school food director.
There was some disagreement amongst interviewees about the involvement of the school community. Some recalled teachers and social workers attending meetings, another interviewee did not, noting that there was a lack of involvement from administrators, teachers, and students (ME05). The school food director of the Portland Public Schools was very involved with the task force, as she was appointed to serve on the task force as one of her responsibilities by the superintendent.

There was also limited representation of people experiencing food insecurity. An leadership team member explained that one goal with the action groups was to engage with people less likely to attend task force meetings, like members of the school community and food insecure individuals,

My goal with the outreach and organizing group was to pull in more people who weren't easily going to be there, like people already working for food based organizations or more privileged people in the community who just have more time to volunteer. I was really hoping to get more school based people. And there were successes here and there with that, but I found that to be really challenging to have people participate more actively. I think also, other forms of diversity at the table, people who are experiencing food insecurity. And we understand all the barriers around why it's so hard to have that voice at the table for so many different reasons. But I think that was a challenge and something to work with throughout the whole process (ME02).

Other interviewees shared the same sentiment that mostly absent from the table were the people who would be directly affected by the outcome of these efforts, those who are food insecure. A member of the task force described that often, the people who are missing from the group are the affected people, referring to the food insecure individuals who ultimately will be most affected by the plan and recommendations developed by the task force (ME05).
**Outreach Effort for Public Participation Opportunities**

There were different outreach efforts for each of the different public participation opportunities and these were targeted to different groups. The food security information survey was distributed to all principals, the general support survey was distributed to the school community through a weekly email sent by the superintendent, the parent survey was distributed at the Locker Project’s food distribution tables, and the King Middle School survey was distributed to all seventh graders at the King Middle School.

Participants for the interviews and focus groups were specifically targeted. The food security survey asked school principals to identify people working in the schools on food security issues. Members of the task force contacted these individuals to invite them to participate in an interview or a focus group. Described by a task force member, “[the principals] put together a list of people doing that type of work at each one of the schools and those were the people that we reached out to” (ME07). Interestingly, the task force did not have any goals about which members of the school community they wanted to speak with, recognizing that each school manages food insecurity differently. For example,

> What really was fascinating is that every single school is addressing food security in a different way. In some schools it’s the school nurse, some schools it’s the community coordinator, and in some schools it’s the home economics professor. It was really interesting to go in in a school by school basis and see how people are taking care of their own community and their own students (ME02).

Multiple interviewees noted that there was limited outreach to people who were experiencing food insecurity. Much of the outreach conducted was to providers in the school systems, and for a specific reason,

> The vast majority [of outreach] was to providers; we did do some specific outreach to folks who are struggling with food insecurity but we wanted to be very cautious and aware doing that because it’s a really sensitive topic and because it’s really traumatic so we didn’t want to cause any harm by kind of poking and prodding and making people
uncomfortable… The only time we did targeted outreach was to folks who we had established relationships with and felt comfortable breaking into that conversation in a way that we were hoping would feel safe and supportive for them. (ME03).

Members of the task force recognized the barriers in engaging with those experiencing food insecurity, and tried to be compassionate and respectful. One method of outreach to those experiencing food insecurity was offering the parent survey at different organizations where there were food distribution tables, like the Locker Project. However, due to limited participation at the time of the publication of Food Fuels Learning report, the parent survey results were not included in the data analysis. The survey remains open and the task force is encouraging participation in this survey.

*Representation in Public Participation Opportunities*

There were a wide variety of members of the school community represented in the public participation opportunities, however, there was limited representation of food insecure individuals, students, parents, and general members of the Portland community. Members of the school community engaged included principals, assistant principals, parents, middle school students, high school students, nutrition educators, school garden affiliates, social workers, program directors, food service workers, nurses, teachers, coordinators, and a PTO member.

Almost all of the interviewees pointed out that there could have been greater participation in the public engagement opportunities by those experiencing food insecurity, parents and students. In terms of student participation, there was the survey of all seventh graders at one of the middle schools and a focus group with 15 high school students, many of which were immigrants. One interviewee remarked, “I think there’s been some feedback but I don’t think that the students have been particularly involved and I think there could have been more student
involvement in this process” (ME07). There were limitations in choosing to offer only one survey to seventh graders at one middle school, and not offering the survey to a broader group of students. A member of the leadership team commented that more students could have been engaged in this process, but this was limited due to concerns about research ethics the task force was cautious of engaging with students under the age of 18 (ME03). While it was helpful to have a qualitative researcher assisting with the policy process, there may have been pitfalls to leading such a rigorous academic-style research project, including being cautious about engaging with students.

Similarly, a few of the interviewees were not sure how much parents were truly engaged in this process. While there was a survey targeted to engaging parents, there was limited participation. Because of the limited participation in the parent survey, there is an ongoing effort to work with the superintendent to have the district assist with distributing the survey to have a broader reach (ME03). Another interviewee was unsure if parents were aware of the task force and the work being done, citing that it is a challenge to reach parents in general, “there’s so much information going out to them all the time so I don’t know, yeah, it’s possible that they might not know that this is going on” (ME07).

Largely, interviewees felt that the biggest gap in participation were those who are experiencing food insecurity. There were many challenges explained, including that food insecurity is a sensitive and traumatic topic as well as limited capacity and resources. Despite these challenges, there was recognition of the value and importance in engaging with people who are food insecure. For example,

The biggest thing that we’ve come back to is that we want to see more marginalized voices participating in this project and finding ways to uplift them, particularly individuals and families that are struggling with food insecurity because there’s no way that we are going to find an end to food insecurity if the people most affected aren’t at the
table. And so that’s been a really big challenge. We’ve tried to be really cautious about not tokenizing people or having their presence be superficial (ME03).

While there are challenges like tokenism, it is necessary to engage with individuals experiencing food insecurity to find solutions to the problem. Another interviewee commented that the lack of food insecure individuals around the table for this process has been problematic.

I’m not sure that any parents with food insecurity have been involved in the process. I would say that’s something missing. In general, in food security work I think it’s often really hard to get people who are actually living with food insecurity to the table to talk about these things…We’re out in the community providing services and I think we can speak to a lot of the issues that are going on but it’s not actually the same as being food insecure and being about to tell people, this is what my experiences are. I think those voices are important to try to get them to be part of the conversation but there’s a lot of barriers to that. (ME07).

This interviewee discusses their perspective in respect to working for an organization that provides services to food insecure individuals and the issue of representing these individuals without having these experiences. While community practitioners can provide some insights about food insecurity, it is not the same as hearing from someone who is struggling with food insecurity. A member of the leadership team recounts the experience of analyzing the data and realizing that most of the input gathered is from service providers, “we do have some first-hand accounts but a lot of the data that we’ve collected is from people that are providing services to people who are struggling with food insecurity so it’s kind of a second hand account of that experience” (ME03).

While many of the interviewees felt like there could have been broader engagement of these groups, there were limitations in resources and capacity. One interviewee also pointed out that at some point, there must be an end point,

We kind of had to have a stopping point or else this could go on forever because there are so many people that are touched by this issue. There’s always more people that we could have reached out to at some point, there has to be a stopping point (ME03).
3.3.3 Information and Resources

Some amount of information was provided to participants during each public participation opportunity, but it is not clear if participants had enough information to contribute meaningfully to the process. The first portion of each survey, interview or focus group described the goals of the task force. For example, the introduction of the parent survey states the following:

Many students and families in our school district struggle with access to nutritious food. This affects student behavior, readiness to learn, and educational outcomes. The Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force is working with key district staff and stakeholders to collect information on what is currently happening to build food security in the schools, identify where the gaps are, and determine how we can collectively address this concern. Thank you for taking time to answer these questions. Your feedback is very important to us! Sincerely, PPS Food Security Task Force (Parent Food Survey, 2018).

Similarly, before each interview and focus group, the interviewer describe the task force to the interviewees. For the youth leaders’ focus group, there was a great deal of information presented to the students prior to the focus group. “[There was] a series of taking about what food security is which they had already kind of been learning and dealing with through the youth leadership intensive so they had a good background” (ME02). Students were prepared to speak about food insecurity during their focus group because they had already learned about the topic through this program.

3.3.4 Outcomes

Influence on Outcomes

It is evident that the input gathered by the task force directly informed the final report, *Food Fuels Learning*. The plan was developed primarily by the leadership team. All the data collected through the surveys, focus groups and interviews were qualitatively analyzed to write
the final report, which includes recommendations for the school district and community organizations. A member of the leadership team described the report, “the entire report is just data, it’s just the feedback and kind of aggregating and sharing out what people have been kind enough to share with us… It’s totally driven, totally driven by the feedback that we received” (ME03). The leadership team led the charge in aggregating the data, analyzing the data, and writing the recommendations. Interviewees all described the report as entirely based on the data gathered through the public participation opportunities.

*Interviewee Satisfaction*

Task force members reported mixed feelings regarding their satisfaction of the policy process and public participation opportunities offered. Generally, the members of the task force were happy to have participated in the process, felt inspired by the work, and felt like others in the community would react positively to the recommendations in the report.

However, there was a common theme that there was some level of dissatisfaction amongst task force members who would have liked to engage with more individuals through the process. A member of the leadership team explained their mixed feelings about the process,

> I really loved being a part of this process and I feel really grateful to have been a part of it. I do wish that we had been able to include and allow people that were experiencing food insecurity to be a bigger part of the leadership of this process and so I'm really hoping that after we kind of do this huge final push together report out we can spend some time reflecting on, if we are going to replicate this again, how can we be more mindful about doing that? (ME03).

The task force members have a desire to engage with food insecure individuals in the process, both in terms of having people experiencing food insecurity participate on the leadership team to guide the process, and also through public participation opportunities. Another member of the leadership team described this from their perspective:
I think we've done a really great job in a lot of ways…I feel like there is a sense of failure just in terms of who we were able to hear from and have input from…And, the phrase 'no decisions about us without us' is something that I really want to live by and I inherently can't do that as being a privileged white person at a decision-making table. But I can try to change who else is there, or make more space, make it more accessible. And that was really the lens I came in with and I don't necessarily think that I succeeded at that. It was a helpful experience for me to just reinforce how difficult that is to do, because I’m here for a long time… In a perfect world, if there was more time and money and support that would be helpful (ME02).

Members of the leadership team clearly recognize the importance of engaging with and including individuals experiencing food insecurity, but also recognize that there are challenges with limited resources and capacity that the task force was operating with. Because the task force was put together quickly and reactively, there was no official funding source and any resources came from the Cumberland County Food Security Council’s budget and staff.

Perceived Satisfaction of School Community

Members of the task force also reported that while there was some uncertainty, they felt like community members and the school community had “reacted really positively” to the process and that they perceived most people to be satisfied (ME02). For example,

I guess it's hard to tell. We ended up interviewing over 60 people so it's hard to know exactly how everyone has felt about the process, but generally when I've done interviews people have been relieved or happy that there's a group working on this because I think that it's a huge concern and it's so overwhelming when you are just one person trying to work on this (ME03).

A member of the task force discussed the issue of isolation for those working on food security in the schools and their desire to collaborate with others.

I got the sense that they wanted to see what others were doing and see if there were best practices. So, I think if that is part of the assessment they'll be thrilled to have it be a top down collaboration with all of the public schools (ME04).
Interviewees generally perceive that the school community is glad to have a task force working on the daunting issue of food insecurity. This was reflected positively in the first meeting to the School Board Operations Committee, where members were pleased with the progress of the task force. A member of the leadership team commented,

The community is ready. People think this is what should be happening. I think a lot of people on the school board will also feel like that. The operations committee meeting specifically, two out of the three people on the committee were so enthusiastic and so supportive (ME02).

The Portland School Board was also supportive of the leadership team when they presented their findings and recommendations in August of 2018. In a publicly available video of the meeting, it is evident that school board members are appreciative and supportive of this assessment, making comments like, “this is wonderful”, “I am a huge advocate for this”, and “we cannot thank you guys enough” which was very positive. The school board was also appreciative that the task force did not present recommendations that required additional funds for the initiative, which was strategic because the school board had just passed the budget. Members of the school board appeared to be interested, appreciative and supportive of the findings.

Task force members had mixed feelings on how students felt about this assessment process. One interviewee discussed the King Middle School survey, and how there was a question that asked students how they felt about having a group of people working on the issue of food security in schools, and commented, “I think that every single student said that it made them happy or made them feel more at ease knowing that and that was very sweet all of the students” (ME03). Another interviewee discussed their perception of if high school students might be satisfied, and reflected, “[what] I experience in Portland with our high school youth is
wanting to really be heard” (ME02), and that perhaps high schoolers will feel like there wasn’t enough opportunity for them to participate and have their voices heard.

**Networking and Collaboration**

Task force members expressed that the policy process and public participation opportunities fostered increased networking and collaboration. A leadership team member commented that the process of conducting the food security assessment really increased relationships and collaboration, especially amongst members of the task force (ME03).

There was also an increase in relationship building amongst individuals who participated in the public participation opportunities. One outcome of the focus group with nutrition educators was an increase in networking and collaboration. An interviewee described facilitating this focus group and noted that this is a group of educators from a variety of organizations that are all working on nutrition education in the schools. Despite working in the same schools and sometimes the same classrooms, these educators do not often have the opportunity to communicate with each other. For example,

> When we all got in the room together, there was a realization, even among the nutrition educators themselves, [that they] didn't have a super clear understanding of what was happening. So, convening that group of providers together was kind of the initiation of this conversation where they had said “this is really helpful, we'd love to get together as a group again and find ways that we can make sure we're not being redundant or overlapping but instead be more efficient and effective in how we're doing this work”. It was great to talk to them and get a lot of good information but it was also very inspiring to kind of be in a space where these people were realizing how important it is to come together and share resources and updates among themselves (ME03).

Bringing together this group of nutrition educators highlighted the need for more networking and collaboration because there is not one person or one organization overseeing nutrition education programs in the school district. This public participation opportunity
provided a reason for this group to come together, and as a result, will likely reconvene in the future.

*Increased Knowledge*

Interviewees discussed many different types of knowledge that was gained through the public participation process, ranging from learning about food insecurity issues, learning about issues to prioritize programming for their organization, learning about other organizations doing both similar and different work, and learning about the food councils in Portland and Cumberland County.

Two interviewees discussed how this process educated people about the food policy councils. A task force member described not knowing much about the CCFSC, but through participating in the task force, has learned a lot more about the council (ME04). Another interviewee reflected on this topic and stated, “I do think it brought a lot of awareness to both of these councils and the work that they’re doing”, citing that presenting about the food security assessment at the PFC’s annual meeting brought a lot of recognition to both the task force and the CCFSC (ME03). However, another interviewee thought that the partnership of the two councils together to form the task force confused people, and it is easier to discuss what the task force is doing versus how this relates to the food councils (ME02).

The process also resulted in increased knowledge around food security issues. An interviewee new to the topic of food insecurity reflected on learning about “food security efforts in Portland specifically and also kind of that world of food access and food systems, and how the pieces of the various nonprofit sector and government sector and schools all come together to make that work” (ME04). Another interviewee discussed how this process was useful for work
that they do with their organization to learn about issues and determine programming. For example,

At [organization], we try to do listening sessions, and community feedback to see what work we should be doing. I feel like in a way, this is acting as that for me, I think that's how other community partners feel as well. It's like we all get to do one big strategic plan together” (ME02).

The food security assessment process and public participation opportunities gave participating organizations an opportunity to work together to understand needs, and understand what other organizations were doing to determine priorities and how to move forward. Another interviewee agrees with this sentiment and discusses how they “got a really clear picture of who is doing what in what schools” (ME07). This is crucial information to have when determining what projects or programs to take on as an organization working with limited resources and capacity.

Policy Outcomes

Because the Food Fuels Learning campaign was just launched, there have not yet been implementation of the plan or policy outcomes.

3.4 Analysis of Attributes of the Food Policy Councils and Policy Process

The following analyzes the public participation of the policy process implemented by the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force, the attributes of the food policy councils and the attributes of the policy process.
3.4.1 Food Policy Council Attributes

Scale

The policy process was implemented at the municipal level, focusing on the Portland Public Schools. The scale does not seem to directly impact the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities; however, the local focus did have a positive impact on the overall policy process. Interviewees identified community support and support from the school district as reasons why the process was successful, as well as the fact that the community was simply ready to begin the process (ME01, ME02, ME03). One interviewee explained,

I think, again, there's a ripeness and the fact that you know, I don't want to let opportunities pass anymore. And I don't think I'm alone in that. I think people recognize when you see that 52% of kids in Portland schools this year, 55% last year, qualified for free/reduced meals, and what that means in terms of household incomes for so many of the families in Portland. I think people recognize that we need to be doing more (ME01).

Once the task force was launched, members of the leadership team were pleased to get so much support from the community and organizational partners and recognized the importance of these volunteers in the success of the process. An interviewee describes,

Yeah, I mean I think we've been really lucky how much support has shown up. It's been amazing, really amazing. And I think every meeting where I'm questioning what we're doing, someone shows up who is very meaningful to be at the meeting, or someone reflects back about how impressive the work is or how excited they are. I think it's just a reminder of having 17 volunteers for the interviews, it's really heartening. Like no one would be showing up if they didn't think that this was going to make a difference. So that has kind of been what's motivating me to keep going (ME02).

The community and volunteer support has been integral to the success of the food security assessment. This community and volunteer support is likely connected to the fact that the policy process is focused locally on the Portland Public School district, which the community feels strongly about and is interested in participating in.

Another topic relevant to scale is leadership, which was also attributed by an interviewee
as a factor for success. This interviewee describes the strong leadership of the chair of the task force and how he is a trusted and respected member of the community, “I think that’s another reason why we were able to be successful in this is because people saw names associated with this project that they could trust” (ME03). This factor also is influenced by scale. Because this policy process took place at the local level, people recognize the leaders as trusted members of the community so the process is more credible and legitimate.

Structure

The Portland Food Council and the Cumberland County Food Security are both classified as non-governmental organizations; the Portland Food Council is categorized as a grassroots organization and the Cumberland County Food Security Council is in the process of becoming their own non-profit organization. The grassroots structures and membership of these councils likely contributed to the organizational structure of the policy process: a grassroots task force that relied heavily on volunteers and service providers. Because the task force was developed as a partnership between the two councils, some members and staff from the councils joined the task force, in addition to recruiting members from other community organizations and the school community.

Membership

The CCFSC and the PFC both have diverse membership in terms of variety of food systems sectors represented. The CCFSC’s membership is also diverse in terms of age, gender, income level and race and ethnicity; it is unknown if the PFC’s membership is also diverse. While both councils participated in some way in the policy process, the membership of the
councils did not appear to have an impact on the effectiveness of the public participation. However, the membership of the task force was more relevant to impacting the process, and how under-represented audiences were engaged. There was one parent who had experienced food insecurity on the task force and leadership team but otherwise, limited representation of low-income individuals or food insecure individuals. The task force members were primarily service providers, and so under-represented groups were represented by organizations.

Capacity

The capacity, or the budget and staff of the food policy councils impacted the policy process. Although the issue of school food insecurity was first brought to the PFC’s food security subcommittee, and despite the municipality-centered project of assessing Portland’s school food security, the CCFSC took the lead on implementing the process. This is demonstrated by the leadership team of the task force being comprised of many Cumberland County Food Security Council members and staff, some of these members whom are also members of the Portland Food Council. While the issue of capacity of the food policy councils did not come up in the interviews, capacity is likely to have played a role in the fact that the CCFSC has paid staff members, and thus more capacity to provide leadership, where the PFC does not have any paid staff. Also, while there was not a budget established to implement this policy process, there were some funds used from the CCFSC’s budget for some of the food security assessment activities.

While there were some funds available from the CCFSC’s budget for the policy process, it was noted by interviewees that lack of funds was a barrier in engaging under-represented audiences. Specifically, there were not funds available to provide stipends to low-income individuals to enable them to participate in the task force, focus groups, or interviews. Lack of
capacity, time and resources generally were cited as reasons for not offering more public participation opportunities. This may have been a limitation of implementing a process that relied heavily on community volunteers and service providers already working at capacity.

Focus on Food Justice

The CCFSC has identified food justice as a policy priority; it is unclear if the PFC has a focus on food justice. The focus on food justice was evident by the food insecurity work the CCFSC chose to take on, and the fact that the process was led by an individual who had experienced food insecurity. However, what was lacking from the process was more low-income and food insecure individuals to help guide the process. There was one parent on the leadership team who did have that lived experience, however, some leadership team members reflected that they would have liked to have engaged more food insecure individuals to lead the process. However, task force members identified many barriers to this, including time, funding, and generally the idea that food insecurity is a traumatic and sensitive subject so it is necessary to be cautious in considering how food insecure individuals may or may not want to be engaged in the process.

3.4.2 Attributes of the Policy Process

The structure of the leadership for conducting the food security assessment of the Portland Public Schools impacted the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities offered. The organization of the task force included a leadership team, general task force members, as well as three action groups focused on specific projects that task force members were welcome to join. Generally, the leadership team implemented the policy process. The six
people on the leadership team included members and staff of the Cumberland County Food Security Council (some of which are also members of the Portland Food Council), a community volunteer, as well as the parent that advocated for the school food insecurity issue to be explored. There were a mix of both professionals, community members and advocates serving on the leadership team.

The task force consulted with members of the school community and low income individuals to gather their feedback on food security issues in their schools, and this was generally limited to gathering input and not discussing and deliberating on solutions. It was recognized that there was limited direct engagement with food insecure individuals, and these families were represented through service providers serving on the task force, or through providers who participated in key informant interviews.

There was also concern about the lack of affected groups like low-income or food insecure parents and students participating in the task force raised by members of the leadership team. Leadership team members recognize that food insecurity cannot be solved without engaging those with that lived experience. However, there are challenges around engaging this group, including time, resources, and the fact that food insecurity is a traumatic experience and a sensitive topic. The members of the leadership team spoke to the need to be cautious about tokenism as well. However, the parent who raised the issue of food insecurity in the schools did participate in shaping the process as a member of the leadership team, and was empowered to participate in making decisions about the recommendations for the final report.

The leadership team worked on taking all the input gathered, aggregating and analyzing the data. The leadership team collaborated with the task force members to a degree, but ultimately made decisions about what recommendations would end up in the final report. Before
the final report was published, members of the task force as well as other involved stakeholders did have the opportunity to provide comments on the final report, which were used to revise the plan.

3.5 Discussion

There are many strengths and challenges regarding the public participation strategy implemented by the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force. Strengths included that the process was a grassroots effort, initiated by a parent who had both witnessed and experienced food insecurity and that there was support from the school superintendent was obtained prior to conducting the food assessment. There were also several different types of public participation opportunities offered, including a mix of thick and thin opportunities, like surveys, interviews and focus groups. It is also clear that the recommendations outlined in the report, *Food Fuels Learning* were derived completely from input gathered through the surveys, focus groups and interviews conducted by task force members and volunteers. Many members of the task force expressed their satisfaction with the process, and they also perceived that the school community would generally be satisfied with the process. It was also evident at the August 2018 presentation to the Portland School Board that members of the school board were also appreciative and supportive of the task force’s work and recommendations. There were also other positive outcomes described by task force members, like stronger networks and collaboration amongst groups and increased learning and knowledge.

Despite several strengths outlined above which contribute to the effectiveness of the public participation strategy implemented by the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force, one area that proved to be a large challenge is representation, or who participated in the
public participation opportunities. Many of the task force members reported being somewhat dissatisfied with the process due to the lack of engagement with individuals experiencing food insecurity, both through the public participation opportunities, and the fact that the task force membership lacked an individual experiencing food insecurity. There were some attempts of the task force to engage members of this group, for example, offering the parent survey and distributing the survey at food distribution tables through the Locker Project, however, there was low participation in the survey. Another task force member pointed out that they had advocated for stipends to provide to low income or food insecure individuals to make it more accessible for them to participate in the process. Many of the people interviewed or who participated in focus groups do work closely with those experiencing food insecurity, so much of the input gathered provided a second-hand account of these issues, but there is some question about how well these professionals were able to represent the needs and interests of those they represent. It was also acknowledged by task force members that food insecurity is traumatic, and thus challenging to engage with individuals experiencing food insecurity in a way that does not support tokenism.

It is interesting to note that some of the task force members attributed the success of the food security assessment to strong leadership, referring to the chair and leadership team of the task force. However, it was also acknowledged that there was limited participation of individuals experiencing food insecurity leading the task force. Perhaps more food insecure people serving in a leadership capacity during this would have had an impact on the engagement with other individuals experiencing food insecurity.

Some attributes of the two food policy councils had an impact on the effectiveness of the public participation, but many attributes were not as relevant because the process was implemented by a separate but related group, the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task
Force. There were some strengths of the process related to the local scale at which the process operated, like strong leadership and community support, however, this did not appear to directly impact the effectiveness of the public participation, as demonstrated by the limited engagement of food insecure individuals. Similarly, the diverse membership of the councils seemed to have little impact on the engagement of diverse individuals; what was more impactful was the membership of the task force, which did include an individual who had experienced food insecurity as well as a variety of service providers who could represent their clientele to a degree. The grassroots structures of both councils likely contributed to the development of the task force, which was also a grassroots effort led by council members, service providers, and community volunteers. It is evident that the greater staff capacity of the CCFSC had an influence on outcome of the process being led by many CCFSC staff members and volunteers managed by the council. While there was no formal budget allocated for the policy process, some funds were used from the CCFSC budget. The limited budget of the policy process did impact the ability to offer stipends to low-income individuals to participate.

While there were many other members of the school community engaged in this process, it is striking that there was not more engagement with the most affected groups of the assessment, students and individuals experiencing food insecurity. It was recognized that there were challenges with limited capacity and resources, as well as issues around the fact that food insecurity is a sensitive topic and there was an effort to avoid tokenism. The strengths and challenges around public participation observed in this case study may be able to inform future school food security assessments.
Chapter 4: Massachusetts Food Systems Plan

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter analyzes the Massachusetts Food Systems Plan Case. Section 4.2 provides an overview of the case, detailing the purpose of the process, the attributes of the MA FPC which initiated the process, the organizational structure of the leadership of the policy process, and an overview of the public participation activities implemented as part of the policy process, organized by the following four elements: process and fairness; representation; information and resources; and outcomes. Section 4.3 presents my data and analysis together and analyzes the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities, answering my second research question. Section 4.4 analyzes the food policy council attributes and policy process attributes and identifies attributes that influenced the effectiveness of public participation, answering my third research question. Section 4.5 provides a discussion of the findings.

4.2 Massachusetts Food Systems Plan Case Overview

The focus of this case is the Massachusetts statewide food systems planning and policy process. This process was initiated by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council (MA FPC) in 2013. The Massachusetts Area Planning Council (MAPC) was contracted by the MA FPC and the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) to lead the process. The MA FPC charged the planning team with developing a framework with goals and recommendations to improve the agricultural economy, enhance the resiliency of the food system, and improve nutritional health of the state’s population (Metropolitan Area Planning Council; Franklin Regional Council of Governments; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Massachusetts Workforce Alliance, 2015).
Attributes of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council

The Massachusetts Food Policy Council operates at the state level and is embedded in government. In terms of capacity, according to the Food Policy Network annual survey, the food policy council does have a budget and also a part-time staff member employed by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources. Based on my survey of New England food policy councils, the Massachusetts FPC has a diverse membership with representation of many food system sectors and under-represented groups like different ages, income levels, genders, and race and ethnicity. The MA FPC has 17 members: 4 members of the legislature, 6 members are representatives of various agencies within the Executive branch (Secretary of Housing & Economic Development, Commissioner of Public Health, Commissioner of Agricultural Resources, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Commissioner of Environmental Protection, Commissioner of Transitional Assistance); and 7 industry representatives appointed by the Governor from groups within the food production and marketing chain. Food justice was not identified as a focus of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council in my survey of New England food policy councils. Attributes of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council are described below in Table 4.1. Data for this table was gathered through my survey, the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future Food Policy Network annual survey, personal interviews and website research.

Table 4.1. Attributes of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Focus on Food Justice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Embedded in government</td>
<td>Budget, part-time paid staff member</td>
<td>Representation of many food systems sectors, diverse members (age, gender, income level, race &amp; ethnicity)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attributes of the Policy Process

The organizational structure of the policy process includes the planning team, executive committee, project advisors group, and eight working groups, portrayed in Figure 4.1. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council led the process, along with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, and Massachusetts Workforce Alliance, after submitting a response to the request for responses and being selected by the MA FPC and MDAR. A planning team was structured to lead the process of developing the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. Members of the Planning Team are listed below in Table 4.2.
Figure 4.1. Organizational Structure of the Leadership of the Policy Process

Table 4.2. Members of the MA Local Food Action Plan Planning Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winton Pitcoff</td>
<td>Project Manager, Metropolitan Area Planning Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidi Stucker</td>
<td>Food System Planner, Metropolitan Area Planning Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Hove</td>
<td>Strategic Initiatives Assistant Director, Metropolitan Area Planning Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Praus</td>
<td>Land Use Planner, Franklin Regional Council on Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Elvin</td>
<td>AICP, Senior Planner, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Risley Schroeder</td>
<td>Program Director, Massachusetts Workforce Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Cluggish</td>
<td>Senior Advisor, Project Bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine Sands</td>
<td>Director, Fertile Grounds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Metropolitan Area Planning Council; Franklin Regional Council of Governments; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Massachusetts Workforce Alliance, 2015)
In addition to the planning team, there was a project advisors group of about 30 members each representing different areas in the food system that helped shape the project. There was also an executive committee which met more frequently and provided oversight to the planning team. Many members of the executive committee were the chairs of the working groups. Each of the working groups was led by an expert in the field, and convened each working group several times over the course of the process to help develop the recommendations in the final report. The planning team periodically presented updates to the MA FPC.

**Figure 4.2. Overview of the Development of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan**

- **August 2013**: MDAR releases RFR for statewide food systems planning process on behalf of the MA FPC
- **March 2014**: MAPC signs contract with the MDAR
- **August 2014 – September 2015**: General stakeholder outreach and engagement

- **October 2014 – April 2015**: 8 regional public forums are held around the state
- **December 2014 – April 2015**: 8 working groups hold regular meetings
- **December 2014 – June 2015**: Key informant interviews and focus groups

- **June 2015 – August 2015**: Data analysis and report writing
- **August 2015**: First public comment period with people who participated
- **October 2015**: Public release of the MA Local Food Action Plan and 2-week public comment period for general public

- **December 2015**: The MA Local Food Action Plan is presented to and accepted by the MA FPC

(Source: Metropolitan Area Planning Council; Franklin Regional Council of Governments; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Massachusetts Workforce Alliance, 2015)
MA Local Food Action Plan Public Participation Activities

The planning team developed a strategy to engage with many Massachusetts community members and stakeholders and engaged over 1,500 people (Metropolitan Area Planning Council; Franklin Regional Council of Governments; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Massachusetts Workforce Alliance, 2015). These methods included regional public forums, working groups, outreach and education, key informant interviews and focus groups, engagement with under-represented audiences, and two public comment periods.

More than 400 people attended eight regional public forums across the state of Massachusetts. The planning team partnered with local organizations to plan and market these forums to their stakeholders and community members.

Eight working groups were established and led by experts in the field for each topic area. The working groups were: Farming; Urban Agriculture; Land; Fishing; Processing; Distribution; Food Access, Security, and Health; and Inputs. The working groups were tasked with identifying issues in their topic area and providing recommendations to address the issues. Each working group held between 2 - 5 meetings between December 2014 and April 2015 (Metropolitan Area Planning Council; Franklin Regional Council of Governments; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Massachusetts Workforce Alliance, 2015). The working groups involved about 270 people, and provided people a way to share their input around an area where they had expertise. Participants were recruited through personal invitations, and meetings were widely publicized and open to the public.

Members of the planning team conducted outreach and education at several different conferences and meetings of various organizations. Staff members typically had an information
table or conducted a brief presentation and collected input through comment cards, surveys, and conversation.

Planning team staff conducted interviews and focus groups with 121 stakeholders. The format of these interviews and focus groups varied but usually included an overview of the planning process, key findings to date, and a discussion of a variety of topics facilitated by the staff member.

Two individuals were contracted by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council to conduct outreach to under-represented stakeholders. These staff members conducted targeted outreach and engagement to 242 stakeholders, including low income, people of color, and those in food deserts. These stakeholders were engaged through focus groups, existing meetings of organizations and key informant interviews.

There were two public comment solicitation periods. The first was offered in August 2015 to everyone who had participated in the development of the plan through the various outreach and engagement opportunities described above, and 70 individuals and organizations provided comments during this time. A second comment period, open to the general public was offered in October 2015. A total of 43 individuals commented during this period. All comments received were listed in an appendix of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan.

Data from the public forums, focus groups, key informant interviews and comment cards were sorted by planning team staff, organized by theme, and distributed to the appropriate working group. Each working group took the input, brainstormed and prioritized recommendations. The chair of each working group assisted staff members in writing up each chapter, which corresponds to each of the working groups.
The final plan was unveiled to the public on October 15, 2015 in celebration of Food Day. The final plan was presented to and accepted by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council in December 2015.

4.3 Data and Analysis of Effective Public Participation

As part of this research, I interviewed nine stakeholders involved with the development of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. Three interviewees were members of the Massachusetts Food Policy council. Four interviewees were members of the leadership team, which is defined as anyone who is a member of the planning team or executive committee. Four interviewees participated in the process as a member of a working group. Some interviewees played more than one role in the process.

To analyze the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities offered through this process, I analyzed the interview data using the elements of effective public participation, identified in my literature review. These elements are process and fairness, representation, information and resources and outcomes. The strengths and challenges of these elements are summarized below in Table 4.3.
### Table 4.3. Elements of Effective Public Participation: Massachusetts Food Systems Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process &amp; Fairness</strong></td>
<td><strong>How the Process Began</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Process was initiated by the MA FPC to conduct a comprehensive review of the state’s food system.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy for Public Participation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strategy was developed by the planning team with the goal of being inclusive, and ensuring broad public engagement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Diversity was considered in terms of geographic diversity, sector diversity, and equity and race.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Methods of Public Participation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Variety of public participation opportunities offered: regional public forums, working groups, interviews, focus groups, public comment solicitation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessibility of Public Participation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Holding meetings at a variety of times, including evenings.</td>
<td>• No stipends were available to compensate participants for their time and travel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some meetings were held in urban centers for convenience.</td>
<td>• Some felt that there was not enough done to accommodate the needs of under-represented audiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Regional forums took place in different locations around the state.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Working group meetings took place in different locations around the state.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Language interpreters present at some public participation opportunities allowing people whose first language is not English to participate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interviews took place at locations convenient to the interviewee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitation during Public Participation Opportunities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Each working group was assigned a facilitator who was an expert in the field.</td>
<td>• It is not evident that the leaders of each focus group were trained in facilitation skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• During the breakout sessions at the regional forums, there was a facilitator and often a note taker for each group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Agendas or interview guides were used to guide the public participation opportunities.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion &amp; Deliberation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lots of opportunities for discussion and deliberation through the regional forums, working group meetings, and assorted focus groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There was adequate opportunity for participants to share their thoughts and ideas during the breakout groups, focus groups, and working groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Outreach Effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of discussion and deliberation took place during the working groups to prioritize recommendations for the plan.</td>
<td>For public forums, outreach was done through partnerships with local organizations that used e-mail lists, social media, and posters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representation in Public Participation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over 1500 people were engaged throughout the process of developing the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Influence on Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentations of information were made during the regional forums which included an overview of the statewide food system, key facts and challenges about the local food system to ground participants in the discussion.</td>
<td>All input gathered informed the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative and quantitative data was provided to the food access, security and health working group for the group to review in determining prioritizing recommendations.</td>
<td>When conducting interviews and focus groups, the leader would educate participants on what a food policy council is and what a food plan is and why they are important.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All input gathered informed the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan.</td>
<td>One interviewee felt that the food plan does not adequately represent input gathered by under-represented audiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was mixed satisfaction amongst interviewees. Some were satisfied that so many people participated.</td>
<td>Others were somewhat satisfied, but felt like more could have been done.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.1 Process and Fairness

How the Process Began

The process to develop the MA Local Food Action Plan was initiated by the MA FPC. There is a significant amount of history behind the idea to develop the MA Local Food Action Plan. Specifically, members of the MA FPC provided some background about how the MA FPC started, through a group called the Massachusetts Food Alliance that advocated for a food policy council in Massachusetts (MA01, MA05). The MA FPC was established through legislature in 2010. A member of the MA FPC describes how the idea of a food systems plan became a priority for the council:
I think the next couple of years the FPC was looking at establishing bylaws, looking at understanding the roles of the members and opportunities to collaborate. The Philadelphia Food Trust came in and suggested to the MA FPC that they support a program for the establishment of supermarkets in food deserts. And the MA FPC at that time thought that was interesting but not a broad enough approach to thinking about some of the issues that were being identified. And recognizing that there had not been a systematic food plan review for about 40 years, the recommendation was just to do the whole thing from the start and do a broad review of the whole MA food system plan that would include some of the topics under the umbrella of the food trust, which focused on food access and especially in urban areas. So, the Department of Agricultural Resources, providing administrative support, looked to develop a budget for an RFR (request for responses) and came up with a plan to comingle funds from the public sector and the private sector. So, the Department of Agriculture had a line item of $200,000 and worked with about a half a dozen philanthropic organizations for another close to $150,000 and then put out an RFR for a whole systematic food plan review (MA05).

Essentially, the process was initiated by the MA FPC but the food policy council as a response to a question where the council realized that they needed a more comprehensive framework or plan to determine their goals and priorities. The goal of developing the MA Local Food Action plan was to create a comprehensive overview of the state’s food system as well as benchmarks and goals for moving forward.

*Strategy for Public Participation*

The planning team developed a strategy for gathering broad public input that was inclusive and considered diversity. Once the strategy was developed, the MA FPC reviewed the plan and shared their ideas. According to members of the planning team, the group used the Vermont Farm to Plate Plan as an inspiration, describing the Vermont plan as “even more inclusive” (MA01, MA06). The goal of the public participation was to ensure broad public engagement including geographic diversity and the need to engage with people across the state, and also referred to diversity in terms of the various sectors and industries that are a part of the food system (MA01, MA02, MA05, MA06). The planning team acknowledged the need to focus
on issues of equity and race, and make a deliberate effort to hear from all who represent the food
system (MA02, MA06). With the goal of broad public engagement in mind, the planning team
constructed a plan for public participation that included four elements: regional public forums,
topic specific working groups, key stakeholder interviews, and dialogue back and forth with the
MA FPC (MA06).

One interviewee felt strongly that the process was not designed to be inclusive from the
beginning, and that the two consultants who were hired to engage with under-represented
audiences were not hired until after the process was initiated (MA08). There was not a concrete
plan for engaging with people of color, low income individuals, or grassroots organizations, so
when the issue was raised, the planning team decided to hire two consultants that each were
responsible for a half of the state geographically (MA08).

Methods of Public Participation

A variety of methods to gather public input were employed by the planning team, both
thick and thin are depicted below in Table 4.4. As discussed in Chapter 1, the primary difference
between these methods of participation is that thin participation is with individuals, where thick
participation is a group activity that engages a group of people together in discussion and
deliberation. For this reason, outreach and education, public comment solicitation and surveys
have been categorized as thin; regional forums, working groups and focus groups have been
categorized as thick, and interviews have been categorized as both thin and thick. Interviews are
not categorized as either thin or thick in the literature, however, I am choosing to categorize them
as both because while an interview does not engage a group of people, there are two people
taking part in an interview.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Participation Opportunity</th>
<th>Type of Method</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outreach &amp; Education at meetings and events – presentations, comment cards, surveys</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Comment Solicitation</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>Individuals who participated in public participation opportunities, general public</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Access Survey</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>Professionals working on food access</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant Interviews</td>
<td>Thin/Thick</td>
<td>Key Stakeholders</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with Under-represented Audiences</td>
<td>Thin/Thick</td>
<td>Students, food chain workers, immigrants, low-income individuals, individuals of different race, urban farmers, cafeteria workers, community organizers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Regional Public Forums</td>
<td>Thick</td>
<td>Open to general public</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Working Groups</td>
<td>Thick</td>
<td>Mostly professionals, but open to all</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups/Meetings</td>
<td>Thick</td>
<td>Key Stakeholders</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups with Interviews with Under-represented Audiences</td>
<td>Thick</td>
<td>Students, food chain workers, immigrants, low-income individuals, individuals of different race, urban farmers, cafeteria workers, community organizers</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thin opportunities included general outreach at events to gather comment cards and solicit feedback through conversation, and there were a number of interviews conducted.

Another thin method was the public comment period. There were also several thick methods of public participation, these were the working groups, variety of focus groups, and regional public forums. A member of the leadership team described the reasons behind offering so many different types of methods for people to provide their feedback,

Part of the reason we had so many different ways of engaging people was because that we recognized that not everyone can come to daytime meetings, not everyone wants to participate in multiple working group sessions, some people would rather have one-on-
one interviews and in some cases people can't travel so we need to go to them. We just tried to make ourselves available in as many ways as possible to gather input - people submitted stuff from email, there were multiple drafts of the plan that were made available online for public comment. We pretty much would go to anyone who would listen, and some people who wouldn't. And so, it was, we were very, very dedicated to making sure that we got input from whoever wanted to (MA02).

Each method of public participation employed had a distinct purpose. The eight working groups were meant to satisfy the need to engage a variety of sectors, and each of the eight working groups was focused on a different topic. The regional forums were meant to engage the general public or anyone who was interested in sharing their thoughts and ideas at a one-time meeting. Interviews and focus groups were utilized to connect with key stakeholders not participating in the working groups and under-represented audiences. The thin methods like the public comment period and comment cards allowed the public and stakeholders to share their thoughts in a simple and easy way that did not require them to attend a meeting or participate in an interview, for example. One member of the leadership team recalled that one of the working groups, the food access, security and health group conducted a survey as a method to gather input from other service providers in the food access sphere who were not participating in the working group. The interviewee explains,

We did a survey really targeted to frontline staff, whatever that is considered in the food access, security and health arena. So, there could be somebody at a community action organization that’s actually getting people signed up for SNAP, it could be somebody at a food pantry who is you know, giving out emergency food, it could be a community health worker who is trying to help a patient connect with healthy food resources. We also did a survey and I wanted to try to be as inclusive as we could of voices and different ideas. We ended up getting over 200 responses to the survey so that was another way that the work group was informed by kind of what was happening and what was needed (MA09).

As demonstrated by the variety of methods used, there were several opportunities for interested community members, community practitioners and professionals alike to get involved in the process and provide their input for the MA Local Food Action Plan.
Accessibility of Public Participation Opportunities

The planning team made efforts to make the public participation opportunities more accessible to participants, however, there were challenges, like no funding available to provide stipends to compensate low-income participants for their time. The planning team considered the location of meetings and interviews and the time of the meetings. A member of the food policy council explained, “there were evening sessions, too. There was an attempt to have a variety of times and opportunities recognizing that having broad options for participation would be beneficial” (MA05). The key was to hold the activities in a variety of different locations at different times of day. The eight regional forums took place around the state, and there was also an effort for the working groups to rotate their meetings around the state (MA09). A member of the leadership team who conducted interviews of key stakeholders noted the importance of going to the people they were interviewing to make it more accessible for them to provide their input. Two interviewees also cited having language interpreters present at some of the public participation opportunities, allowing for individuals who did not speak English as their first language to participate (MA06, MA08).

Despite some efforts to make the public participation opportunities more accessible, there were issues identified by members of the leadership team around the lack of stipends available for participants to compensate people for their time and travel (MA05, MA08). One interviewee explained,

It didn’t appear to be a priority to have meetings that considered financial needs of people who were not paid to be doing what they were doing as community leaders, or to hold meetings in places that were more accessible to low income communities of color and rural folks. A better job was done around the subcommittee groups. The food access, security and health group did move around the state and try to make it possible to get a lot of people there. And the urban agriculture group did that as well. They got it. (MA08).
This interviewee explains the lack of stipends available and notes there could have been additional accommodations made to make participating more accessible.

Facilitation during Public Participation Opportunities

Facilitation was a key component of the regional forums and working group meetings, but it is not clear if the facilitators for the working groups were trained facilitators. Each working group was assigned a facilitator, who was an expert in the field as well as a staff person from the planning team (MA01, MA02, MA09). The leaders of each group were responsible for setting the agenda of the meeting, calling the meetings, and facilitating the discussion at each meeting. Interviewees described these leaders as facilitators, but it is not evident if the leaders of these working groups were trained in facilitation skills. A key component of facilitation is neutrality; a facilitator helps propel a group forward without providing their input and opinion about a topic. Because there were a wide variety of stakeholders with differing opinions present in each of the working groups, a neutral facilitator would be important to ensure that all participants feel heard and welcome to share their perspectives.

Each of the regional forums had a portion of the meeting dedicated to breakout groups. A member of the leadership team described the break out groups,

We would break into groups, 6 or 8 that were organized around topics, so people wanted to talk about hunger, farmers markets, or grocery stores, or land protection. The types of groups changed a little bit depending on what region we were in. So, then the second half of these meetings we'd break into these smaller groups and there would be one staff member there facilitating discussion and taking notes as best they could, and then if we were able, come back at the end of the meeting, report back. You know, the classic kind of, breakout session, report back so everybody could hear what the other groups were working on. (MA06)
As a leadership team member explained, forum attendees had the opportunity to select the breakout group that they preferred, and this small group was staffed with a facilitator and sometimes a note taker to capture their thoughts, ideas and comments. Another interviewee recalled the facilitators using creative methods like sticky notes and dots to assist in gathering the information, noting that “the idea was to have conversations where even people who you know, had quiet voices would be able to share their opinions” (MA05). An experienced facilitator can help encourage participation from all attendees and help lead the discussion in a productive manner, which is key to effective public participation.

**Discussion & Deliberation**

There were multiple opportunities for discussion and deliberation during the public participation activities offered by the planning team. Discussion and deliberation took place primarily during the regional public forums, working group meetings, and assorted focus groups.

Members of the leadership team described the regional forums as open-ended meetings where the purpose was for participants to brainstorm ideas in small groups around particular topics to get “raw material” for the planning team to sort through (MA02, MA06). Reflecting on the regional forums, one interviewee described the meetings as providing adequate opportunity for participants to share their thoughts and engage in discussion (MA03). During the meetings, participants were asked pointed questions for discussion in small groups but also had the opportunity to brainstorm generally (MA06). One interviewee described this,

Essentially the results of [the small group discussions] were really big long lists of ideas, and the thinking, there's no bad ideas here. The material that came out of all of those forums was sifted through and categorized - this is a farming idea, this is a food access idea, and so on, and those were all delivered to the working groups as raw material for them to sift through and kind of test the ideas with folks who were more expert in the field (MA02).
While there was some discussion and deliberation as a component of the regional forums, much of the deliberation about recommendations and text that went into the plan took place during the working group meetings. The public forums were primarily for brainstorming. As described above, all the raw data from interviews, focus groups, and forums were organized by category by the planning team and distributed to the appropriate working group.

Members of each working group participated in discussion and deliberation to organize these ideas and ultimately prioritize and write the recommendations for the report. A member of the leadership team explained,

We used the working group to kind of bring ideas and ratify and prioritize and put some context to. That was the useful thing of having the organizational heads or the organizational representatives, they really understood how the systems work in our state, and then how their communities work, wherever they live and work (MA09).

There were some disagreements during discussions about prioritization of recommendations because the working groups were composed of a variety of different stakeholders with differing opinions (MA02, MA09). For example,

One of the first goals of the food access, security, and health group section is about income. At the same time the farming community is another community within the food system and sustaining farms, sustaining livable wages, is hard, and could be a hardship for some farmers. So that was some of the negotiation that I'm talking about, we're calling for support of the minimum wage and that could be hard for some of the farmers who are bringing on fellows and interns, and kind of the initial trainees (MA09).

Another example of a point of contention in the food access, security and health group was described by another interviewee,

Where some things got contentious between folks who represent farmers and folks who represent the public health community around how much regulation is appropriate for farms, and obviously the public health folks wanting to keep the authority that they had to apply certain regulations to farms. And farmers wanting to make sure - not saying they didn't want to be regulated at all, but wanted to make sure they had input when regulations were being developed, and that they wanted to make sure that regulations were scale appropriate and scientifically based, and when there was regulations that there
were resources and education to help them meet new requirements as opposed to being punished for not being able to meet them. So, those were discussions that happened a lot during advisory committee meetings (MA02).

While there were contentious issues discussed, it was important to offer public participation opportunities that allow for meaningful discussion of differing opinions to take place. In this case, the working groups were empowered to discuss, deliberate and make decisions about the recommendations for the plan.

4.3.2 Representation

*Outreach Effort for Public Participation Opportunities*

Outreach methods included partnering with existing organizations, utilizing networks, personal invitations and attending the meetings of existing groups. The planning team relied on partnering with community organizations to co-host the regional forums (MA02, MA06). These partner organizations were responsible for selecting a welcoming location, and then using their networks to widely market the forum. Because the planning team did not have contact information for people in each region, they relied on the partner organizations to reach out to their contacts, often using social media and e-newsletters (MA02, MA06). For example, to market the regional forum held in Worcester, the planning team partnered with a group in Worcester, as described by a member of a working group,

The [organization] has amassed a list - about 300 folks, so we primarily used that network to get the word out. And then asked other groups to get the word out through their lists. We used a couple Worcester based activists, like alert list forums, that sort of thing. And then we posted, the event took place in the library, so we posted posters there. The library tends to be a pretty effective place here in Worcester for hosting events and drawing people in (MA03).

The outreach for this particular forum included email, forums, collaborating with other
groups to spread the word, and hanging posters. While it is a good use of resources to collaborate with existing groups and networks, it is important to also reach out to individuals not already connected to these networks. There could have been more outreach beyond posters at the library to reach out people not already involved or interested in food systems.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, there was also specific outreach and engagement with under-represented audiences. A member of the leadership team described the process for identifying groups to target for engagement including interviews and focus groups.

It was a flawed and backwards strategy because community representatives and groups were not actively sought out and invited to the table to design an inclusive process to begin with. The advisory committee was mostly white, sustainable agriculture, community food, health and anti-hunger organizations; there wasn’t an intentional attempt to include key organizations of color in the design phases. We all acknowledged the process was flawed, and with the food access, security and health and urban agriculture working groups came up with an outreach list together (MA08).

The strategy for public participation was a bit backwards, meaning that under-represented audiences were not first included in the process by being invited to join parts of the leadership team, for example the executive committee or the working groups. Outreach to under-represented groups was similar to the outreach conducted for the regional forums, which included utilizing existing personal relationships and networks and attending meetings that were already taking place, for example, the Massachusetts Farm to School conference, a listening session at University of Massachusetts Amherst, and attending meetings of various local food policy councils (MA08).

Outreach and Representation in Working Groups

Members of the working groups were primarily recruited through personal invites from the working group leaders, utilizing networks and general outreach (MA01, MA02). Anyone
who was interested in participating could join the working group. The working groups focused on recruiting a diverse group of people that represented the variety of organizations working within the sector. For the processing working group, this included representation from private sector, non-profit and government (MA01). For the food access, security and health working group this included people working on hunger in food banks and soup kitchens, people working on food access that included SNAP, WIC and a variety of non-profit organizations, and also the public health sector which included Department of Public Health and Department of Transitional Assistance (MA06, MA09). The food access, security and health group also considered geography and recruited people from around the state, because food access looks different in Boston in comparison to a rural setting or a suburban setting (MA09). Most participants in the working group were professionals (MA08, MA09).

**Representation in Public Participation**

The Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan cites that over 1500 people were engaged as a part of the process for developing the plan, however, there is criticism that there was not enough participation of low income and food insecure individuals, and there were challenges with professionals representing the interests of these groups. As described throughout this chapter, there were a variety of public participation opportunities offered and representation by different sectors, industries, and geographies. There were also two consultants hired to conduct outreach and engagement with often under-represented audiences which included small farmers, students, people of color, immigrants, refugees, cafeteria workers, food chain workers, and community organizers.
However, the lack of participation or representation of under-represented groups throughout this process was discussed by several interviewees (MA08, MA06, MA03, MA07). As a result of not being involved in the beginning of the process, many of the under-represented groups felt excluded. One interviewee explains, “some of the groups that we talked to, that are grassroots community led were already pretty disenfranchised by the whole process. They felt like they were add-ons. And I feel like it is very important to say that in this story because it was not an ideal situation at all” (MA08).

It is evident that the majority of the work done to engage under-represented audiences took place almost exclusively through the two consultants. Most participants at the regional forums and working groups were professionals and this was brought up as a challenge by interviewees (MA06, MA03, MA07). A member of a working group explained,

I don't know how many actual food insecure individuals really participated in shaping those [recommendations]. My sense is that [the plan] was very much shaped by practitioners and organizations in the works, specifically in the food access component… I feel like in every meeting that I participated in - from the regional forums down to like the sort of finalizing of those components [in the plan] it was very much led by practitioners (MA03).

There was limited participation of under-represented groups, which an interviewee attributed to the nature of the planning process. For example,

It felt like we could have done more. It started to feel like sometimes we were preaching to the choir. People love to come out and talk about food stuff, and they're often people who have food. They're not actually the people who are hungry, or the people for whom the food system is not working. So, I think some of the reasons why we had not been able to reach more low income people is just the nature of the planning process. It happens during the day; people like me who don't have to worry about where their next meal comes from. I think there’s some inherent biases that I'm aware of, some that I'm not aware of, that may make it harder or less convenient for underprivileged people to participate. We attempted to acknowledge that and overcome it, but it's always there (MA06).

While under-represented groups were engaged by the consultants, it is interesting that
there were not efforts made to encourage under-represented groups to attend the regional forums
and contribute to the working groups. There is some question about what the best method is to
engage under-represented groups, and this was brought up in an unpublished report titled,
“Massachusetts Food System Plan Social Justice and Equity Recommendations”. This report
cites a discussion at an advisory committee meeting around the issue of including under-
represented groups. Many people simply cannot afford to attend working group meetings or
regional forums, and there was discussion around the method of including people in the planning
process. This report highlights a question about whether hiring consultants to conduct outreach is
a best practice, or if funding stipends for people to participate in the already existing meetings is
more valuable (Sands, 2015). The lack of funds for compensation to participants who couldn’t
leave their job to come to a meeting or required compensation for travel was highlighted by an
interviewee as well (MA05).

Related to this is the issue of low-income individuals and food insecure individuals being
represented by organizations in the working groups and regional forums (MA03, MA06, MA07).
A member of a working group explained how professionals represented the interests of their
clients in the working groups,

I think what most often tends to happen is that you have members of the organizations
that are acting to support, to educate this population, are the ones that are elevating these
concerns. So, I'm going to elevate that we have food deserts in Massachusetts, we have
areas where it's really hard for families to get to and to shop, and get all of the affordable
foods, fresh fruits and vegetables, that they need. There probably were a few people that
were in this lower income population voicing these needs but that's also something that I
can voice on their behalf and that's something that collectively, this working group tried
to bring to light the different challenges and barriers that we've all heard. We always tell
a lot of stories. (MA07)

This member of the working group supported the idea that organizations representing low
income individuals are representing their needs. However, because the professionals are not
representative of their clientele, there are challenges. This working group member continued,

Where I think it tends to be challenging is that the staff members working in many of these organizations on these eight food access, security and health goals very rarely represent the cultural ethnic backgrounds, and economic levels of the families that we are serving. So, we talked about race, we talked about culture, we talked about a lot of these different things, but not from a, “I'm part of this group”, but more from a, “I'm on the sidelines but I think this is important”. That’s why I say yes and no to voices being represented. I think we did to the best of our ability. I think this is a group that is incredibly aware of the fact that our work is not often as representative of the families we are trying to serve (MA07).

Members of this working group were clearly aware that they were trying to elevate the concerns of their clients to the best of their ability. Another working group member felt similarly that they were unsure of how well they are really representing their clients, and stated, “I think we're all trying to do our best to accurately represent the folks we serve but I don't think we do enough to really say that we know we are. I can speak from our organization in that we know we're not doing enough to really check and make sure we're accurately representing (MA03). The common thread throughout these quotes is that members of the various organizations did feel like they were elevating issues relevant to their clientele, however, without speaking with their clients, the professionals are uncertain if they are adequately representing the needs of their clients. It is unclear how many of the professional members of the working groups did check in with their constituents and tell them about the process and gather their feedback to inform the plan. One member of the working group stated that they did not make their clientele aware of the process of the development of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan or share the opportunity to participate in the regional forums, nor were they asked to by anyone on the planning team (MA07). There seems to be some discrepancy in whether members of the working groups were soliciting input from their clientele and constituents directly to inform the plan, and despite best intentions, if these under-represented groups’ interests were accurately represented.
4.3.3 Information and Resources

Some level of information was provided to participants during the public participation opportunities. The working groups were provided with information and resources to work with to determine and prioritize recommendations for the plan. A member of the leadership team discussed the information provided to the food access, security and health working group, which included qualitative and quantitative data provided by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council about food deserts, reviewed surveys from different organizations in the working group, and the data gathered through interviews, focus groups and the regional public forums (MA09).

Information was also provided more generally to participants during the public participation opportunities. An interviewee described the information provided to participants during each regional public forum.

We definitely had our own presentation with some of the key facts about statewide food systems and then we put together what key facts we could about what that region was presenting and maybe key challenges were in terms of access in urban areas, the food desert severity, and then we would leave time in the presentation for the local organization to give its presentation and its concerns and hopes for what would be in the food plan. That would take the first 30 - 45 min of each meeting (MA06).

Forum participants were able to obtain information about the planning process, learn about the statewide food system, as well as local concerns to help ground them in the purpose of the meeting and provide background information as context. Similarly, when members of the leadership team conducted interviews or focus groups, the interviewer or focus group facilitator would provide information to participants.

Whenever I conducted listening sessions or interviews, a piece of this was about letting people know about the Massachusetts food policy council and what a food policy council is, what a food plan is, why we were doing it. So, a piece of it was setting context and then asking questions in order to elicit a sense of what the needs were and also what the assets were in the community (MA08).
Providing information to participants is important to provide context about the purpose the process and also educating participants about what the food policy council is and what a food plan is to have a productive conversation.

4.3.4 Outcomes

Influence on Outcomes

The input gathered through public participation opportunities directly resulted in the content of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, but there was some criticism that the plan does not adequately include input gathered by under-represented audiences. Notes were gathered, organized by theme, and distributed to the appropriate working group who took the feedback, and with their expertise, prioritized ideas and recommendations (MA06). Each staff member was responsible for one or two chapters of the plan, and they worked together to develop an overview for each chapter to look similar with goals, recommendations and action items (1LDBB1). The executive committee was also involved in prioritizing and determining the recommendations for each chapter as well (MA06). The leaders of the working groups worked closely with the planning team to write the recommendations for each chapter. For example, the staff member wrote a first draft of the recommendations after attending meetings of the working group and reviewing all notes and input, and then the staff and the leader of the working group went back and forth to bring it all together (MA09). The drafts of the chapter was also shared with members of each working group to provide feedback before the plan was finalized (MA09). As demonstrated by many of the interviewees, the community input directly influenced the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. There was, however, one interviewee who did not agree that all of the input gathered shaped the plan. This interviewee commented that the two
consultants who had conducted outreach and engagement with under-represented audiences had written reports with their recommendations, which the interviewee did not feel were adequately represented in the final report (MA08).

**Interviewee Satisfaction**

There was mixed satisfaction about the process of developing the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan amongst the interviewees. A member of the food policy council was satisfied, stating that it was satisfying to get a lot of people involved (MA01). Others were somewhat satisfied but felt that there could have been some improvements to the process. For example,

> I feel like we did our best, I feel like I'm patting myself on the back, but I think we did the best that we could within the timeframe that we had and with the dollars that we had. And I think folks, we did our best to kind of make sure that the folks who were at the various tables and at the various meetings were bringing the information back to whoever their constituency was or is, so I think we did the best that we could but I don't know, again I'm not sure if you're ever satisfied (MA09).

A member of a working group agreed with this sentiment and commented, “I essentially think more could have been done and what was done could have been done better” (MA03). Because all people eat, there is an issue of engagement ever being satisfactory around food systems work because it is so challenging to engage everyone who is a stakeholder (MA09).

Another issue was dissatisfaction with the process due to the lack of funding to execute the public participation component properly. A member of the leadership team explained,

> It's too bad that there wasn't more money and intention at the outset to engage communities of color in the design phase. I mean this is what happens all the time with qualitative work, it requires more time, it requires building trust, it requires a different set of timing and setting up meetings in community neighborhoods, getting people there, and taking care of them with a meal, childcare, and a stipend. There wasn't enough money allocated to do it well enough (MA08).
Overall, interviewees were satisfied that the process happened, however, there were some comments about how the process could have been improved.

**Perceived Satisfaction of Stakeholders**

Generally, interviewees perceive that stakeholders, including the members of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council or people who provided input through the public participation opportunities, were satisfied by the policy process. A food policy council member explained, “in general, there's a pretty good level of satisfaction with the engagement process for the MA Local Food Action Plan. In retrospect, there's always things that could have been done better or fine-tuned, but overall, there’s a good level of satisfaction” (MA05). An interviewee perceived that the Massachusetts Food Policy council was satisfied with the process and resulting plan (MA02).

There was some question about if participants who provided input were satisfied with the process. One interviewee stated they did not have enough information to know if participants were satisfied, explaining that there had not been an evaluation or informal feedback collected from participants in the regional forums (MA03).

**Networking and Collaboration**

The process of developing the Massachusetts Local Food Action plan led to increased collaboration and networking between people working on the development and sharing their input (MA08, MA05, MA09, MA03). The food system is broad, and it was valuable to make connections and build collaboration between individuals, organizations and agencies that are all
working on the food system in Massachusetts (MA05). A member of the leadership team described the collaboration as,

“…working across context sectors, working across public and private, bringing in collaboration at the local level all the way up to the state level, and really focused in on policy that can get moved, like upper case ‘P’ policy, legislation, as well as lower case ‘p’ policy, like changing peoples’ practice” (MA09).

Reflecting on an experience in the food access, security and health working group, an interviewee described the collaboration that took place across different organizations that may not normally work together.

There were times for which it was, people who work on different parts of what I see as a continuum coming together and working together and finding connection amongst their work and informing, one informing the other, and finding some collaboration that might not have been there and expanded thought of seeing yourself within a context of another work and content area (MA09).

Participants in this working group had the opportunity to meet and work with individuals that they had not had the experience of working with before, and share information and possibly build a relationship to continue working together.

One of the outcomes of the policy process was the development of the Massachusetts Food Systems Collaborative, which is led by one of the members of the planning team. Many people that were involved in developing the plan are now involved in some capacity in the collaborative and still working together to improve the state’s food system (MA01).

**Increased Knowledge**

Increased knowledge was another outcome of the policy process. The process may have helped raise awareness of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council to some degree. A leadership team member explained,
Yeah, we talked about [the food policy council]. Did it matter to people? Some people yes, some people no. But yes we always talked about it as a frame for it. And we talked about why we need food policy councils because otherwise government agencies operate in silos and food has got to be talked about across all sectors in order to make change. So we talked about that a lot. Are people more aware? Maybe. Of the policy process? Maybe (MA08).

Through participating in the process, community members and stakeholders were able to learn about the food policy council and the importance of having a food policy council. There was one interviewee that felt like the MA Food Policy Council was removed from the process, and so the council wasn’t talked about during the public participation opportunities (MA07).

There were mixed feelings about if the process and resulting plan provided new knowledge to the MA Food Policy Council members. One interviewee felt strongly,

I think it was a huge learning experience for them. To just understand what emerged and what were the consensus items, I think it was a huge learning for them, absolutely. And I think without the plan they would have totally floundered as a group, in terms of trying to figure out what to do. And I think that was actually what was happening before, and they decided to pursue a plan (MA03).

Members of the food policy council commented that it was a learning experience; the process allowed members to think from a food system perspective, which was a goal of the process (MA04, 1PFCBB5).

Participants in working groups also had the opportunity to learn from other participating organizations throughout the process (MA09, MA03, MA07). A member of a working group explained,

I think both in the food access realm we were able to have so many conversations to understand those priorities of people who are in similar fields of work. And then broadly just by participating at the larger level learned so much more about the food system and different competing priorities and sort of the politics between different groups and different fields of thought and all of that. I feel like I have a better understanding really across the board. (MA03).
While people in different organizations often know of each other, the process really helped people understand the different organizations in detail and the work that they do, for example, the food banks do more than just provide food, many are very active in advocacy work, too (MA07).

Through the working group discussions, individuals working in similar fields of work were able to learn from each other, and then through regional forums that brought together a wide variety of people, people connected across sectors and interests. It is also a key point that the MA FPC found the process to be enlightening and allowed its members to be exposed to different sectors of the food system.

Policy Outcomes

In December 2015, members of the planning team presented the MA Local Food Action Plan to the MA FPC, which the MA FPC accepted. Following the acceptance of the plan, there have been some policy activities, however, it is an interesting finding that the MA FPC is not playing a role in advocating for or implementing new policies. A food policy council member explained,

The council does not have any particular implementation authority. So, it’s an advisory body, so then it’s up to interested parties, whether governmental or nongovernmental, legislative or executive branch, to decide what goals or recommendations might be those that they wish to support, and how actively they choose to do so (MA04).

Despite initiating the process to develop the MA Local Food Action Plan, the MA FPC has no authority to implement any of the policies recommended in the plan as a council. The exception is that different departments may choose to implement policies separately. A few interviewees unaware of the FPC’s limitations in policy implementation commented on being disappointed by the lack of implementation of the plan by the council.
There have been some positive policy outcomes resulting from the plan that have been lobbied and advocated for through the Massachusetts Food Systems Collaborative (the collaborative), a group that started as a result of the process of developing the MA Local Food Action Plan (MA03, MA02). The collaborative was started by a number of food systems stakeholders that wanted to ensure that there was an effort made to implement the plan (MA02). “The simplest way to describe [the collaborative] is that we look at the plan and all of the recommendations that were in the plan, and then at the landscape of all the great food systems organizations in MA and then figure out how we can help facilitate action towards particular goals of the plan” (MA02). The collaborative uses the MA Local Food Action plan to guide its initiatives.

The collaborative is described by interviewees as a strong outcome of the policy process because it seen as an effective group. This effectiveness may be explained by the collaborative’s ability to advocate and drive policy change. A member of the MA FPC explained, “The director [of the collaborative] is a registered lobbyist. So, in many cases the food policy council is trying to work in a complementary way with the collaborative because again, they can lobby for some of the priorities in the MA Local Food Action Plan.” (MA05).

A number of interviewees discussed the collaborative’s recent work advocating for the Healthy Incentives program as a successful policy outcome. The Healthy Incentives Program provides one dollar for each dollar spent on fruits and vegetables using SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits at farmers markets, mobile markets, farm stands, and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs (MA07). This program was so successful that in the first year of operation, funding to support the program for three years was spent, and so the
4.4. Analysis of Attributes of the Food Policy Councils and Policy Process

The following analyzes the public participation of the policy process implemented by the planning team, the attributes of the MA FPC and the attributes of the policy process. It is important to note that because the MA FPC did not directly lead the process of developing the MA Local Food Action Plan, many of its attributes are not relevant to the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities offered.

4.4.1 Food Policy Council Attributes

Scale

The MA FPC operates at the state level, and the council initiated a statewide policy process to develop the MA Local Food Action Plan. Despite the statewide effort, there were many efforts made by members of the planning team and leaders of each working group to make participating in the process accessible despite wide geography. Based on participant interviews, it does not appear that scale played a role in the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities offered, as there were many opportunities held across the state. For example, the eight regional forums were held across the state; working group meetings were also rotated across the state; and the two consultants who were tasked with engaging under-represented audiences were focused in different parts of the state, one on the eastern part, one on the western part of the state. Interviewees also discussed the fact that Massachusetts has a strong network of
farmers markets, public health organizations, buy local organizations and farming organizations which helped with the statewide initiative.

**Structure**

The MA FPC is embedded in government. Because the council is embedded in government and many of its members are higher level administrators, this likely impacted the decision for the council to hire planners and consultants to lead the policy process.

The structure of the MA FPC does play a role in the ability of the council to implement recommendations from the MA Local Food Action Plan. Because the MA FPC is embedded in government, the council does not have the ability to implement policy change. The council is considered an advisory body, and while the individual members of the council can choose to implement policies or projects recommended in the plan, the council as an entity cannot lobby or advocate for specific policy change. Instead, the MA Food Systems Collaborative was formed in order to ensure recommendations from the MA Local Food Action Plan were implemented. One of the key differences between the council and the collaborative is that the council is embedded in government, whereas the collaborative is a grassroots organization that is able to advocate for policy change.

**Membership**

Members of the MA FPC include members of the legislature, various state agencies, and governor-appointed industry representatives. Council members are also demographically diverse. Despite the diversity of the council members (in terms of demographics and sector), this did not seem to have an impact on the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities because the
MA FPC was not directly leading the process. The membership of the leadership team of the policy process had more of an impact in the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities. For example, a criticism of the process was that there were no under-represented audiences represented as members of the leadership team guiding the process, and for this reason, some groups felt excluded and disenfranchised by the process.

*Capacity*

The capacity, or the budget and staff of the food policy council may have played a role in the policy process. The MA FPC does have a budget, as well as a part time staff member employed by the MA Department of Agriculture. Due to the lack of staff capacity of the food policy council, it is likely that it was necessary to hire planners and consultants to lead the policy process.

It is unclear whether the budget of the MA FPC had an impact on the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities because it is unknown if funds from the MA FPC’s budget were allocated for the policy process. However, it is evident that the budget of the policy process was important and impacted the public participation, as there were concerns from interviewees about the limited budget available for public participation. The MA Department of Agricultural Resources provided $200,000 and coordinated with other philanthropic organizations to obtain an additional $150,000 to offer a budget to fund the policy process. While there was a budget to hire planners and consultants to lead the policy process, there were some comments from interviewees about the amount of funds budgeted towards public participation. One interviewee spoke to the challenge of writing a proposal and submitting a budget where the majority of funds are allocated to public participation,
When you’re doing a public project it’s hard to convince your client that you need half the project budget just to engage people. People don’t buy that. And if you’re going to have a competitive proposal, you can’t propose that. It takes time and money to reach people (MA06).

There are constraints established by the budget and the expectations of the client for a planning process. Even if there are funds available for a policy process, it can be challenging to explain why the public participation component requires so much funding. Interviewees also commented on the limited funds as a barrier to engaging with low-income individuals. In order to reach these under-represented groups, funds are necessary to offer meals and stipends for participants.

**Focus on Food Justice**

Given the MA FPC’s limited focus of food justice, it is not surprising that the policy process was not implemented with a food justice lens. While the MA FPC did not directly implement the policy process, the group awarded the contract to the MAPC and partners who wrote a response to the RFR that did not have a focus on justice. A key component of food justice is involving under-represented groups in decision-making and moving beyond working on food access and anti-hunger work. Instead, the engagement strategy did not focus on involving people of color and low-income individuals as leaders to guide the process, and instead focused on engaging under-represented groups through consultants which limited the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities offered.

**4.4.2 Attributes of the Policy Process**

The structure of the leadership for the development of the MA Local Food Action Plan impacted the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities offered. The leadership of the
policy process included the MA FPC, the planning team, an executive committee, a project advisors group, and eight working groups. Generally, the planning team led the policy process, and made decisions about what public participation opportunities to implement and communicated to the MA FPC. Another component of the leadership for the policy process were the two consultants hired to engage under-represented audiences. The planning team worked to implement public participation opportunities for general community members and stakeholders, while under-represented groups were engaged primarily through the two consultants. Under-represented groups were primarily consulted with to learn about their thoughts and ideas about the food system; these groups were not empowered to make decisions about specific recommendations for the plan. There was some question amongst interviewees if using consultants to engage under-represented groups was the best way to have these groups bout if this was the best method to engage with these under-represented audiences. The planning team chose to employ consultants to go to under-represented groups and consult with them, when another option may be providing stipends to individuals to compensate them for their time, allowing these groups to be represented in the forums and participating at a higher level in the working groups. There is debate about which method of engagement is preferred.

The working groups were responsible for distilling input and information from the public participation into goals and recommendations for the plan. Because of the way that this structure was set up by the planning team, the working groups were allowed a high level of input into the plan by providing opportunity for the individuals in these groups to collaborate, discuss and make decisions about the recommendations for their chapter of the plan. However, many members of the working groups were service providers and administrators of organizations that were tasked with representing their clientele and constituents. There were issues with this
approach discussed by members of the working groups. These individuals expressed concerns that while they were doing their best to represent the interests of their low-income and food insecure clients, without having them at the table, they couldn’t be certain that their interests were being represented accurately. It is also important to note that while working group members had opportunity to prioritize goals and recommendations for the plan, ultimately, the planning team was responsible for taking the recommendations from each working group and writing up the chapters of the plan, therefore making the final decision.

4.5 Discussion

Several strengths and some challenges were identified in the process of gathering public and stakeholder input for the MA Local Food Action Plan. There are many factors that contributed to the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities, including the strategy to implement an inclusive process from the beginning, considering diversity of participants in terms of food systems sectors, geographic location, and also considering outreach to under-represented audiences. There was some debate amongst participants about when the decision was made to conduct outreach to under-represented audiences, but there were two consultants hired specifically for this purpose. Another strong element of the public participation was that there were a variety of methods, both thick and thin, offered to stakeholders and citizens, including regional public forums, working groups, interviews, focus groups, and public comment solicitation. There was a strong structure in place to gather input from a variety of community members and stakeholders and then funnel those comments and ideas to the working groups to be prioritized and written as recommendations. Many of these opportunities also allowed for adequate opportunities for participants to discuss and deliberate. An especially high level of
deliberation took place during the working group meetings, where participants worked to prioritize ideas and write recommendations for the plan.

There were some strengths and challenges around the elements of facilitation and accessibility. Each breakout group at the regional forums had a facilitator and sometimes a note taker, and there were “facilitators” assigned to each working group, but it is not clear if these facilitators are trained. Interviewees described the facilitators as experts in the field who were asked to lead the groups. Similarly, interviewees did point out that there was an effort to make public participation opportunities more accessible by considering their location and time of day when they took place, but there were challenges in that they were not able to offer stipends for low-income individuals to participate.

Largely, the challenges of the public participation process were reported to be around outreach and engagement to under-represented audiences. While there were two consultants hired to conduct this outreach, there was a limited budget to accomplish this. This led to some interviewees feeling dissatisfied with the process and with the feeling like there could have been more done. There is also question about if these under-represented groups were adequately represented by professionals serving on the working groups.

Some attributes of the MA FPC had an impact on the effectiveness of the public participation, but many attributes were not relevant because the council did not directly lead the policy process. It is also not evident that the statewide scale of the process had an impact on the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities, as there were efforts to engage stakeholders across the state through rotating the location of public forums and meetings. It is likely that the government-embedded structure of the council and the limited capacity of the council led them to choose to hire another organization to lead the process. The structure of the
MA FPC also has an impact on the implementation of the plan, as the council serves in an advisory capacity and cannot implement or advocate for policy change. While the budget of the council did not directly relate to the budget of the policy process, based on comments from interviewees, the funding for public participation opportunities is important, and there was feeling like there was not enough funding to properly implement the process. The council’s limited focus on food justice might have played a role in the policy process, as the council chose to select a response to their RFR that did not have a strong focus on justice, perhaps explaining why the process of developing the MA Local Food Action Plan was not approached with justice as a priority.

The overall structure of the policy process played a greater role in the effectiveness of the public participation. For example, while it was strategic to provide the opportunity for working groups to make decisions and prioritize recommendations for the plan, the working groups did not have representation of low-income individuals, food insecure individuals, and people of color. In the working groups, these groups were represented by service providers. The planning team primarily engaged with under-represented groups through hiring consultants to engage directly. There were concerns about whether this was the best strategy to employ for engaging with under-represented audiences.

The challenge of engagement of under-represented groups throughout the process of developing the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan is similar to the challenges identified in the process of conducting the school food security assessment. Interviewees in both of the cases describe wanting to have engaged with more under-represented audiences. Despite this challenge, there were many strengths around the public participation opportunities and this case could serve as an example for other states interested in developing a statewide food systems plan.
Chapter 5: Cross Case Analysis and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter compares both cases to analyze the effectiveness of public participation offered by New England Food Policy Councils working on policy efforts and understand the food policy council attributes and the policy process attributes that contribute to the effectiveness of public participation. Section 5.2 provides a brief overview of each case as well as the respective attributes of each food policy council. Section 5.3 answers my second research question, bringing together the discussion from chapters three and four on the effectiveness of public participation, analyzed by the four elements of effective public participation: process and fairness; representation; information and resources; and outcomes. Section 5.4 analyzes the food policy council attributes, identifying FPC attributes that influenced the effectiveness of public participation, answering my third research question. In this section I also present emergent findings of factors that influence effectiveness of public participation. Section 5.5 presents recommendations for food democracy, and section 6 offers my reflections on this research study.

5.2 Food Policy Council Attributes

As depicted below in Table 5.1, there is variation between the three food policy councils involved in the two cases. The Portland Food Council and the Cumberland County Food Security Council have partnered to create the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force which led the development of the Portland school food security assessment, described in Chapter 3. The Massachusetts Food Policy council, a council embedded in government, initiated the process of developing the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, described in Chapter 4.
### Table 5.1. Food Policy Council Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Council</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Focus on Food Justice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portland Food Council</td>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>Grassroots coalition</td>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>Representation of many food systems sectors</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland County Food Security Council</td>
<td>County</td>
<td>Transitioning to 501c3 non-profit, was housed in another non-profit</td>
<td>Budget, Multiple paid staff</td>
<td>Representation of many food systems sectors, diverse members (age, gender, income level, race &amp; ethnicity)</td>
<td>Yes – policy priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts Food Policy Council</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Embedded in government</td>
<td>Budget, part-time paid staff member</td>
<td>Representation of many food systems sectors, diverse members (age, gender, income level, race &amp; ethnicity)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the purpose of this research was to analyze how food policy councils implemented public participation opportunities and analyze the effectiveness of the public participation, it is interesting to note that in both cases, a separate entity led the processes, so the many of the attributes of each food policy council do not directly impact with the effectiveness of the public participation.

In Maine, a new task force was developed to lead the school food security assessment, called the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force. This task force is said to be a partnership between the Cumberland County Food Security Council and the Portland Food Council, however, it is evident that the task force is led and supported by members and staff of the Cumberland County Food Security Council.

In Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Food Policy council initiated the statewide planning process. The Department of Agriculture developed a budget and a Request for Responses and ultimately hired the Metropolitan Area Planning Council to lead the development of the
Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council partnered with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, and Massachusetts Workforce Alliance to develop the Planning Team, a team of people who ultimately led the process of developing the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan.

5.3 Analysis of Effective Public Participation

This section analyzes the effectiveness of public participation across both cases. Each element of effective public participation is represented in a table and discussion follows each table.
5.3.1 Process and Fairness

Table 5.2. Effective Public Participation: Process and Fairness Comparative Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Massachusetts</th>
<th>Maine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How the Process Began</strong></td>
<td><strong>How the Process Began</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Process was initiated by the MA FPC.</td>
<td>• Process was initiated by a member of an affected group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Process had the support of the school community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy for Public Participation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strategy for Public Participation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some felt that from the beginning, the goal was to conduct broad public engagement, considering diversity.</td>
<td>• The leadership team decided to broaden public participation opportunities during the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consultants were hired later in the process to engage with under-represented audiences.</td>
<td>• Initial strategy for public participation was limited to one survey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods of Public Participation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Methods of Public Participation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Variety of public participation opportunities offered: regional public forums, working groups, interviews, focus groups, public comment solicitation.</td>
<td>• Variety of public participation opportunities offered: surveys, interviews, focus groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of a large community forum to gather input.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessibility of Public Participation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Accessibility of Public Participation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Efforts to make opportunities accessible to participants.</td>
<td>• Efforts to make opportunities accessible to most participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of accommodations for low-income individuals to participate.</td>
<td>• Lack of accommodations for non-English speakers and for low-income individuals to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitation during Public Participation Opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Facilitation during Public Participation Opportunities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitators led focus groups, working groups and interviews.</td>
<td>• Facilitators led focus groups and interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It is not evident that the leaders of each working group were trained in facilitation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion &amp; Deliberation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Discussion &amp; Deliberation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunities for discussion and deliberation during the regional forums, working group meetings, and several focus groups.</td>
<td>• Opportunities for discussion and deliberation during three focus groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Limited opportunities for discussion and deliberation (during three focus groups).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Text in blue are strengths and text in gray are challenges.
How the Process Began

There are differences in how each process began. In Maine, the process was initiated by a member of an affected group, a parent who was experiencing food insecurity and witnessing food insecurity in the schools. This process began from the grassroots, and before beginning the school food security assessment, a group of individuals met with the school superintendent to obtain his support to move forward with the project. The local scale and grassroots structure of the PFC may have contributed to the parent coming forward to raise food insecurity in the schools as an issue.

Conversely, members of the MA FPC initiated the development of Massachusetts Local Food Action plan to create a comprehensive overview of the state’s food system. The MA FPC was approached by a supermarket coalition requesting the council’s endorsement to add more supermarkets in food deserts. Council members decided that they needed a framework to determine if this endorsement fit into their goals. The MA Local Food Action Plan was not driven by an affected group, but was initiated to create an overview of the state’s food system with goals for moving forward. Because the MA FPC operates at the state level, it makes sense that they initiated a statewide process.

Strategy for Public Participation

In both cases, the strategy for public participation was developed by the entity leading the process, in the case of Maine this was the leadership team of the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force, and in Massachusetts this was the planning team who was hired by the MA FPC to lead the development of the food action plan. Here, the cases are somewhat similar in that the plans for public engagement evolved as the process went on. In Maine, the initial idea
for public engagement for the food security assessment was to survey the school principals to learn about each school’s programs. However, once these data were collected from each school, it was clear to the leadership team that they needed to go deeper, and collect more data from the school community to understand the food security issues.

In Massachusetts, some interviewees commented that from the beginning, there was an effort to implement an inclusive process, focusing on offering opportunities to fulfill geographic diversity and food systems sector diversity. However, it was not until the issue of reaching under-represented audiences was raised that the planning team decided to hire two consultants to engage specifically with under-represented audiences.

Methods of Public Participation

Both cases employed a variety of methods of public participation, both thick and thin, to engage with stakeholders and community members. In Massachusetts, there were a greater number of public participation opportunities offered, likely because the planning effort was statewide, and not citywide like the Maine case. A strength of the Massachusetts case is that the planning team elected to offer eight regional forums open to anyone to attend; in Maine there were only public participation opportunities targeted at particular groups, there was not a community forum hosted that was open to all which is viewed as a challenge. However, there were different goals of each process, and in Maine, the assessment was very much focused on school food insecurity and not on the entire food system, so perhaps there was less of a need to engage members of the general public.
Accessibility of Public Participation

In both cases, there were efforts made to ensure that public participation opportunities were accessible to participants. Despite the differences in scale, there were accommodations in each case to make participating in the process more accessible for participants. In Maine and in Massachusetts, interviews were held at a location convenient to the interviewee. In Massachusetts, there was an effort to hold meetings in a variety of locations, to make them accessible to people living across the state. In terms of accommodations for under-represented audiences, Massachusetts did offer translation services for those who did not speak English as a second language, where Maine did not.

The budget of each process clearly impacted the ability of each leadership team in their ability to make participating more accessible for low-income individuals. Interviewees in each case acknowledged that they would have liked to be able to provide stipends to individuals to attend the public participation opportunities. With limited funds, this was not feasible. While the Massachusetts case did have a larger budget than Portland, Maine, according to the Massachusetts leadership team, there was not an option to allocate more of the budget to public participation, highlighting the fact that there were constraints in writing the response to the RFR. An interviewee explained that often, clients do not understand the cost of public engagement, and in order to write a competitive response, it was necessary to allocate less of the budget to public engagement. In both cases, there could be improvements to making public participation opportunities more accessible to low-income participants.
Facilitation during Public Participation Opportunities

In both cases, facilitators were used to lead the meetings and focus groups in the public participation opportunities in both cases. Interviewers were also trained and utilized interview guides when interviewing participants in each case. A strength of the Maine case was that a volunteer with qualitative research experience developed the interview protocol and led trainings for volunteer interviewers, so these interviewers were very well trained. A potential challenge of the Massachusetts case was that an expert from each sector was assigned to be a facilitator for each working group, and it is unknown whether these group leaders had any facilitation training. Because the facilitators were experts in their field, it is possible that there may have been issues with neutrality and having individuals with different opinions effectively participate in the working groups.

Discussion and Deliberation

There were some opportunities for participants to discuss their ideas and deliberate in the public participation opportunities in both cases. The structure of the leadership had an impact on the opportunities for discussion and deliberation. For example, there were more opportunities for discussion in the Massachusetts case, where members of the working groups worked to deliberate and decide on what the top recommendations were for each chapter of the plan. In the Maine case, there were limited opportunities for discussion, which only took place during the three focus groups. The Maine case was limited in that there were limited opportunities for individuals other than the leadership team to deliberate and make decisions about recommendations for the report. While there was some opportunity for discussion during the task
force meetings, the leadership team primarily analyzed the data gathered and wrote the final report.

### 5.3.2 Representation

**Table 5.3. Effective Public Participation: Representation Comparative Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Massachusetts</th>
<th>Maine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outreach Effort</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outreach Effort</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Targeted outreach to different sectors to recruit members of the working groups.</td>
<td>• Targeted outreach to recruit members of the task force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Targeted outreach to particular audiences and conducted primarily through partnerships with local organization, personal networks and relationships for other public participation opportunities.</td>
<td>• Targeted outreach to different groups for public participation opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representation in Public Participation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Representation in Public Participation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Over 1500 people were engaged throughout the process of developing the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, including a variety of different sectors, geographic areas, and under-represented audiences.</td>
<td>• Representation of community organizations and food council members on task force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of representation of low income and food insecure individuals in public participation.</td>
<td>• Representation of a variety of members of school community in public participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limited representation of food insecure individuals, parents and students.</td>
<td>• Limited opportunity for general public to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* Text in blue are strengths and text in gray are challenges.

**Outreach Effort**

Both cases relied on utilizing existing relationships, and networks to recruit membership in their groups; in the case of Massachusetts, for the working groups and in the case of Maine, to recruit members of the task force. Both cases also relied on targeted outreach for recruiting participants for the public participation opportunities. This may have been a function of both the focus of the process or the scale of the process. For example, the process of assessing food
security in the Portland Public Schools is specific and leadership team members conducted targeted outreach to ensure participation of service providers and the school community. In the case of statewide food systems planning in Massachusetts, the planning team conducted targeted outreach to ensure representation of different parts of the state, and of different food systems sectors. The consultants engaging under-represented audiences in Massachusetts also conducted targeted outreach to specific groups after observing which groups were not already included in the process.

**Representation in Public Participation**

Both cases engaged a broad range of stakeholders, and some under-represented groups. In Massachusetts, there was geographic diversity and food sector diversity. There were also efforts to engage with under-represented audiences through two consultants.

In Maine, there was representation of community organizations that provide services to the schools as well as members of the school community in different public participation opportunities. There were a few public participation opportunities that engaged under-represented audiences, like a survey targeted towards low-income parents, and the youth leaders’ focus group, which was comprised primarily of immigrant students. There was representation of a parent who had experienced food insecurity serving on the leadership team that had initiated the process.

However, in both cases, there was a recognition that under-represented groups were not leading the process, except for the parent on the leadership team in Maine, and this was concerning to interviewees. In Maine, input was gathered primarily through service providers, whether those providers were outside community organizations or employees of the school
district. This is dissimilar to Massachusetts where input was gathered by directly communicating with the under-represented individuals, through interviews, focus groups and community forums. In addition, the planning team engaged members of the working groups who were often professionals, to analyze the input and make recommendations. In Maine, members of the leadership team analyzed the data, made recommendations, and wrote the report. Members of the leadership team were council members, advocates and staff of community organizations.

Interviewees in both cases discussed representation of under-represented audiences and the challenges that are posed by having professionals represent the interests of low-income individuals, food insecure individuals, and people of color. Interviewees in both cases agreed that professionals were often doing the best that they could, but there is the risk of not accurately representing constituents. Interestingly, interviewees in both cases suggested the idea of providing stipends to low income individuals to enable them to not only participate in public participation opportunities, but to take part in a leadership role, for example, the working groups in the Massachusetts case or the leadership team in the Maine case. However, there was question about what the best method of engaging these groups is due to concerns about tokenism and the issues around sensitive topics like food insecurity.
5.3.3 Information and Resources

Table 5.4. Effective Public Participation: Information and Resources Comparative Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Massachusetts</th>
<th>Maine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information and Resources</strong></td>
<td><strong>Information and Resources</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some information was provided to participants during each public participation opportunity.</td>
<td>• Some amount of information was provided to participants in each public participation opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Data was provided to the food access, security and health working group for the group to review in determining prioritizing recommendations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Text in blue are strengths and text in gray are challenges.

In each case, some level of information was provided to participants. In the Massachusetts case, this information was provided through a presentation at the beginning of each regional forum, an introduction to the process and food policy council before each interview and focus group, and information (qualitative and quantitative data) provided to the food access, security and health working group. Similarly, in the Maine case, information was provided to interviewees and focus group participants about the food security assessment at the beginning of each session, and there was also information about the process at the beginning of each survey.
5.3.4 Outcomes

Table 5.5. Effective Public Participation: Outcomes Comparative Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence on Outcomes</th>
<th>Massachusetts</th>
<th>Maine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• All input gathered informed the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• All input gathered through surveys, interviews and focus groups directly informed the recommendations outlined in the Food Fuels Learning report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• One interviewee felt that the food plan does not adequately represent input gathered by under-represented audiences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Massachusetts</th>
<th>Maine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• There was mixed satisfaction amongst interviewees. Some were satisfied that so many people participated.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Task Force members are generally satisfied with the process of conducting the food security assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Generally, interviewees perceived stakeholders to be satisfied with the process.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Task Force members perceive that the school community is satisfied with the process of conducting the food security assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Others felt like more could have been improvements to the process.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Portland School Board is generally satisfied with food security assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limited funding did not allow the public participation activities to be implemented properly.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Task force members are dissatisfied with the number of food insecure individuals that they engaged in the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is question about whether people who participated in public participation opportunities are satisfied due to lack of information.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Task force members have mixed feelings about if students will be satisfied with the process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Networking and Collaboration</th>
<th>Massachusetts</th>
<th>Maine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Strong increase in networking and collaboration, both within sectors and across the food systems sectors.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Task force members report increased networking and collaboration amongst members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Many participants continue to collaborate on other projects.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Task force members also report relationship building amongst participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increased Knowledge</th>
<th>Massachusetts</th>
<th>Maine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Some felt that the process led to increased awareness of the food policy council and other organizations.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• The process educated participants about the food policy councils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some felt like the process brought new knowledge to members of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Process raised awareness of food insecurity issues and helped organizations prioritize their work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influence on Outcomes

The input gathered from people through the public participation opportunities directly shaped the resulting plans and assessments in both cases. In Massachusetts, the input gathered resulted in the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan document, which includes goals, recommendations and actions for eight topic areas: land, inputs, farming, fishing, processing, distribution and marketing, food access, security and health, and workforce development and training. The input gathered at the different opportunities was organized by theme and distributed to the working groups that worked to analyze the data, write and prioritize recommendations. The participants in the working groups had the opportunity to directly shape the output of the report. While many interviewees reported that participant input directly shaped the output of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, there was one interviewee that felt input provided by under-represented audiences was not well represented in the report. This input was described in a separate report, “Massachusetts Food System Plan Social Justice and Equity Recommendations” and was written by one of the consultants, summarizing the main points and themes discovered by discussing food systems issues with under-represented audiences. This highlights another potential challenge with engaging groups through a consultant separately. In this case, the consultant shared their final report with key recommendations and findings to the planning team and some relevant working groups (food access, security and health, and urban agriculture).
Initially there was a plan to involve the consultants in writing pieces of the plan, and unfortunately, there was not enough funding allocated for this, so it is possible that this resulted in less of a focus on the interests of under-represented groups reflected in the final plan.

In Maine, it is evident based on participant observation as well as data from interviewees that the input gathered from participants directly shaped the outputs of the report. The leadership team aggregated all data collected through the surveys, focus groups and interviews and worked to analyze the data and develop recommendations. Once the leadership team wrote the report, they did provide stakeholders and task force members the opportunity to review the report and provide feedback. Despite not working directly on determining the recommendations in the plan, all interviewees felt that the Food Fuels Learning report is directly informed by the input received by all participants.

*Satisfaction*

In both cases, interviewees had mixed responses about their satisfaction of the policy processes. Generally, interviewees were satisfied that the process had happened and perceived other stakeholders, like the MA FPC in the case of Massachusetts, and the Portland Public Schools in the case of Maine, to also be satisfied with the process and resulting report or plan. Members of the leadership team in each case felt uncertain whether those who participated in the public participation opportunities were satisfied with the process, mostly because interviewees had not spoken with these individuals directly.

Reasons for dissatisfaction amongst the interviewees in both cases include the lack of engagement with under-represented groups. Interviewees from both cases felt like there could have been improvements to the process to better engage with low-income individuals, food
insecure individuals, and people of color. Specifically, there was discussion about generally wanting to include these groups of people in public participation opportunities, but also wanting to include these groups in the leadership roles to guide the process. For example, in Massachusetts, there was question about whether the best way to engage under-represented groups was through a consultant, instead of providing stipends to empower people to participate at a higher level. Similarly, in Maine, interviewees had wanted to offer stipends to engage under-represented groups on the task force and in different opportunities but had limited funds.

*Networking and Collaboration*

Networking and collaboration was a strong outcome of the public participation processes in both cases. In Massachusetts, interviewees highlighted both an increase in collaboration amongst different sectors and between organizations in the same sector. The eight working groups brought different organizations in the same sector together who may not often connect. For example, the food access, security and health working group was comprised of organizations working on hunger in food banks and pantries, food access through SNAP or WIC, and the public health sector. In the Maine case, the task force provided an opportunity for different organizations and community members to come together and learn from each other. An outcome highlighted in Maine was a focus group of nutrition educators who had not collaborated before having an opportunity to come together and learn from each other. Increased networking and collaboration took place at the leadership level as well as the participant level in the process.


Increased Knowledge

Increased knowledge was cited as an outcome of the policy process in both cases. Despite the food policy councils not directly leading the process, especially in the case of Massachusetts, interviewees felt like the process helped raise awareness of the food policy council to participants. In both cases, the food policy councils and participating organizations gained knowledge from gathering input from participants. For example, in Massachusetts, food policy council members shared that they perceived members of the council to have learned about a wide variety of topics in the food system and have begun to adopt a food systems lens, considering all sectors in the food system following the statewide planning process. In Maine, it was evident that community volunteers and organizations alike learned about food insecurity issues in Portland. Some members of the task force described the needs assessment as useful for their organization moving forward in terms of informing their organizational priorities.

Policy Outcomes

While there have been positive policy outcomes resulting from the process in Massachusetts, since the policy process just took place this year in Maine, there had not yet been implementation of recommendations from the final report. In Massachusetts, there is a separate group, the MA Food System Collaborative, leading policy advocacy and implementation because the MA FPC serves as an advisory body and cannot advocate for policy change as a function of being embedded in government. This structure is different than that of the food policy councils in Maine, which operate as grassroots organizations that likely can advocate for policy change. In addition, some of the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force members are staff of
community organizations that provide services to the schools and so will likely be helpful in implementing recommendations from the final report.

5.4 Analysis of Attributes of the Food Policy Councils

This section summarizes the food policy council attributes and the attributes of the policy process and discusses which of these attributes have had an influence on the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities. This section also presents emergent findings about other factors which influence the effectiveness of public participation opportunities.

Scale

There is some evidence that the scale of the food policy council played a role in the effectiveness of the public participation process. The scale of the food policy council may have influenced how each of the processes began. For example, in the Maine case, the idea for the food security assessment was brought to the PFC by a parent who had experienced food insecurity. Due to the grassroots structure and local scale of the council it is possible that it was more accessible for this parent to share their concerns and have their voice be heard. If the council was embedded in government or operating at the state level, there may not have been the same opportunity for a citizen to share their concerns. Conversely, the MA food systems planning process was initiated by the council after a request from a group requesting their support for a project.

Interestingly, there is little evidence to suggest that the scale of the FPC hindered the geographic accessibility of the public participation opportunities. Despite the Massachusetts policy process taking place at the statewide level, the planning team was careful to rotate public
participation opportunities, and partner with local organizations to host regional forums across the state. The planning team also used targeted outreach to ensure representation of people from different parts of the state and different sectors. However, there were some benefits of the local scale of the policy process in Maine discussed by interview participants who spoke to the fact that there was strong community support, attributed to the fact that the people leading the process who were recognized and trusted in the community.

Structure

There was one finding regarding the structure of the MA FPC that impacted the policy process. Because the MA FPC is an advisory body, the council as a whole does not have any authority to implement or advocate for policy change. Members of the council may choose to implement policy in their department or sector representatives may choose to lobby for policy change individually. There is a separate group that was developed as a part of this process to implement the findings called the MA Food Systems Collaborative. In Maine, the Portland Public Schools food security assessment was just completed and there have been no recommendations implemented yet. When it does come time for implementation of recommendations, it is possible that the grassroots structure may enable the food policy councils to play a role in policy advocacy and implementation.

Membership

There is little evidence to suggest that the diversity of the membership of the food policy councils had an influence the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities, mostly because the food policy councils did not directly lead the processes, and many members of the
councils did not participate. However, the membership of the groups leading the processes were more pertinent to consider in the effectiveness of the public participation, for example, members of the leadership team and task force in Maine, and members of the planning team and working groups in Massachusetts. Again, there was a desire from interviewees in both cases that they would have liked to have more under-represented groups participate in a leadership role in the policy process. There was representation of one person on the leadership team in Maine, but looking at the Massachusetts case, under-represented groups were often represented on the working groups by professionals, many of whom were high level administrators that did not directly interact with low income or food insecure individuals.

Capacity

Some evidence suggests that the capacity of the food policy councils had some influence over how the policy process was led. For example, the MA FPC had limited staff capacity, which likely influenced the decision to hire planners and consultants to lead the process. In Maine, while the task force is considered a partnership between the CCFSC and the PFC, it is evident that the CCFSC has taken the lead, which is likely attributed to its greater staff capacity.

Interviewees also discussed the issue of staff capacity in Maine. The process was led by working professionals, and community volunteers were engaged to conduct key informant interviews and focus groups. Interviewees attribute the success of the process to people who volunteered their time to conduct the interviews and focus groups. It was suggested that with perhaps more time and staff capacity, there could have been additional public participation opportunities offered.
Focus on Food Justice

There is some evidence that the FPCs’ focus or lack of focus on food justice influenced the opportunities for public participation. Given the MA FPC’s limited focus on food justice, it is not surprising that there was also a lack of focus on food justice in the policy process. Reviewing MAPC’s response that was awarded from the food systems plan RFR, there is also a limited focus on food justice in the text. This may explain why there was a lack of under-represented groups having active roles in leading the process. The lack of focus on food justice likely also contributes to the fact that the planning team initially did not have a plan to engage with under-represented groups until they were prompted and chose to hire two consultants as their strategy for gathering input.

The CCFSC has identified food justice as a policy priority, but it is unclear if the PFC focuses on food justice. The focus on food justice was evident in the policy process because of the focus on food insecurity, and the fact that the process was led by a parent who had experienced food insecurity. However, there was limited representation of low-income and food insecure individuals in the process, and this was acknowledged by interviewees as a challenge.

5.5 Emergent Findings

How Under-represented groups were engaged

Under-represented groups were engaged in different ways in each of the cases. Table 5.6 displays who, how, and to what level of engagement under-represented groups were involved in both cases. The column in this table, “Level of Engagement”, refers to the Ladder of Citizen Participation that outlines eight levels of citizen participation (described in Chapter 1 on page 13) (Arnstein, 1969).
### Table 5.6 Methods for Engaging with Under-represented Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Who was engaged</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Level of Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>high level administrators, service providers: indirect</td>
<td>Food Access, Security &amp; Health Working Group</td>
<td>delegated power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>under-represented groups: direct (ex: low-income individuals, food chain workers, immigrants, urban farmers)</td>
<td>interviews &amp; focus groups</td>
<td>consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>community leaders: indirect parent who had experienced food insecurity: direct</td>
<td>leadership team</td>
<td>delegated power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>community service providers: indirect</td>
<td>task force</td>
<td>partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>school community, community service providers: indirect</td>
<td>interviews</td>
<td>consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>immigrant youth leaders: direct middle school students: direct</td>
<td>focus group, surveys</td>
<td>consultation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Massachusetts, the leadership team set up the process to collect input through forums, interviews, and focus groups, which was then provided to working groups. The leadership team delegated power to working groups, such as the Food Access, Security and Health Working Group, to make decisions about the recommendations and goals. The planning team then compiled the recommendations from all the working groups, organized them, and wrote the final plan. Under-represented groups were represented in the working groups only indirectly by high level administrators, such as a director of a food bank, many of whom did not interact directly with low income or food insecure individuals. Conversely, under-represented groups provided input directly through interviews and focus groups, but were not empowered to make decisions about the plan.

In Maine, the leadership team designed the process to collect input through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and the task force. The task force was engaged as partners in the process and provided input throughout. The leadership team was empowered to analyze the input
collected, write recommendations and present the final report. Under-represented groups were represented in the task force indirectly through community service providers and community volunteers, many of whom work closely with food insecure individuals. Conversely, under-represented groups provided input directly through surveys and focus groups, but only one individual, a parent who had experienced food insecurity, was empowered to make decisions about the plan through their participation on the leadership team.

There are differences in how under-represented groups were engaged indirectly or directly in the two cases, especially what groups were empowered to make decisions. In Massachusetts, a larger group of people, members of the working groups, were empowered to make decisions, however, none of these members were low income or had experienced food insecurity. In the Maine case, a small group of people, the leadership team, was empowered to make decisions and one of these members was a parent who had experienced food insecurity. Looking across both cases, under-represented groups were engaged largely through consultation and were represented only by proxy through professionals and service providers in decision-making, with the exception of one individual.

*Capacity of the Policy Process*

Evidence from both case studies supports the need for adequate capacity for effective public participation, both in terms of staff capacity and budget. In the Massachusetts case, staff to led the process, whereas the Maine case was led by community practitioners and volunteers. Both cases required people to lead and staff the public participation activities, including focus groups, interviews, and regional forums.
In both cases, there was a need for adequate budget to support public participation activities. For example, a member of the leadership team in Maine advocated for funding for stipends to be able to provide for low-income individuals to participate. Similarly, members of the leadership team in Massachusetts had a desire for greater funding for public participation opportunities. One interviewee from the Massachusetts case stressed that the lack of funding was challenging, especially when engaging with under-represented groups. Funding challenges include time paid for consultants to engage and build trust and the need to host meetings in the communities. With adequate funding, it is feasible to overcome some of the barriers to engaging under-represented groups, like offering stipends to compensate for time and mileage, offering a meal, childcare, and transportation, and providing translation services for those who do not speak English. However, as a member of the leadership team in Massachusetts discussed, applicants can feel constrained by the request for responses process and feel that they need to limit funds going towards public participation in order to have a competitive proposal. Therefore, organizations who are hiring groups to conduct planning and policy work need to prioritize adequate funding for public participation and communicate this through the request for response process.
5.6 Recommendations for Food Democracy

Based on my findings, best practices for food policy councils or food systems organizations seeking to implement effective public participation opportunities include:

- **Develop a strategy before beginning a planning or policy process of how to engage under-represented groups and be prepared to adapt as needed during the process.**

  To increase the effectiveness of public participation, it is important to have a strategy to include under-represented groups before beginning a planning or policy process. In both cases, the strategy for engaging under-represented groups evolved as the process went on. In the case of Massachusetts, when some under-represented groups were finally engaged, it was discovered that these groups felt like add-ons and felt disenfranchised by not being included in the process sooner. However, it is also necessary to be prepared to adapt and change the strategy for engagement.

- **Empower under-represented groups to participate in a leadership role.**

  It is important to offer under-represented groups the opportunity to participate in a leadership role in the process, and to be empowered to make decisions. Some interviewees had a desire to engage under-represented groups in a leadership role. While there are some questions about the best way to engage with under-represented groups, and the need to be cautious to avoid tokenism and compassionate and sensitive around topics like food insecurity, under-represented audiences should at least have the opportunity to play a role in shaping the process beyond providing input in a one-off opportunity.
• Ensure adequate capacity to implement the process through leadership and funding for public participation.

Evidence suggests that capacity, such as funding and leadership influence the effectiveness of public participation. To implement effective public participation, it is necessary to have leadership, whether the process is led by professionals or a community-led effort. There is a need for people to lead public participation activities, like focus groups, interviews, surveys and community forums. In the case of Maine, participants recognized the value of the process being led by a trusted and respected leader in the community. The Massachusetts case relied on paid staff members and professionals to implement the activities, where the Maine case attributed their success to dedicated volunteers and staff from community organizations. However, interviewees discussed a desire for greater capacity to implement additional public participation opportunities.

While there are low-cost ways to implement public participation opportunities, interviewees from both cases identified the desire for funding to provide stipends to low-income participants to enable these groups to attend an opportunity or participate in a leadership role. Funds may also be used to provide a meal, childcare, and transportation to enable low-income participants to attend a public participation opportunity. An interviewee in the Massachusetts case also raised the issue of writing competitive proposals and the need for clients to understand the cost of public participation. This would allow more funds to be allocated to the public participation activities at the very beginning of the process.

• Increase accessibility of public participation opportunities.

When engaging with under-represented groups, it is necessary to consider how to make public participation opportunities more accessible. If the process includes individuals from
under-represented groups at the leadership level, there will be a greater understanding of the barriers faced by under-represented groups. Some barriers include lack of transportation, lack of childcare and language barriers. Best practices include offering transportation or going to the communities to gather input, providing translation services and offering childcare. It is also helpful to compensate people for their time and mileage in the form of stipends. In addition, offer a variety of methods for people to get involved, ranging from surveys to interviews to working groups. While it is ideal to engage people in discussion and deliberation, it is necessary to offer multiple methods of gathering input that are more accessible. It is also important to offer opportunities at different times and locations to increase accessibility.

5.7 Reflections on this Research Study

There were some challenges and limitations in conducting this research study. One issue was case selection. My initial goal was to select three food policy councils with at varying scales and with varying structure, membership, capacity, focus on food justice, as well as variation in the success of their public participation opportunities implemented. Essentially, the Massachusetts case and the Maine case exemplify councils that have implemented effective public participation and have engaged with under-represented audiences. While I did identify councils that seemed to have implemented less successful public participation opportunities, I found it difficult to communicate regularly with these councils when I was conducting preliminary research. Most of these councils did not have paid staff members which played a role in my ability to communicate with the councils, and as such, I determined it would not be feasible to collect enough data for my research if council members were not accessible. Findings
were informed by more effective efforts of public participation and do not include in depth insights from councils that may have greater challenges engaging the public.

Another finding is that the food policy councils did not play a large role in leading the policy processes. This is a limitation of the research study because I aimed to analyze FPC attributes and the relationship with public participation effectiveness. In the case of Massachusetts, the council hired planners and consultants to lead the process, and in Maine, a task force was formed that was technically a partnership between the two food policy councils but really operated as a separate entity. For this reason, it was challenging to directly connect the attributes of the food policy councils, like scale, structure, membership, capacity and focus on food justice to the effectiveness of public participation opportunities that were implemented by another entity. It was also challenging to identify individuals from each case to interview that could provide perspectives about the food policy council itself while also having insight about the public participation opportunities in the cases. Because my research focused on analyzing the effectiveness of the public participation opportunities, I focused my interviews on learning about the public participation opportunities and less about the food policy councils. Some participants that I spoke to were completely disconnected from the food policy council and could not provide any data on the topic. Another related limitation is that my research design did not include interviewing under-represented groups directly, but I was able to interview individuals that represented under-represented groups through their work. Recognizing the challenges and barriers of engaging with under-represented groups directly, this could be an opportunity for future research.

Finally, there were also some limitations in my data collection. I selected the Massachusetts case where the policy process had already happened, and the Maine case where
the policy process was in progress. Because the policy process was in progress, I chose to participate in the Maine case by attending and observing task force meetings, as well as volunteering my time to assist the leadership team with analyzing some of the survey responses. For this reason, I gained some additional insights by participating in the policy process that I don’t have with the Massachusetts policy process.
Appendix A: IRB Approval

University of New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Service Building
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

21-Sep-2017

Hancock, Cathryn
Cooperative Extension, Nesmith Hall
131 Main St
Durham, 03824

IRB #: 6761
Study: Bringing Everyone to the Dinner Table: An Analysis of Public Participation in New England Food Policy Councils
 Approval Date: 20-Sep-2017

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the document, Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects. This document is available at http://unh.edu/research/irb-application-resources. Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

[Signature]

Julie F. Simpson
Director
Appendix B: Modifications to IRB Consent Form

University of New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Service Building
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

27-Feb-2018

Hancock, Cathryn
Cooperative Extension, Nesmith Hall
131 Main St
Durham, 03824

IRB #: 6761
Study: Bringing Everyone to the Dinner Table: An Analysis of Public Participation in New England Food Policy Councils
Study Approval Date: 20-Sep-2017
Modification Approval Date: 22-Feb-2018
Modification: Change consent form

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved your modification to this study, as indicated above. Further changes in your study must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to implementation.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the document, Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects. This document is available at http://unh.edu/research/irb-application-resources or from me.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Director

cc: File
Appendix C: New England Food Policy Council Survey

Please answer the following questions based on the food policy council you represent.

1. What is the mission of the food policy council?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not Sure

Display This Question:

If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = No
Or 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Not Sure

3. How long have you participated in the food policy council?

☐ Less than one year

☐ More than one year
3a. If you have participated in the food policy council for less than a year, please enter the name and contact information for a person who has participated in the food policy council for greater than a year that we may also contact to complete this survey:

- Name ________________________________
- E-mail ________________________________

Display This Question:
If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Yes
3. If yes, what are the top policy priorities (Check all that apply)

- [ ] Food access
- [ ] Food justice
- [ ] Economic development
- [ ] Land use/planning
- [ ] Food procurement
- [ ] Food production
- [ ] Food waste/recovery
- [ ] Food labor
- [ ] Environment
- [ ] Land access
- [ ] Public health
- [ ] Nutrition
- [ ] Other (please describe) ________________________________

Display This Question:
If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Yes
4. Please identify up to three policy efforts (ex: community food assessment, food action plan, food charter, policy change) of the food policy council whether successful or not:

   ○ 1. ____________________________________________

   ○ 2. ____________________________________________

   ○ 3. ____________________________________________

Display This Question:
If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Yes

Carry Forward All Choices - Entered Text from "4. Please identify up to three policy efforts (ex: community food assessment, food action plan, food charter, policy change) of the food policy council whether successful or not: "

Q18 4a. For each policy effort, did your council gather input from affected populations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes (1)</th>
<th>No (2)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>3. (x3)</td>
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</table>
4b. For each policy effort, what methods were used to gather input? (Check all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surveys (paper or online) (1)</th>
<th>Social media (2)</th>
<th>Interviews (3)</th>
<th>Attending meetings of other organizations/groups (ex: Health Department, Planning Board, other civil society groups) (4)</th>
<th>Citizen's forum at regularly scheduled food policy council meetings (5)</th>
<th>Listening sessions or face-to-face discussions (6)</th>
<th>Other (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

Display This Question:

If 4b. For each policy effort, what methods were used to gather input? (Check all that apply) 1. - Other Is Selected

Or 4b. For each policy effort, what methods were used to gather input? (Check all that apply) 2. - Other Is Selected

Or 4b. For each policy effort, what methods were used to gather input? (Check all that apply) 3. - Other Is Selected

4c. If you selected "Other" in 13b, please describe:

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
4d. For each policy effort, in general, which sectors or stakeholders participated or were represented through the participation opportunities?

- Farmers (1)
- Fisheries (2)
- Food processing (3)
- Economic development (5)
- Food distribution (4)
- Food waste (11)
- Public health (12)
- Nutrition (20)
- Government (13)
- Planning (14)
- Food access (15)
- Concerned citizens (6)
- Individuals from diverse economic backgrounds (7)
- Schools (k-12) (16)
- Extension (18)
- Individuals of varying ages (9)
- Individuals from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds (10)
- Other (19)
4e. If you selected "Other" in 13d, please explain:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
4f. For each policy effort, from your perspective as a council member, how satisfied were you with the participation opportunities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very satisfied (1)</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied (2)</th>
<th>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied (4)</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied (5)</th>
<th>Not sure (6)</th>
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</thead>
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Display This Question:

If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Yes

4g. Please explain your response.

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________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
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Display This Question:

If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Yes

Carry Forward All Choices - Entered Text from "4. Please identify up to three policy efforts (ex: community food assessment, food action plan, food charter, policy change) of the food policy council whether successful or not: "
4h. For each policy effort, how satisfied do you perceive the council was with the participation opportunities?

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<th></th>
<th>Very satisfied (1)</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied (2)</th>
<th>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied (4)</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied (5)</th>
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**Display This Question:**

If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Yes

4i. Please explain your response.

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

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**Display This Question:**

If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Yes

**Carry Forward All Choices - Entered Text from "4. Please identify up to three policy efforts (ex: community food assessment, food action plan, food charter, policy change) of the food policy council whether successful or not: "**
4j. For each policy effort, how satisfied do you perceive participants were with the participation opportunities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very satisfied (1)</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied (2)</th>
<th>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied (4)</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied (5)</th>
<th>Not sure (6)</th>
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Display This Question:
If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Yes

4k. Please explain your response.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Display This Question:
If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Yes

Carry Forward All Choices - Entered Text from "4. Please identify up to three policy efforts (ex: community food assessment, food action plan, food charter, policy change) of the food policy council whether successful or not: "

X→
4l. For each policy effort, did the input gathered through public participation opportunities shape the outcome or the decision made?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes (1)</th>
<th>No (2)</th>
<th>Not Sure (3)</th>
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Display This Question:

If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Yes

4m. Please explain your response.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
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Display This Question:

If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Yes
5. What sectors or stakeholders are currently represented on the food policy council? (Check all that apply)

☐ Farmers

☐ Fisheries

☐ Food processing

☐ Food distribution

☐ Food waste

☐ Public health

☐ Nutrition

☐ Government

☐ Planning

☐ Economic development

☐ Food access

☐ Schools (K-12)

☐ Colleges and Universities

☐ Extension

☐ Concerned citizens

☐ Individuals from a variety of income levels

☐ Individuals of different genders

☐ Individuals of different ages

☐ Individuals from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds
☐ Other (please describe) ___________________________________________
7. Does the food policy council recruit members from diverse economic, gender, age or racial/ethnic backgrounds?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If 7. Does the food policy council recruit members from diverse economic, gender, age or racial/ethnic backgrounds... = Yes

7a. If yes, which demographic groups does the food policy council target?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

If 7. Does the food policy council recruit members from diverse economic, gender, age or racial/ethnic backgrounds... = Yes

7b. If yes, how are these demographic groups identified?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
If 7. Does the food policy council recruit members from diverse economic, gender, age or racial/ethn... = Yes

7c. If yes, how are these demographic groups recruited?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

If 2. Is the food policy council engaged in policy efforts? = Yes

8. Does the food policy council have workgroups?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If 8. Does the food policy council have workgroups? = Yes

8a. If yes, please list the workgroups:

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________
8b. If yes, who can participate in workgroups?

☐ Council members only

☐ Any interested individual

☐ Other: ________________________________________________________________

9. How long have you participated in the food policy council?

☐ Less than one year

☐ More than one year

9a. If you have participated in the food policy council for less than a year, please enter the name and contact information for a person who has participated in the food policy council for greater than a year that we may also contact to complete this survey:

☐ Name ______________________________________________________________

☐ E-mail ______________________________________________________________

10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

______________________________________________________________________
Appendix D: Interview Protocol – Massachusetts Food Policy Council Members and Stakeholders

Introduction/Icebreakers
1. Can you tell me about your work with (insert name of organization)?
   a. Do you represent a specific constituency?
2. Can you tell me about your involvement with the MA Food Policy Council?
   a. Why do you participate in the council?
   b. How long have you participated in the council?

Membership
3. I’m interested in learning more about membership of the food policy council. I understand that members of the food policy council are government appointed. Do you feel that the food policy council’s membership is representative in terms of food systems sectors?
   a. What about in terms of the state demographics?
      • Like age, gender, race, income
   b. Does the food policy council strive for diverse demographics? How do you do this?
   c. Does your council experience challenges in recruiting and retaining members?
   d. If there are challenges in recruiting/retaining members, has the council tried to understand what challenges and barriers people are facing to joining the council?

FPC Regular Meetings
4. I am interested in learning more about regular food policy council meetings.
   a. Who typically attends the meetings
      • Do other people besides council members typically attend?
      • Does the council invite the public or experts to attend?
   b. Is there an opportunity for the public to comment at the meetings?

General Community Engagement
5. Beyond the meetings, are there other ways that the food policy council engages with stakeholders and the public?

About the Food Action Plan Process
6. I am interested in learning how the development of MA Food Action Plan became a priority for the FPC.
   a. Where did the idea come from to develop a food action plan? Why did the council choose to work on this?
   b. Who was involved in the project from the beginning? Do you have any minutes from early meetings – are there any minutes from before 2015?

About Public Participation
7. Could you tell me about the process for gathering public input for the food action plan?
   a. From the start, did the council have a strategy or a plan for gathering ideas and opinions from community members? I read through the MA Food Action Plan Appendix D and noticed that there were general public forums, issue-specific working groups, outreach
efforts, focus groups with under-represented audiences, interviews with individuals, and providing opportunity for public comment on the plan.

- How did you develop this strategy?
- How did you decide what groups to partner with to host these sessions? (Reference under-represented focus groups)
- Did you collect any demographic information about the community members to understand if you were collecting input from a broad group of community members?

b. Can you tell me about a specific regional public forum or one of the sessions with under-represented stakeholders?
   - Where was the session in-person located?
   - How did you decide to partner with the organization?
   - How was the event publicized?
   - What was the event like?
   - Was the event well attended? Who attended?
   - How was the discussion led? (Prompts: facilitator? Small groups? Agenda?)
   - Was there information presented at the event?
   - Was there opportunity for participants to share their thoughts or engage in discussion?
   - Is there anyone else I should reach out to to learn more about this event?

c. Did the council have any challenges gathering community input?
   - If yes, what?
   - If no, what would you attribute to your success?

**About the MA Local Food Action Plan**

8. I’m interested in learning about your general thoughts about the Food Action Plan.
   a. How did the community input gathered shape the Food Action Plan?
      - Are any of the priorities listed in the report a result of the community input?
   b. Do you feel like the priorities outlined are appropriate?
   c. Are you satisfied with the MA Local Food Action Plan?

**Outcomes**

9. Aside from the Food Action Plan document, were there any additional outcomes that resulted from the process of creating the Food Action Plan?
   a. Did the council gather new insights through engaging the public/other stakeholders?
   b. Were relationships built or improved?
   c. Do you perceive there to be increased trust in the food policy council?

**Satisfaction**

10. Were you personally satisfied with the process of developing the Food Action Plan?
11. Do you perceive that the council was satisfied with the process of developing the Food Action Plan?
12. Do you perceive that participants were satisfied with the process of developing the Food Action Plan?

Wrapping Up
13. Is there anyone else you recommend I talk to about the development of the MA Local Food Action Plan?
14. Is there anything else that you would like to share that I didn’t ask about?
Appendix E: Interview Protocol for Portland Food Council members, Cumberland County Food Security Council Members or Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force Members

Introduction/Icebreakers
1. Can you tell me about your work with (organization)?
2. Do you work with the Portland Food Council and the Cumberland County Food Security Council?

About the Structure of the Task Force, FPCs, etc.
3. How was the Portland Public School Food Security Task Force started?
4. Can you explain to me how the task force is a partnership between the Portland Food Council and Cumberland County Food Security Council? Does the task force report to either of the councils? How much overlap is there between members of the various councils/task force?
5. I’m interested in learning more about membership of the task force. Do you feel that the membership is representative?
   a. What about in terms of the state demographics?
      • Like age, gender, race, income
   b. Does the task force strive for diverse demographics? How do you do this?
   c. Has the task force experience challenges in recruiting and retaining members?
   d. If there are challenges in recruiting/retaining members, has the council tried to understand what challenges and barriers people are facing to joining the council?
6. Do you feel that the membership of the Cumberland County Food Security Council/Portland Food Council is representative?
   e. What about in terms of the state demographics?
      • Like age, gender, race, income
   f. Does the food policy council strive for diverse demographics? How do you do this?
   g. Does your council experience challenges in recruiting and retaining members?
   h. If there are challenges in recruiting/retaining members, has the council tried to understand what challenges and barriers people are facing to joining the council?

Task Force Regular Meetings
7. When are task force meetings typically held? Can you tell me a little bit about how the council decided on this approach?
   c. Who typically attends the meetings?
      • Do other people besides council members typically attend?
      • Does the council invite the public or experts to attend?

About Public Participation
8. Could you tell me about the process for gathering community input for the food security assessment?
   b. From the start, did the task force have a strategy or a plan for gathering ideas and opinions from community members? Who developed this strategy? How was this strategy developed?
c. I understand that there were various methods for collecting data: Interviews, focus
groups, surveys. How was this strategy developed?
  • How did you decide what groups to partner with to host these sessions? How
did you decide what people to interview? Do you think you missed anyone?
  • Did you collect any demographic information about the community members
to understand if you were collecting input from a broad group of community
members?

d. Did the task force experience any challenges gathering community input through surveys,
interviews, focus groups?
  • If yes, what?
  • If no, what would you attribute to your success?

About the Food Security Assessment
9. How will the community input gathered shape the food security assessment?
10. What sort of outcomes do you anticipate?

Outcomes
11. Aside from the assessment and forthcoming recommendations, were there any additional
outcomes that resulted from the process of conducting the food security assessment?
  d. Did the council gather new insights through engaging the public/other stakeholders?
  e. Were relationships built or improved?
  f. Do you perceive there to be increased trust or knowledge about either food policy
council?

Satisfaction
12. Were you personally satisfied with the process of conducting the food security assessment?
13. Do you perceive that the task force was satisfied with the process of developing the food
security assessment?
14. Do you perceive that participants (students, teachers, food insecure) were satisfied with the
process of developing the food security assessment?

Wrapping Up
15. Is there anyone else you recommend I talk to about the food security assessment?
16. Is there anything else that you would like to share that I didn’t ask about?
References


DeLind, L. B. (2011). Are local food and the local food movement taking us where we want to go? Or are we hitching our wagons to the wrong stars? Agriculture and Human Values, 28(2), 273–283. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-010-9263-0


