CONVERSATIONS
ACROSS THE FOOD SYSTEM:

A GUIDE TO COORDINATING GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENTS
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FIRST EDITION
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Introduction

Conversations Across the Food System provides a background and overview of the process involved in coordinating a grassroots Community Food Assessment (CFA). As opposed to more data-driven assessments, the focus of grassroots CFAs is on conversations. These conversations not only tell the story of a community’s food system in a much different way than through statistical analysis, they also allow for a more participatory process. Grassroots CFAs are done with not to communities. Organizing is a critical component to this process. Organizing builds community capacity, ensuring that the efforts initiated through the CFA continue into the future.

In 2009, Oregon Food Bank embarked on a partnership with Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE), an AmeriCorps program run by the University of Oregon Community Services Center, to place full-time 11 month AmeriCorps members in rural communities throughout Oregon to conduct grassroots CFAs. To date, 14 CFAs have been completed covering 23 of Oregon’s 36 counties. This guide draws on the field experience and perspective from several AmeriCorps members who coordinated CFAs.

The guide is divided into 5 phases or topics: Background, Preparation, Process, Completion and Organizing. Each phase has its own section, except for Organizing which is featured as profiles throughout the guide to highlight the fact that organizing efforts take place simultaneously throughout the CFA process. FEAST, an Oregon Food Bank sponsored community organizing model has played a key role in all of the OFB/RARE CFAs. While coordinating CFAs, AmeriCorps members have been active in hosting food literacy events, creating local food guides, and organizing community foods groups.

The Background section provides an introduction to the purpose and theory behind coordinating grassroots CFAs. Key terms are identified, such as Community Food System and Community Food Security and Resilience. A grassroots CFA focuses on community assets as opposed to needs, and empowers community members to envision long term transformational changes to their community food system as opposed to short term symptom based solutions.

Adequate Preparation is a key factor in a successful CFA process, including what happens after the report is completed. Careful consideration of identifying the geographical boundaries of your “community”, determining community readiness, and defining your audience all play a key role in determining your assessment process. A sample timeline, based on an 11-month full-time AmeriCorps term, provides a rough guideline for the amount of time needed for each phase of the process.

The grassroots CFA Process focuses on the community and conversations. The easiest way to get started is to strike up conversations with likely stakeholders in the community food system—which could be anyone—to get a sense for what the key issues are in your community. Ask why questions, focus on assets, and engage community members to envision a food system that fits their needs and desires.

You will find that exploring a topic as complex as a community food system will seem like an endeavor that can continue ad infinitum, yet be sure to allot enough time to adequately finish Completion. Writing can take much more time than expected. Community members need to review content and especially the opportunities in order to ensure that they are representative of community desires. A plan for marketing and outreach around the CFA final report will ensure that the important information contained in the CFA is shared with the broader community and key policy makers.

Conversations Across the Food System provides some tips and strategies for conducting a grassroots CFA, but you should feel inspired and empowered to think and act creatively to best fit the needs of your local community. And above all, consider that the process itself is as important as the resulting document.
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What is a Community Food Assessment (CFA)? Why coordinate a CFA? What is different about a grassroots approach? What is the theory behind this approach? How does organizing fit into the assessment process?

Before jumping into the planning or conducting of the CFA, be sure to understand the key topics of community food security, community foods organizing, needs vs. asset-based assessments, and the Creative Tension Model. Starting with the theory behind the process, will help to wrap your mind around the many complex parts and topics that make up a CFA.

**Grassroots Community Food Assessment**

A Community Food Assessment (CFA) is a collaborative, participatory project that takes a big picture look at a food system, including production, consumption, distribution, and waste.

The intention of a grassroots based CFA is to tell the story of a county or region’s community food system through the experience and vision of the people who live and work in the area. Engaging the community through the assessment process produces a finished product that is not merely a report, but an organizing tool that moves community members to action.

This intentional, community-based process, creates a social and economic environment in which all of the stakeholders begin to understand and evaluate their decisions and actions (including policy change) through the lens of their regional food system.

Information is gleaned through community meetings, focus groups and surveys, but is grounded in statistical data that is available from a variety of sources including but not limited to the US Department of Agriculture, the Center for Disease Control, and the US Census Bureau.

The result of all this effort is a report written by, and for, the community which focuses on local issues and provides meaningful action items to help build a more resilient community food system.

While more formal, academically focused CFAs definitely serve their purpose, they are more likely to be done “at” the community as opposed to “with” the community, and as a result, end up on a shelf. Instead, taking a grassroots approach to the assessment builds community leadership, leading to empowered action. By involving the community throughout the process, the assessment becomes much more than a report – it becomes an organizing tool that cultivates community ownership and ensures follow through with the opportunities identified in the assessment.
Community Food System

A food system includes all of the activities required to make food available to people, such as production, distribution, and consumption.

A Community Food System “is a food system in which food production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place.” The scope and definition of “place” can range from a small rural town, to a multi-county area, to the larger levels such as state or region.

The use of the term “community” places “an emphasis on strengthening existing (or developing new) relationships between all components of the food system. This reflects a prescriptive approach to building a food system, one that holds sustainability – economic, environmental and social – as a long-term goal toward which a community strives.”

1A Primer on Community Food Systems: Linking Food, Nutrition, and Agriculture. Cornell University. Division of Nutritional Sciences. Discovering the Food System.

Community Food Security and Resilience

Hunger constitutes the physiological effects of a lack of sufficient food. Food Security is defined as an individual or household’s ability to access food now AND into the future. Those currently experiencing the physical symptoms of lack of food are experiencing hunger. Those who don’t know where their next meal and/or the next meals in their foreseeable future are coming from are experiencing food insecurity. The difference between terms relates to the extent to which accessing enough food is a problem. Is it a temporary, hunger, or long-term, food insecurity?

Mike Hamm and Anne Bellows define Community Food Security as “a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.”

Resiliency is at the core of Community Food Security. Resilience is the opposite of vulnerability. Resilient food systems can withstand political, economic, social, and environmental shocks. Resilient individuals, households, and communities are less vulnerable to changes in fortune that push others into food insecurity.
According to Stall and Stoecker, the “process of building a mobilizable community is called ‘community organizing.’ It involves ‘the craft’ of building an enduring network of people, who identify with common ideals, and who can engage in social action on the basis of those ideals...Community organizing can in fact refer to the entire process of organizing relationships, identifying issues, mobilizing around those issues, and maintaining an enduring organization.”

Sharon Thornberry, Community Food Systems Manager for Oregon Food Bank, defines community foods organizing as the process of bringing together a variety of stakeholders to reshape a local food system that is more responsive to the needs and assets of a community. The goal of that organizing will promote a healthier community; respect, promote and celebrate the culture of that community as well as seek to improve its economic well-being.

Community foods organizing is an integral part of a grassroots CFA and happens simultaneously during the assessment process. Throughout the assessment process, key community food leaders will be identified, networks between a variety of stakeholders will be formed, and community members will become inspired to make positive change. By focusing on organizing simultaneously with the assessment process ensures that the resulting report has strong community ownership and an implementation plan led by empowered community leaders. In this sense, the report is a tool to not only identify action items for change, but also to inspire the community to make the change.

Activities related to community foods organizing that will happen during the CFA include FEAST events (see page 12); community meetings; building and sharing contact lists; organizing community food events such as film screenings, informational fairs, and more; and engaging seemingly unlikely food system players (such as economic development groups, public health departments, and the chamber of commerce to name a few) to think about how their work is related to building a resilient community food system.

Throughout the CFA process, it is important to remember that the process itself is often times more important than the actual report. Engaging community members throughout the process, focusing on community voices and ideas, and developing meaningful action plans, based on community input, will ensure that the CFA is just the start of food systems efforts in your community. The organizing work that comes out of completing the CFA will bring together all the necessary stakeholders to create long-lasting and systemic food systems change.

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Asset vs. Need-Based Assessment

Traditional assessment work focuses on needs or deficiencies within a community, instead of identifying and acting upon the assets or existing community resources. The former focuses on and reinforces the negative components within a community and emphasizes the importance of outside help, while the latter strengthens and empowers a community to utilize existing capacities to create more meaningful community development.

John Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, in the book titled *Building Communities From the Inside Out*, discuss three interrelated characteristics of the asset based approach to community development:

1. As the name implies, asset-based community development “starts with what is present in the community, the capacities of its residents and workers, the associational and institutional base of the area—not with what is absent, or with what is problematic, or with what the community needs.

2. The asset-based approach is “internally focused.” That is to say, that identifying strengths, creating meaningful action plans, and following through with implementation is focused on components within the community. This internal focus is not meant to minimize the importance of outside forces such as funding, resources, or others. Rather, “this strong internal focus is intended simply to stress the primacy of local definition, investment, creativity, hope and control.”

3. Relationships are absolutely critical to the success of the asset-based process.

The asset based approach seeks to build ownership throughout the process from those within the community, which will result in an empowered community, ready and willing to make long-term positive change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs-based assessment</th>
<th>Asset-based assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Based on a community need, a particular deficiency or problem that concerns the community</td>
<td>Based on community assets that can be mobilized for community improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks at what is wrong with the community and how to fix it</td>
<td>Focuses on positive aspects of community; every community member can potentially be a community asset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examines needs, what is/what should be gaps, deficits and needed improvements</td>
<td>Leads community to look within for solutions and resources to solve problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads community to seek outside assistance rather than in-house skills &amp; change agents</td>
<td>Fosters a sense of independence, pride &amp; possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourages community members</td>
<td>Community discovers &amp; appreciates own resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on communities weakness and inabilities, perceiving that only outsiders can fix them</td>
<td>Empowers residents to realize and use their abilities to build/transform community &amp; self reliance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

University of Kansas - Community Tool Box [http://ctb.ku.edu/]
Creative Tension Model

In *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Peter Senge explains that “the juxtaposition of vision (what we want) and a clear picture of current reality (where we are relative to what we want) generates what we call ‘creative tension’: a force to bring them together, caused by the natural tendency of tension to seek resolution.” Essentially there are two paths for resolving this tension: reacting, which is based on current realities and needs, or visioning, which is based on assets and innovation.

This is an important concept to consider when conducting your CFA. If the focus of your CFA is on current realities and needs, the opportunities will reflect short-term, problem solving-based solutions. The alternative is to intentionally focus on the strengths of the community and to engage in visioning for the future. The latter will result in more long-term and innovative solutions.

Looking at the issue of school children who are hungry over the weekend provides a good example of the different results from each approach. If we focus on the emotional response to hungry school children, the desire would be to feed them now. The solution might be to start a Backpack Program (which sends kids home with food for the weekend). However, if we were to engage the broader community, and focus on long-term, sustainable solutions—children who don’t need supplemental food on the weekend—the result might be creating a community garden.

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Collective Impact

Collective impact refers to “the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem”4. As opposed to simple collaboration, collective impact focuses on a systemic approach to change work, with shared strategic focus and objectives. In addressing the multifaceted and systemic change required to strengthen community food systems, collective impact seems to have the greatest potential to ensure long lasting change that spans and incorporates many different, but connected sectors.

Successful collective impact stems from organizations using a “shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication, and staffed by an independent backbone organization.” A CFA can play an important role in providing the first step in achieving collective impact. Through the various phases of the CFA, you will engage with many different groups working on food, agriculture, health, equity, hunger, economic development and other related efforts. The networking and collaboration that stems from these conversations will provide the building block for achieving collective impact. It’s important to cast a wide net when considering which groups or individuals to engage with in the CFA process. It’s easy to make community food systems connections across many different sectors, industries, focuses, and values and all should be considered key contributors in this effort.

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Suggested Readings

- Oregon Food Bank and RARE sponsored **Community Food Assessments**
  Visit Oregon Food Bank's website, search for Our Work > Community Food Security > Community Food Assessments.

- **USDA Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit**

- **Community Food Security Coalition What’s Cooking in Your Food System**

- **A Primer on Community Food Systems: Linking Food, Nutrition and Agriculture**
  Cornell University. Division of Nutritional Sciences. Discovering the Food System.

- **A Guidebook for Conducting Rural Research**

- **Building Communities from the Inside Out**
  Kretzmann, and McKnight. Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Towards Finding and Mobilizing A Community’s Assets. The Asset Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Research Policy, Northwestern University.

- **Collective Impact**

- **Enhancing Program Performance with Logic Models**
An intentional planning process is critical to the success of the CFA. Key considerations include identifying the “community”, determining community readiness, and defining the audience. Answers to these questions will shape the length, content, and presentation of the CFA.

A well thought out timeline will ensure that all the pieces of the project are completed. This is especially important in the latter stages of writing, review, editing and presentation. This step often takes longer than expected, and it would be a shame to have to rush through this due to lack of adequate planning.

Depending on staff availability or volunteer interest, you may get to choose your coordinator. Be sure to consider which type of organizer will best fit your community.

**Identifying your “Community”**

A “community” can be a neighborhood in the city, a rural town or village, a county, a state, or even multiple states. There should be an intentional process when defining your “community” in order for the CFA to have the greatest impact and to ensure meaningful and effective results.

What makes a community? In an urban city, a community could be defined by a neighborhood, or it could be defined by a section of the city. In a rural area, the community might be a town, multi-town area, or even a county. In some cases, a community could be defined by a multi-county area, or a state or region. However, when considering to focus on the grassroots approach to a CFA, the larger the geographical and population reach, the harder it is to cultivate community ownership and ensure all sectors of the community are represented.

Physical proximity is an important factor when considering the “community”, however, you should also consider the agricultural landscape of an area. In one area of Oregon, several CFAs were conducted across several counties, which identified themselves as a “food shed” or agricultural region. The defining features of one area were several rivers that provided fertile soil, a flat valley bottom where grains could be grown, and coastal communities that offered access to fisheries. This area could theoretically produce a great deal of its own food, hence it’s considered a “food shed”. The food shed approach to defining a community places a greater focus on the local supply of food and it was appropriate for this fertile agricultural region. However, for some parts of the country, the food shed approach may not be the most appropriate. Either way, make sure to have an intentional discussion within your area to determine how you will define the “community” and who will be participating.

In Oregon, OFB and it’s partners defined the geographic region for CFAs in partnership with the local organizations that sponsored the efforts. In most cases the region assessed matched the service area of the sponsor. Early in our work, some of the CFAs covered up to 5 counties and two crossed state lines. This is easier in less populated counties with similar characteristics, agriculture, demographics and shared service providers. This broad stroke approach is not effective in counties that are either more densely populated or geographically isolated or in cases where neighboring counties have vastly different characteristics, agriculture & demographics. Lincoln and Linn counties are good examples of very different areas that were assessed separately even though being part of CFS group’s catchment area. Grant & Wallowa are examples of isolated counties that benefitted from their own CFA process. The quality and quantity of the community organizing work that can be accomplished is much higher in a more geographically focused process. That work will increase the likelihood of continued success of community food system work in the future.
Community Readiness

Now that you’ve defined your community, is it ready for a CFA? While the CFA can be a great starting point for discussing opportunities for strengthening your community food system, implementation and follow-up might lack if your community is not truly ready for this process.

In essence, every community or region is ready for a community food assessment. Food system’s information can be gathered anywhere. The real question is how much community organizing can be accomplished and how much CFS activity will be set into motion for the future. Any collective impact work requires a backbone organization, community partners and individuals willing to engage in systemic change work through a common agenda. You may have this in place at the beginning of your CFA or you may build this network during your process. We have generally started with the RARE sponsor in the backbone position, some community partners in place and added others along the way. The CFA helps build a shared vision and promotes the common agenda.

Defining Audience

Who is your audience? Is it the general public? Is it local food system enthusiasts? Farmers, ranchers or fishers? Is it a community food systems group desiring a guiding document to inform their work? Is it local government seeking policy suggestions? The answer to this question will have major implications for the shaping and framing of the CFA.

John Dean, Clatsop County Community Food Assessment coordinator, provides some advice on deciding on an audience:

*If you try to make the document too broad, you can get lost—it will start spinning its wheels. Too specific, and it will be put on the shelf and not talked about. However, if you target it for a group that will be transparent, that’s working with the public, and you have a document focused on that group, then I think that automatically that document will be a public resource.*

The purpose of a grassroots CFA should be to provide a living document that is informed by, and useful to, the community which it describes. Ideally, the CFA will be a document that is approachable and accessible to all community members, yet as Dean warns, trying to make a report that is so broad and all encompassing can be an overwhelming and often unsuccessful task. Too much jargon and the CFA will only be accessible and read by a few. Excessive quantitative data collection might interest readers from academia, but will leave out the stories that provide the personal touch that will make the CFA more engaging.

Striking a balance between overly simplified and narrowly specific is but one of the many challenges that you will encounter throughout the CFA process. Though starting out with an intentional process of defining your audience will help to inform your research and writing later on in the process.
Timeline

The timeline for your CFA will most likely be determined by staff and/or volunteer capacity. Careful consideration of this capacity will ensure that the project reaches completion and that the resulting CFA is free of excessive gaps in information or under-developed ideas.

While a full-time staff member dedicated to the project is ideal, it can also be completed with a strong volunteer coordinator, and many dedicated volunteers. In the case of the former, the timeline can be anywhere from several months to a year. As an all volunteer project, the timeline might have to be expanded beyond a year, but be sure not to allow the process to “drag-on” and ultimately never achieve completion.

In order to gather meaningful community data, expect to spend a lot of time interviewing and attending community meetings throughout the data gathering step. While this approach is time-intensive, it’s imperative to spend as much time as possible completing this step. Everyone is potentially a community informant, and the stories and perspectives gained through this process can provide the most meaningful insight into community desires for their food system.

OBF’s process utilizes AmeriCorps members placed full time for 11 months to coordinate the CFA project, along with other community foods organizing. Below is an example timeline that was informed by suggestions from former OBF/RARE AmeriCorps CFA coordinators based on their timelines.

### OFB/RARE Example CFA Timeline

**Planning and Preparation**

This step involves determining community readiness, identifying key players/advisors, and defining project scope and audience. This step will take more or less time depending on community readiness.

**Data Collection and Organizing**

Regardless of scope and/or staff or volunteer capacity, this step will take up the most time in the CFA process. During this step, the CFA coordinator is also networking key players and organizing the community food system.

**Preliminary Research**

Before you begin the bulk of data collection, it’s important to acquaint yourself with the community, through consulting secondary data sets such as socioeconomic, demographic, and agricultural data.

**Writing and Editing**

Again, depending on the scope, this can be unexpectedly time-consuming. Former OBF/RARE CFA authors suggest setting aside several months for this part (while simultaneously continuing to organize and collect data).

**Outreach and Presentation**

An important part of the completion of the CFA is to have a plan for community outreach and presenting the findings to key groups, such as county commissioners, city council, non-profits, or others.

**Next Steps/Implementation**

The CFA doesn’t stop after its written and presented—implementation of the opportunities, and maintaining momentum, are critical to the success of the project.
Selecting a Coordinator

A strong coordinator, or project manager, is critical for ensuring the success of the CFA project. The coordinator’s role is to recruit and consult with community advisors; facilitate community engagement and outreach; maintain project momentum; ensure that a wide-variety of perspectives and ideas are represented; and follow through with project completion.

A grassroots CFA process requires a coordinator that is outgoing and energetic and unafraid of starting new conversations with complete strangers. They should be sociable, likeable, and a great listener. Be wary of selecting a coordinator who is overly opinionated or deeply committed to their own perspective of what the community food system should look like. The CFA coordinator should be a facilitator of this process, much more than an informer.

A coordinator who has a basic understanding of community food systems and community food security would be helpful, though again, it’s important that they not have preconceived notions of what is best for the community in regards to these topics. It is possible for someone less familiar with community food systems work to still shine as coordinator if they come with strong community organizing skills, such as meeting facilitation, active listening, and networking.

As with any project management position, the coordinator must be detail oriented and able to command a complex project with many different, and seemingly unrelated, parts. At the same time, they must be able to see the big picture, especially concerning relationship building, networking, and visioning, and recognize the holistic approach of community foods organizing. Skills such as being independently driven, committed to the project, and compassionate are indicators of a successful CFA coordinator.

Inside vs. Outside Organizing

As the names imply, inside organizing refers to the use of an existing community member to lead the organizing effort, while outside organizing refers to the use of an organizer from outside of the community.

Both types of organizers have their benefits and challenges, and it’s important to understand the differences between the two. Instead of considering which is better, use the following lists to maximize the effectiveness of whichever coordinator is leading your CFA process:

**INSIDE ORGANIZING**

**Benefits**
- Familiarity with community, and local issues
- Established network of local contacts
- Easier to establish legitimacy and trust
- Ability to recruit and mentor new community leaders
- Role flexibility—able to be a leader and organizer

**Challenges**
- Less objective—might approach the report with bias
- More willing to assume than ask questions
- Personal history might alienate other participants
- Can over identify with a personal issue or perspective

**OUTSIDE ORGANIZING**

**Benefits**
- Unbiased and more likely to be objective
- Clear role and less tempted to stray from organizer’s responsibilities
- Can ask difficult questions, less likely to assume
- Less likely to advocate for personal projects
- Can share outside examples/successes and bring new energy

**Challenges**
- Learning about community and building new relationships can take a long time
- Not a community role model—will always be an “outsider”
- Does not have direct experience with everyday life in the community
- Must overcome distance and detachment

Adapted from work by Lee Staples in Roots to Power: A Manual for Grassroots Organizing (Second Edition)
Establishing Your Team and Roles

Do not feel like you must do everything yourself. While a strong coordinator, or organizer, is important, involving other people in the project will help build the sense of ownership that will be crucial for follow-through after the CFA is completed. Framing the CFA as a team project will also help to orient your process towards community organizing as opposed to simply report writing.

For an outside organizer, this process may take time—if you’re new to a community, it is unlikely that you will know who all the key community leaders are before you start the CFA—but constantly think about different ways to engage people in the process. If you are a local, you might already have an idea for people you are interested in being part of the CFA team. Either way, consider how you will establish and organize the CFA team, and realize that the structure of the team will depend on numerous different factors, such as if there is staff dedicated to the CFA, if the key players are already organized, or what the intended scope or length of the CFA.

While not all of the grassroots CFAs completed through the OFB/RARE program had a formal advisory committee, most had some sort of group—be it informal or formal—advising the coordinator throughout the CFA process. These advisors help to guide the CFA, provide thoughtful recommendations on issues to research, and can be key players in identifying opportunities and next steps. More detail about likely candidates for this committee are offered in the next session, but it’s important to keep in mind this role, and think about which community members would be good advisors for the CFA.

The grassroots approach to CFA requires a lot of qualitative, and mostly face-to-face, data gathering which can be incredibly time consuming. If you have a dedicated coordinator, this person will take on the bulk of this work, however either way, it would be good to consider other volunteers who might be able to help gather qualitative data. A person who is outgoing and loves talking with people is a likely candidate to help with conversations and interviews. In the case of using surveys and focus groups, consider ways of engaging folks in survey implementation or organizing, coordinating, or recruiting participants in the focus groups.

A large chunk of time will be spent writing the report—think about potential volunteers for this time-consuming part of the process. Breaking down the load is a good way of making small, yet meaningful tasks, such as having someone be the lead on a specific topic, like farmers’ markets, as opposed to all of the issues related to agriculture. Experts on certain topics—like extension agents for agriculture, food pantry directors for hunger and food insecurity, or the librarian or historian for community history—are likely candidates, but don’t expect that they have time or are interested in writing sections of the report. Look for volunteers who might not necessarily be the expert on a specific topic, but are interested in writing and might want to contribute in this way. Offering up this job is a great way to cultivate new community leaders, and provide meaningful work for volunteers who may not think of themselves as able to provide much to the process.

Throughout the process, and especially towards the end, consider the plan for implementation. If an outside coordinator is leading the CFA, make sure to recruit community leaders who will help maintain the momentum and can ensure that opportunities are acted upon once the coordinator leaves. Likely candidates for this role might come from the advisory committee, or others who’ve been involved in the assessment process.
What is FEAST?
FEAST is an opportunity for participants to engage in an informed and facilitated discussion about Food, Education, and Agriculture in their community and begin to work towards Solutions Together that will help build a healthier, more equitable and resilient local food system. This is an anchor event in a larger community organizing process that engages communities in making positive change in their local food system.

What happens during a FEAST?
- The Local Picture: community members tell the story of your local food system.
- An introduction to Community Food Systems Organizing and language
- Visioning and brainstorming to set your food system priorities together
- A meal...it wouldn’t be a FEAST without a meal that celebrates local food!
- Creating a food system action plan to address the priorities identified
- Small group work: organized by interest area, participants are provided with resources and tools to inform their action plans

How can FEAST be used in a CFA?
Nearly all of the OFB sponsored CFAs have included a FEAST as part of their process. FEAST participants will discuss some of the challenges and opportunities within their community food system, and create action plans for ensuring that the necessary work is completed. These discussions will directly inform a CFA and can provide the framework for themes and topics to be further researched in the CFA.

In Clatsop County OR, a FEAST began the CFA process. John Dean, the Clatsop County CFA coordinator explains that “starting the conversation through FEAST led to momentum—something I don’t think is talked about enough—and leaders helped push through the assessment.” In other cases, FEAST played an important role later on in the CFA process, especially where stakeholders were initially less organized.

Regardless of when the event takes place, FEAST can play a critical role in the CFA process both by informing the topics reported on in the CFA, and by networking and organizing key players within the food system who will ensure that opportunities identified in the CFA are acted upon.
The CFA process can seem overwhelmingly complex at first, but by breaking it down into manageable pieces, you’ll have a better sense for the process. Start first with the easy pieces, such as getting acquainted with community history and key events and reviewing key secondary data (poverty, hunger, agriculture).

A grassroots CFA is all about the conversations. Be sure to engage as many different stakeholders, and seek out a wide variety of perspectives. Think about not only what are the issues, but why are these the issues.

Remember this is merely a guide—be sure to adapt to your location to determine the best course of action for your CFA.

**Preliminary Research**

While it may sound obvious, the first thing to research is whether or not there has already been a CFA, or other community food system report, completed in your community. If so, how long ago was it completed? It very well might be out of date and in need of an update. What was the scope of the previous community food systems efforts? Were they data heavy and lacking compelling personal stories? Can a new CFA provide a different perspective or focus? Be careful not to reduplicate efforts or “over-assess”. If a reasonable up to date CFA is available, consider ways of engaging with implementing opportunities or recommendations from existing CFAs or other food systems related research.

The following is a list of preliminary research topics that can help either an outside or inside organizer orient themselves to the community prior to heading out in the field. Be careful not to spend too much time on this part or get bogged down in the data—the conversations and qualitative data that you will gather later on will make up the bulk of your CFA.

**Community History**

What are some key historical events of the area? Mill closure, natural disaster, key industry? What are some major community events? What about current happenings or recent news?

Understanding the history and current state of the community will help orient an outsider to a new community, and will help build rapport and legitimacy when engaging with community members.

**Poverty and Demographics**

From US Census data you can find poverty rates, unemployment statistics, and other demographic data. Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap study contains information about food insecurity and food costs. USDA’s Food Environment Atlas has other worthwhile food security data.

Research local anti-hunger agencies to find out how many food boxes are distributed and for the rates of Food and Nutrition Services programs (TANF, SNAP, WIC). Check the State Department of Education for info on which schools receive the most Free or Reduced Price Lunches.

**Tips**

- First thing I did was to read a lot of CFAs!
- Spend time learning about and understanding the basic concepts of community food systems.
- Constantly refer back to secondary data sources throughout the CFA—don’t only look at them at the beginning or end.
- Research other areas like health, housing or employment—these are all related to the food system.
- Local knowledge is as, if not more, important than external data sources.
LOCAL AGRICULTURE

What is the agricultural history of the area? Was food production more localized—if so, what was grown? What about currently? The local extension office or USDA Census of Agriculture data are good places to start. You can also visit your local Farm Services Agency office.

What is the soil and climate like? What are the major pests or diseases that are common in your area? Understanding just a few of the issues facing farmers on a daily basis will help later on during interviews.

Make sure to understand the evolution of agricultural production in your area, and why changes happened—was the change based on a new industry, changes in water rights, loss of an industry from specialization? A grasp of the hows and whys of the loss of local food production is important to understand and consider when shaping your CFA.

EXISTING COMMUNITY FOOD EFFORTS

What community food efforts are already underway in your area? Are there Farm to School programs? Farmers’ Markets—if so where are they and when? Food literacy activities such as film screenings, panel discussions or informational fairs focused on food, agriculture, hunger, or food systems? Simple internet searches will help to identify some of these programs, though they might not all have the capacity or marketing sense to have an active website.

Also make sure to find out if there are food system organizations or food policy councils in your who might be interested in the CFA. What about other groups or organizations that might work on food system related issues such as the public health department, hospitals, food pantries, free-meal sites, anti-homelessness agency, academia, extension agencies, and economic development groups? Often times, local food co-ops or other businesses will offer food literacy events, or other community food related efforts.

Useful Resources for Secondary Data

- **USDA Census of Agriculture**
  The Census of Agriculture is the leading source of facts and figures about American agriculture. Conducted every five years, the Census provides a detailed picture of U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them. The next update is expected in early 2014

- **USDA Economic Research Service (ERS)**
  The Economic Research Service provides economic research and analysis of issues relating to food, agriculture, and rural development. The Food Environment Atlas assembles information based on food choices, health and well-being, and community characteristics.

- **US Census Bureau**
  Find out demographic information, poverty rates, unemployment rates, and other useful socio-economic data. http://www.census.gov

- **CDC County Level Estimates of Diabetes, Obesity and Inactivity**
  The application on this site gives you access to rates of diagnosed diabetes, obesity and physical inactivity by state or county: http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/DDT_STRS2/CountyPrevalenceData.aspx?mode=DBT

- **Map the Meal Gap**
  Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap has information about food security, income levels, and cost of meal on the state and county level: http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/map-the-meal-gap.aspx#

- **And lots more**
  Depending on your county, state, or region, there are likely many other useful secondary data sources. Your local state university or extension program is a good place to start your search.
Getting Out in the Field

Starting the data gathering part of the CFA process will definitely seem overwhelming at first. Don’t let yourself get bogged down in the complexities of a community food system or the scope of the project, but instead, just dive into and immerse yourself in the community. Go to the local family owned grocery store and buy food there. Chat with the owners and don’t be afraid to say that you’re new to town. Ask if they carry any local produce—if so, these store owners will be valuable in connecting you with local growers later on.

Pick up the local newspaper and head over to a family owned coffee shop. Don’t be afraid to start up conversations with folks here either. Tell people that you’re working on a project related to food—you never know who might have a lead or is interested in the project. Head down to the visitors association, chamber of commerce, or library and pick up a schedule of upcoming community events. Find out what is going on in town and what are the major happenings. Subscribe to the local newspaper and listen to the local radio station. This will be your best source for community news and happenings.

To learn about poverty and hunger, visit the local food pantries and ask to volunteer. Find out who the pantry directors are and introduce yourself. If appropriate (you’re not taking a spot from someone who really needs it) grab a meal at a free-meal site and make small talk with the other attendees.

Attend community events, be it the county fair, a health informational fair, or a city council meeting. You never know who you might run in to. Whether you’re new to town, or a local, make sure to focus on listening, and be mindful not to add too many of your own thoughts or opinions.

Make sure to stop by any farmers’ markets that are in your community. Make note of the vendors and what products they are offering. Strike up conversations with the farmers, but try to make the discussion about them and their farm, instead of talking about the CFA—you’ll have plenty of time for this later.

Be mindful of names of people who keep coming up—as they may be key community leaders, or people who might be interested in or are already working on food systems efforts. Make a note of these people, as they will be where you start in the next phase of the CFA process. Overall, the goal is to become completely immersed into the community.

What are you looking for?

Ask Why?
Focus on Assets
Think Vision

Who faces difficulty accessing food?
What are the challenges and solutions?
Is there local food production? If so, what works and why? If not, is it feasible to build this capacity? What factors effect increasing food production (climate, facilities, markets)?
Are people growing their own food? If not, why not?
What are the hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the community food system?
Conversations: The Heart of the CFA

After you feel acquainted with the community, and have put in adequate “face time”, you are now ready to begin the most important part of the CFA process: the conversations. Hopefully, from your preliminary research and time in the field you’ve come up with a list of contacts from organizations or community members working on food systems efforts, or who might be interested in this project. Maybe you made a strong connection with someone, or have been told numerous times, that there is someone you have to meet. Start there. You will quickly see how finding new key informants and networking has a snowball effect.

Now that you have your initial list, it’s time to set up introductory meetings with a few of the key community members. When setting up the first meeting, be sure to comment on who referred you to them, or why they were referred (for example, this is someone “you must meet” or “they know the most about [blank]”) as this helps warm the “cold call”.

Be sure to contact several different people to start with, because you’re likely not to hear from some of them right away. Be ready to explain the CFA project and why you want to speak with them. You will likely have to “sell” the CFA, so be ready with your prepared elevator speech. Look at both experts on certain topics, and individuals who are just generally interested in community food systems or the CFA. Even if people do not consider themselves “experts” on a specific topic, their voice and perspective is still important to understand. These folks are also the most likely to become involved with the CFA project, help with implementation after the report is completed, and become key community leaders.

Prior to conducting your first interview, it would be a good idea to have a few questions prepared, just in case. Use these questions as a way to help prepare and guide the discussion, but be careful not to rely entirely on them. Try not to make the dialogue overly formal—think of it as a conversation, rather than an interview. Your goal should be to identify who are the key community members or leaders; learn about what the main issues are regarding the community food system, identify and explore trends or common themes, and constantly consider ways to network key players.

RARE TIPS

- Keep an organized contact list! Make notes on who you’ve met, what their interests are, and if applicable, who referred them.
- Take notes after every conversation, meeting, or phone call. These notes are invaluable to the writing process later on.
- Become comfortable introducing yourself and the CFA. Practice your 30-second elevator speech. Make sure it is easily understandable and jargon free.
- Identify community gatekeepers—people who can utilize their network of contacts and relationships to inform the CFA.
- Don’t rely only on email—ask for peoples preferred method of communication.
- Be compassionately persistent—most people are overworked and busy. Be mindful of this fact, but don’t give up on someone if they seem interested yet just can’t find the time at the moment. Also know when to quit.
- Listen, listen, listen. You’re facilitating this process, not leading.
- Make good friends with the local reporter—they can be great advocates for your work and can advertise about events or meetings in the future.
Strategies for Engagement

Throughout the course of the CFA, the different groups of folks you will be conversing with will be as diverse as the many sectors that make up a food system. While you want to maintain some consistency of questions between the different groups, it is important to understand these differences and to target groups in different ways.

The following are some useful tips for engaging with different groups:

**RURAL RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES**

Unless the CFA is focused on a very local area, such as a neighborhood within a city, it is likely that your community will encompass rural communities. These communities are often left out of discussions or not given equal representation, either because of small populations or geographic isolation. In order to produce a balanced CFA, and to be successful at organizing the entire community food system, it is critical that these communities are given due consideration in the process.

While visiting the more isolated communities will take extra time and effort, it is critical that the CFA coordinator goes to them. Don’t expect rural residents to make a trip outside their community. Consider that it’s very difficult to understand and appreciate the perspective of rural residents without actually seeing what life is like in their community. Use some of the strategies mentioned in “Getting Out in the Field” for each rural community visited.

It’s also important to understand that rural communities are often the subject of projects and efforts initiated from individuals or groups outside the community that rarely result in improvements in rural life. Because these efforts are often from the outside in, few are ever followed through on. Many rural residents have become skeptical, and even steadfastly opposed to new outside initiatives, regardless of the legitimacy or integrity of the project.
The town librarian, if the town has a library, is often a great resource for making connections in rural communities. Other likely connectors can come from the local food pantry or free meal site. If the town has a grocery store, the store owner is another key player in the rural community.

Although not everyone enjoys digital communications and social media, these tools can be important for connecting with and organizing rural communities. If, for instance, a rural community member can’t attend a meeting or conversation, offering alternative engagement options, such as through a listserv or Facebook group, can ensure that rural residents aren’t left out of the discussion.

**Farmers, Ranchers, and Fishers**

This is a very busy demographic, generally not interested in meetings, interviews or surveys, but who’s participation is absolutely critical. Framing the CFA in a way that shows how this assessment and organizing will benefit this group, is one strategy for increasing participation rates.

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**RARE Tips**

- If possible, try not to ask for an interview when you first meet someone.
- **Never** call a rancher a farmer!
- Bring your boots.
- Conversations can be of variable length—try to keep your schedule flexible and don’t plan too much for one day.
- Make sure to get varied perspectives—talk to organic and conventional growers and all in between.
- Hunger, poverty or food insecurity is something people experience, not who they are.
- Make note of themes or issues that come up multiple times—these are likely topics for further research, and to be included in the CFA.

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The key to connecting with farmers, ranchers, and fishers is to build trust and demonstrate how the project will benefit their situation. This demographic is inundated with surveys and questionnaires, often done on the internet, via email, or by phone, by groups that have little or no prior relationships with growers and of which growers see few results. Do everything you can to visit the grower, rancher or fisher, on their land to get a better sense of their world.

Make sure to avoid busier times of the year, such as harvest season, fishing season, or slaughtering (for example, don’t contact a poultry processor right before Thanksgiving). Come prepared so that you can get the necessary information in as little time as possible.

One strategy to ease the burden of conducting an in-person interview with a grower is to offer to help out on the farm in exchange for the interview. Suggest an easy but on-going task, such as weeding, which won’t require training, and is easy enough that you can chat with the grower at the same time. Another strategy is to bring lunch or snacks with you when you visit.

Make sure to research as much as you can about the crop or industry that the person you are interviewing is involved in—for example, have a basic understanding of the crops grown and possibly some challenges (such as lack of water, soil conditions, pests, etc.); research the location of the nearest livestock processing plants; or find out what types of fish and the method of fishing that is used before visiting a fisher.

Above all, be ready to talk about the weather.
**Emergency Food Recipients**

As with growers, ranchers and fishers, this is another over-surveyed group. Unless certain food security and hunger data is unavailable, avoid conducting a survey to emergency food recipients. If certain information is desired but not readily available, check in with food pantry or free meal site staff before conducting a survey on your own.

A better way to gain an understanding and appreciation for emergency food recipients’ world is through casual conversations at a food box or free meal site. Try striking up conversations as folks wait for their food boxes. Volunteering at the pantry also offers an opportunity to engage with folks. If you are certain that there are enough meals, eating at a meal site and chatting with folks over a meal is an excellent way to build trust and relationships. You will need to put in your time—don’t expect people to open up to a stranger right when they meet them. Come back to the same free meal site and sit with similar folks or sign up for a regular volunteer shift at the local pantry.

When you get to discussing information about the CFA, it is important to be up front and honest with folks about the project and why you are asking certain questions. You want to make these conversations informal, but you also don’t want to be deceptive. If someone is uncomfortable participating, respect their desires. Avoid taking notes or using a tape recorder. Unless you receive explicit permission, be sure to keep all quotes and stories anonymous.

During conversations, be mindful of how you refer to emergency food recipients. Remember that these are equals in your community food system—be careful to avoid referring to folks as “them” or “those who need our help”. Not only is this off-putting, but it is also arrogant and dismissive. Use Lilla Watson’s quote to frame your discussions:

*If you’ve come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.*

- Lilla Watson

**Existing Community Groups**

One of the most efficient ways to reach multiple community members is by attending community meetings already taking place. Whether it is to introduce the CFA, recruit volunteers or participants, or to hold a conversation about food systems, utilizing the existing network of community groups will introduce you to active community members, and minimize the burden for some folks.

While each community contains different groups who might be interested in the food systems and/or the CFA, some likely candidates include the Kiwanis, Rotary, faith based organizations, Slow Food, the local Grange, parent teacher associations, and many more. Check the library or other community hub for information about community meetings, and events.

If you have an agricultural extension agency in your community or area, workshops, discussions, or other events hosted by extension are great ways to connect with the local agricultural community. Other agricultural groups could include the Farm Bureau, USDA Farm Service Agency, or farm support organizations (for example, in Oregon, Women For Agriculture) though these are likely to focus on larger-scale agriculture. For small-scale agriculture, ask to attend the vendors meeting for the local farmers’ market or a farmers’ market board meeting.

When appropriate, ask to be put on the agenda to discuss the CFA project. In other situations, it might be best to just attend a meeting, and announce the CFA project during introductions, or at the end of the meeting.

Use this list as a start, but be sure to keep asking around about potential organizations or community groups who might be interested in the CFA. It’s much easier to talk with a group of folks who are already meeting,
Surveys and Other Research Methods

While the ethos for a grassroots CFA is definitely informal, it may be of value to use surveys to gather more formal, quantitative measures. Surveys are generally a good method for reaching a large number of people to gain insight on community knowledge, desires, or concerns, but they can also take a lot of time and effort. In order for a survey to be statistically significant, you need to reach a large percentage of the population, which can be expensive and time consuming. A lot of people are inundated with surveys on a regular basis, so be ready for apprehensive participants and a lot of rejection.

If there is specific quantitative information that you think will be helpful for the CFA, make sure that it is not already available—see the section titled “Preliminary Research” for ideas of where to look for available quantitative data. If it isn’t, consider recruiting an outside group, such as the local college or university, to see if a student, professor, or department might be interested in designing and administering the survey. While having a university sponsored survey is definitely a long shot, it is still worth a try if you think the information that you need is truly lacking.

If the goal of the survey is to get a general feel for a particular issue, then consider creating a more informal, albeit not statistically significant survey. For other grassroots CFAs, surveys were used to determine a variety of different things, such as the interest in local food among consumers, whether or not a community desired a community garden, and new insight into challenges facing small-scale producers. Examples of surveys used in CFAs from rural Oregon can be found in the Appendix.

Length is another important consideration, and can have implications for the success of the survey. As a general rule of thumb, a survey 1 page or less is most likely to receive answers from the general public. If you are surveying a specific set of respondents, who are likely to see value in the survey and have other motivations for participating, you can offer a survey of greater length. But beware that long surveys, regardless of the audience, will greatly decrease the number of responses. Either way, remember to be intentional in what questions you ask and try to make the survey as short and easy as possible.

There are also different survey methods, such as the dot-survey or “hands-up” which are much easier to administer, and can result in a greater number of responses. A dot-survey works by creating a list of options and having respondents place a dot sticker next to their responses. This can be especially useful at a large public event, such as a farmers’ market. This method of survey is easy to explain and respondents don’t have to expend too much energy to participate. The “hands-up” method is more useful in a meeting situation, where the surveyor asks questions of the group, and respondents simply raise their hands to respond in the affirmative. This method also requires little effort to participate. Obvious limitations for both of these methods is depth to which you can ask questions, along with inability to further analyze with other data sets (such as what is the income level of the person who responded [blank]).

Finally, it’s important to consider that your survey is inclusive. Make sure that your survey is available in multiple languages, or at least some of the common primary languages spoken by area residents. Offer the survey in different formats such as in person, on the internet, or by phone. However, administering in person usually offers the best results. Consider implementing the survey in multiple locations. Lastly, avoid excessive use of jargon.

Consumer Surveys

A consumer survey can be a useful tool for determining general food buying habits, such as where people are purchasing from, how far they have to travel for food, the current or future demand for local food, and barriers to buying more local food. You could also use a consumer survey to determine food security or hunger statistics, but make sure that this data can’t be found elsewhere. Consider removing demographic questions if length is an issue.

Producer Surveys

A producer survey can offer insights into challenges facing producers, but be wary of surveying this oft over surveyed population. Try to identify specific growers to learn about certain issues—for example if you want to learn more about livestock processing concerns, don’t send a survey to a vegetable grower. Also consider how answering the survey will help or support their cause in some way—will it lead to potential funding opportunities, new facilities, or other?
RURAL GROCERY STORE OWNER SURVEYS

The role that rural grocery stores play in rural community food systems goes beyond simply providing food—they also provide economic development opportunities to economically challenged areas, and play a critical role in the social fabric of small, rural towns. Alarming ly, across the nation, rural towns are seeing their local stores close, placing great uncertainty on the future of these communities.

In order to gain a deeper appreciation for challenges facing rural grocery store owners, OFB/RARE CFA coordinators perform a targeted survey of these owners as part of their CFA process. The survey is designed by Kansas State University’s Center for Engagement and Community Development and used in their Rural Grocery Initiative. The lengthy survey asks questions about the services that stores provide, challenges facing owners and possible solutions, a store-owner self-assessment, and general store information, such as average weekly income, number of employees, distance to nearest discount grocery store, and store hours.

The length is considerable—several pages—however, the additional questions allow the surveyor to delve deeper into the issues facing rural grocery stores. Nearly all of the surveys are completed in-person, which not only ensured the completion of the surveys, but also allowed for discussion and further explanation on top of answers to the prepared questions. Surveyors find that it is best to visit and purchase from the store several times before asking for an interview. Most owners were interested in participating once it was made clear what the survey was for, and how the information would be used.

For a complete look at the results to date from the Oregon rural grocery store surveys, see the report Sustaining Rural Communities: A Report on Grocery Stores in Rural Oregon published by Oregon Food Bank. A sample survey is provided in the Appendix.

FOCUS GROUPS

Another qualitative research method that you might employ in the CFA process is a focus group. A focus group involves gathering a group of individuals to engage in a guided discussion about a particular topic. Often times, the group will have something in common—live in the same community, experiencing homelessness or hunger, or are food producers—which allows for a deeper discussion about a particular issue. However, focus groups can also be made up of a more general audience, which will provide a wider view of a topic.

Focus groups can be very effective at delving deep within an issue. A focus group based on people experiencing food insecurity can help to understand specific barriers to accessing food. A group of farmers can explore common challenges or missing resources. A group of youth experiencing homelessness can shed light on their experiences with poverty and the gravity of their situation.

While focus groups might be easier to administer than a survey, there are still many challenges to consider. For one, it may be difficult to convince people that it is worth their time to participate, especially if the person organizing the focus group has little or no relationship with the potential group members. Working with staff or organizations that have existing relationships with potential group members can help, but there is always the possibility that people won’t show up. Make sure to consider “what’s in it for them”. A focus group also requires excellent facilitation to ensure that the discussion stays on task and that all voices are heard from. Finally, transcribing and/or extracting the data and stories can be time consuming.

RARE TIPS

- Never call it a “focus group”. People in rural & low income areas are likely to run the other way unless you have some sort of premium to encourage their participation.
- Go where people are. Arrange to be part of an already existing meeting of groups you are interested in talking with. Make it a conversation.
- Consider using the FEAST Conversation model for your information gathering process.
Promoting Food Literacy

The California Food Literacy Center defines food literacy as “understanding the impact of your food choices on your health, the environment, and our community.” Within this definition, you can include knowing where your food comes from—whether it be knowing the farmer or growing it yourself, or the country—and knowing what is in your food—whether it be ingredients or nutritional components. Simply by explaining the CFA process and goals, you will be encouraging people to consider the impact of their food choices and challenging the notion that it’s not important to consider these impacts.

Throughout the CFA process, you will likely have many opportunities to promote food literacy, in both formal and informal venues. Food literacy efforts as part of grassroots CFAs have included:

- Informational fairs introducing local farmers with consumers
- Film series featuring films about sustainable food production
- Classes on nutrition and health
- Workshops on healthy cooking and shopping on a budget
- Learning how to filet a tuna (see above)
- Creating a Local Food Guide

While the main focus of your CFA will be the report and related processes, consider food literacy efforts as organizing tools within this process. These events offer folks an easy and fun introduction to community food systems work, which could lead to greater involvement in the CFA or community food systems efforts.
It's important to recognize that data gathering can go on for ever, so at some point you have to move on to completing the report.

Make sure to leave a significant chunk of time to work through the writing, editing, and publishing of the CFA—anywhere from 1/4 to 1/3 of the total project time is recommended.

Don't just let your report sit on a shelf. Have a plan for rolling out the CFA, which could include presenting to public officials (county commissioners or city councils), community organizations, or organize a food summit to present the report and solicit feedback and/or recommendations.

Writing the Report

It’s important to understand that you will never completely finish gathering data, engaging in thoughtful conversations with community members, or learning all that you can about your local community food system. Conversations can, and will, continue long after the CFA is completed, but at some point, you will need to be content with the amount of information you have gathered, and begin writing the report.

Roopika Subramanian, coordinator of the Klamath and Lake County Community Food Assessment, recommends starting the writing early on. Once you have a good sense about a specific topic, you should feel empowered to begin writing that section of the CFA. This is especially true in regards to secondary data sources—analysis of this information can begin early on in the process, and you can start writing a few paragraphs related to these topics before you get entrenched in other work. Waiting until the last minute to write all the sections can feel overwhelming, and it’s much harder to remember all the facts, figures, or stories related to each particular section.

RARE/OFB CFA coordinators recommend spending at least 1/4 to 1/3 of the time allotted to the project in the writing and completion phase. In the 11 month AmeriCorps term, this amounted to 3-4 months. This doesn’t mean writing for 8 hours a day for 3-4 months, but rather, focusing most of the time writing, while also allowing for time to continue data gathering, especially to enhance particular sections.

More important than the length is ensuring that the report is engaging. A 20 page report filled with compelling personal stories, lots of engaging photographs, and with the complex topics and issues distilled down to their most important, and digestible elements, might be more useful than 100 page report of complex prose and comprehensive data analysis. The worst case is to expend significant energy and effort into this process, only to have the CFA gather dust on a shelf somewhere. As is the case with most elements of the CFA, it is important to understand what is most useful for the community, and to tailor the report to fit that need.

As the focus of the report is on the local community, it is important that the report reflects the thoughts, concerns, and ideas of the community and not just the thoughts of one author, or the advisory committee. Using quotes, personal stories, and anecdotes is a great strategy to accomplish this goal. But at the same time, make sure that you aren't providing too much focus on outliers, or giving extreme views or opinions equal footing with more commonly held opinions. Above all, the information that is presented in the CFA must be backed up and vetted by community members.
Organizing the Report

A critical component to the CFA process is to remain focused and organized throughout. When assessing a highly complex and inter-connected system, it is easy to get stuck exploring one specific issue while forgetting about all the other components. As you are gathering data, be sure to identify and categorize the major themes and topics that are arising. Looking through other grassroots based CFAs is a great place to start, but don’t feel limited by or confined to the themes and topics of other CFAs—each area has unique characteristics and some topics will be irrelevant to your community (an obvious example being, if your community is far from the coast, a section on fisheries might not be a necessary addition).

It’s important to start organizing your data early on in the process, and to update it throughout. An outline, based on these major themes or topics is a great place to start, though ultimately it will depend on whatever works best for the coordinator or community. Other ideas used by former RARE/OFB CFA coordinators include keeping notes documents on each major theme, which include key contacts, themes, challenges, and opportunities. The following are examples of major themes used by RARE/OFB CFA coordinators:

The Supply Side:

All food systems start with supply — farmers, ranchers and fishers. Although there are also other components also make up the supply side, such as processing, distribution, marketing, and sale. This section can include insights into the opportunity for increased local food production, challenges facing producers in terms of climate, soil, and infrastructure, and also marketing strategies to increase local food consumption.

Barriers to Accessing Food

This section can focus on hunger, food insecurity, and the emergency food system, and more specifically, the barriers to accessing food, especially for groups facing unique challenges such as youth, elderly, communities of color, or migrant farmworkers.

Community Food Efforts

Farmers’ markets, farm to school programs, local food restaurants, and community gardens all can be characterized as community food efforts. Educational programming focused on nutrition, cooking, or preservation can also be included in this section.

Community Health and Education

A section focused on health and education can be used as an alternative to splitting up barriers to accessing food and community food efforts. This section could include hunger, food insecurity, and barriers to accessing food, paired with the educational programming aimed at increasing access to and consumption of healthy foods.

Tips for Creating an Engaging Document

Not only will report length determine the likelihood that a CFA will just sit on a shelf, but also the way that it is written and designed will also play a role in whether or not the report is accessed by, and accessible to, the wider community.

Focusing too heavily on secondary sources and statistics will create a more stuffy and academic report, not likely to be read by too many people especially your target audience: community members. While some background is necessary and helpful, you should not feel responsible for providing a detailed description of community food security, the history of SNAP, or how to manage a grocery store, to name a few examples. While all of these topics are worthwhile in their own right, the CFA is most likely not the best place to provide all of this information (you can always refer people to other resources). More importantly, focus on the uniqueness and individuality of the community. Tell the local story.

Community Food Systems is a relatively new field of study. Most people are not likely to speak the community food systems lingo so be careful with using too much jargon in the CFA. Certain concepts need to be defined—community food system, food security, local food—however try not to use too many concepts or terms that are less likely to be understood by the broader community.
Personal stories, inspiring and/or affecting quotations, and lots of compelling photographs will go a long way in making the CFA more engaging. Be sure to quote accurately and receive permission when using names. Use discretion when considering attributing private or deeply personal stories to particular people. Sometimes names aren’t really that important. A good rule of thumb is to check in with the person before you publish the report.

Profiles
While facts and figures are undoubtedly critical in understanding the scale or severity of an issue, they often leave out the personal connection. When looking through data about how many grocery stores face difficulty in having food delivered, you won’t know the story of the rural grocery store owner who is forced to drive 120 miles to pick up staple food items so that her community has the food it needs. The USDA Census of Agriculture doesn’t say too much about the difficulty for young and beginning farmers in accessing capital and/or finding affordable land. The number of food boxes distributed by a food bank sheds light on the scale of the issue, but it doesn’t say much about the experience of the single working mother who is still forced to rely on emergency food because her salary isn’t enough to meet all her family’s basic needs. A story or profile puts a face on the issue and provides a personal connection.

A profile is a great way to delve deeper into issues that might not show up in the data. This is especially the case for small-scale agriculture. The USDA Census of Agriculture (the main data source for farming and agriculture) is much better at telling the story of large-scale, commodities producers, but sheds little light on the smaller-scale and locally focused farmer. Profiles of small-scale farmers can highlight the extraordinary lengths that some farmers go to provide healthy food to their customers. And by focusing on the people, rather than just a stand-alone issue, esoteric topics such as limited access to bean harvesting equipment becomes much more relatable when you explain the challenges a certain farmer faces in harvesting beans by hand.

Profiles are also a great way to highlight a model program or organization. If there is a farm-to-school program that’s found a great way to increase their local food purchases while staying within budget, a profile can help highlight how they do it, and point other school districts to this program. A pantry or free meal site that works hard to ensure their clients retain their dignity and feel loved and appreciated, can inspire other pantries to follow in their footsteps.

After completing most of your data gathering and conversations, it will become clear what are key issues, model organizations, or unique stories that will be best told through profiles. Consider featuring profiles throughout the report as a means to ensure that adequate focus is given to the people and organizations of the community food system. As mentioned previously, profiles provide the personal connection to the issues and emphasize the fact that people make up the community food system.

RARE TIPS

- When writing a profile, don’t just focus on what people do. Rather, focus on how they got where they are, how they address challenges, and/or what the future holds.
- Always run your profiles by the featured individual or organization to ensure accuracy and receive permission to feature their story.
- Keep your camera with you at all times—you never know when the perfect shot will present itself. You also don’t want to wait until the last minute to get all your photographs.
Community Food Groups

As has been mentioned previously, it is the process and organizing that is the most important outcome of a grassroots based CFA. Through these efforts, a variety of community food groups have been created, even including the creation of a registered non-profit.

If there is not already a group dedicated to food systems efforts in your community, it will become clear that this will be essential in moving forward with momentum created from the CFA. On Oregon’s North Coast, a loose group was formed after a FEAST event kick-started their CFA process. Over the year, this group became an informal advisory committee for the CFA coordinator and helped steer the assessment. As the group’s mission was to create a more resilient community food system, it became clear that the CFA could serve as the guiding document for this group (see their logic model on the next page). Soon after the completion of the CFA, the North Coast Food Web received their 501(c)3 non-profit status. Since then, they have been working on implementing the opportunities and recommendations from the CFA, including starting a mobile gardens program using recycled shopping carts (see above).

In Oregon’s mid-Willamette Valley, Ten Rivers Food Web (TRFW) is a food systems non-profit that spans three counties. This regional focus allows the group to focus on on food systems development for an entire foodshed. In 2010, two CFAs were undertaken in the more rural areas of the foodshed, Linn and Lincoln County. Through the CFA process, it became clear that these areas were lacking cohesion with the main efforts of the organization, which were taking place in the urban center of the region. Through the data gathering and organizing process of the CFA, small groups were organized in several of these rural communities. Eventually, the organization decided to formally incorporate the groups into their organization, and thus 3 new chapters of TRFW were formed. In 2011, thanks to the research and organizing efforts created through the CFA, TRFW was awarded a $300,000 community food systems grant from Meyer Memorial Trust.

In the far NE corner of Oregon, Wallowa County, the Wallowa County Food Systems Council grew from the FEAST and its work has been shaped by the community food assessment. This group engaged in a priority setting process in the fall of 2012 following the completion of their CFA. Through a two-session process they able to prioritize their most important goals into one year and longer timeline that launched a one year plan of action. The group will come back to together in early October of 2013 to acknowledge accomplishments and define the next year’s plan of action.
Photography

Right alongside profiles and personal stories, compelling photography can help create a more engaging report. Photos of the people and places that make up the community help create a sense of place and authenticity within the report. Readers are much more likely to react when seeing places they are familiar with or people they've met. Pictures of the local grocery store, of a school garden project, or of visitors at the farmers' market help to tell the story of the community food system. A story or profile can paint the picture, but the photo can make sure that the painting is correct!

Here are a few basic photography tips that will help you take the most effective photographs:

Subject:
Don’t forget the people!

It's people who make up communities, and it's people who are the heart and soul of the CFA. Without images of the people—especially their faces—who are actively contributing to the strength and resilience of their community food system, the CFA will feel disingenuous and fake. Many amateur photographers are uncomfortable taking pictures of people. Just ask—you’ll be surprised how many are happy to acquiesce, and there won’t be any uncertainty about those who are not.

Composition:
The Rule of Thirds

Resist the urge to always center your subject. Instead, imagine a 3X3 grid across your scene and place the subject on one of the points where two lines intersect—these are called “thirds”. This will create more dynamic portraits and landscapes. Don’t worry if you don’t get this right when you’re shooting—you can always go back and crop the photos.

Lighting:
Placement is key

Placement of your light source can have a dramatic effect on the success of your photo. Here, subjects are illuminated because the light source is behind the photographer.

In this example the bright light behind the subject makes them impossible to see. While the silhouetting created from backlighting a subject can create a nice effect, more often than not you’ll want to avoid this.

Take Lots of Photos!

One of the finest features of digital photography is that you don’t have to pay for film! Use this to your advantage by taking lots of photos. While you should still strive to incorporate all of the above suggestions in all shots, sometimes in the heat of the moment, you might not get to place your subject perfectly or the lighting might be off slightly. Take lots and sort through them after the event, interview, etc.
Identifying Opportunities

Assessment by itself can be a useful way of understanding the current state of your community food system, but it’s arguably more important that you consider the next steps forward. Crafting meaningful, actionable, and realistic opportunities and recommendations, based on feedback gathered through the CFA process will allow the efforts initiated through the CFA process to move forward. As with the rest of the report, it is absolutely critical that the opportunities and recommendations come from the community and are not the prerogative of the author or coordinator. Be careful not to fall into this trap.

Throughout the course of data gathering and conversations with community members, some opportunities and recommendations are likely to surface by themselves. If ranchers constantly bring up the lack of processing facilities available to them, exploring the possibility of adding a new processing facility, or increasing the capacity of existing facilities, is one possible opportunity. Another example would be if numerous community members express interest in having a community garden or if farmers want to organize a farmers’ market.

Though not all opportunities will manifest themselves simply through community conversations. Other opportunities or recommendations will come through an intentional process of considering the community’s assets and identifying gaps, then engaging in strategic planning and visioning with community members and leaders. FEAST (featured on page 12) provides an excellent venue for this type of collective visioning. A FEAST event at the beginning of the CFA process might identify initial opportunities, and the conversations that follow will help to clarify and specify these opportunities. A FEAST held after the CFA process has already begun might help to shape, and further define, already identified opportunities that have come up through conversations and data gathering.

Another source for opportunities could be an advisory committee (see page 11). An advisory committee can help to make recommendations for next steps or opportunities based upon either their experience with the certain topic, or based on analyzing and synthesizing data collected through the CFA. In the case of a more informal advisory committee where the coordinator meets with individual advisors as opposed to a group setting, these individuals can act as the reviewer for relevant sections and provide comments which can turn into opportunities.

In either case, it’s important that these opportunities and recommendations are not only meaningful and grounded in community desires, but also actionable and measureable. In the case of a tangible outcome—such as a community garden—this might seem quite simple and logical. If the desire for the community garden is clear, and people have signed up for or paid for plots, then they opportunity may be cut and dry. However, if the case is that there is simply a general interest in a community garden, there may be the need for action items within the recommendation that deal with finding a location, determining demand, finding a garden champion, or other. The clearer the steps and action items within an opportunity, the easier to ensure that an opportunity is acted upon.

Logic Model

A logic model breaks down a complex program, initiative, objective, problem, or social change into a simplified view of all of the parts. The term logic model stems from the use of organizing the various parts and resources to show logical relationships among the resources invested and provide a “plausible, sensible model of how a program is supposed to work”\(^5\).

While logic models are primarily used for program evaluation and tracking measurables, they can also be useful for planning and program design, along with program management. By creating a clear graphic that spells out the major relationships involved in a project or effort, logic models improve communication amongst partners about a program or effort.

At its most basic, a logic model includes the inputs (what resources are being used for the project), outputs (what activities will be used to achieve the project and who will be doing what), and outcomes or impact (what will happen because of the project). Outputs can be defined further as activities and participation. Outcomes can also be further defined as short term, medium term and long term. But before you jump into determining the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of a problem or project, you must first accurately define the problem or situation requiring action. Thankfully, you should have already completed this work as part of the CFA process. Any advisors or advisory committee will also be crucial in ensuring that the community has accurately identified the underlying problem or situation.

The following images include a template of a logic model, along with an example of a logic model created from the Clatsop County CFA:

**Logic Model**

**APPENDIX A**

North Coast Food Web Logic Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Short-term Outcomes (Year 1)</th>
<th>Intermediate Outcomes (Year 2)</th>
<th>Long-term Outcomes (3–5 years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Create food system incubator</td>
<td>-Increase access to local food producers</td>
<td>-Provide leadership in solving regional food system issues</td>
<td>-Haver: Community Food Assessment results</td>
<td>-OSU-Extension</td>
<td>-Clatsop Community Action Regional Food Bank</td>
<td>-Oregon Food Bank</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mission:** The North Coast Food Web cultivates a thriving regional economy and healthy communities through food and agriculture.
Review and Editing

As with any piece of writing, it is important to leave enough time in your process to thoroughly review and edit the CFA. While textual errors are important to catch, you should also consider ample time for review of the content, and most importantly the opportunities and recommendations.

There are a variety of different means which allow for review of the content and opportunities. In the mid-Willamette Valley, RARE/OFB AmeriCorps presented initial findings from their reports at a food summit open to the public. Comments and suggestions were solicited from audience members, and ample time was left in the writing process to allow for incorporation of these comments into the final CFA. In Southern Oregon, a series of FEASTs and Community Conversations were set up to allow community members to identify the key opportunities themselves, which were then incorporated into the CFA. Other CFAs employed a more informal process involving key advisors or community members who reviewed the initial findings and provided feedback to content and opportunities. You should note that these are just some examples of how to solicit community feedback for content and opportunities. While these have worked for other communities, you should not feel limited to these options, rather, feel empowered to create your own method if necessary.

It is critical to allow ample time to incorporate these comments and suggestions into the CFA. In most cases, this has been about a month or about 10% of the total project time.

Now that the community review is completed and the comments and suggestions have been incorporated, you’ll want to have a variety of different people look over the report, not only for identifying grammatical or spelling errors, but also to get a sense for readability and comprehension. A report laden with jargon or with concepts or topics that aren’t adequately explained will limit the CFA’s reach. Make sure to explain key concepts or terms—such as food system, food insecurity, or community foods organizing—that the lay person might not understand. But at the same time, do not feel the need to explain each and every topic in very specific detail. For example, in explaining SNAP, describing that it stands for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and is the program formerly known as food stamps is adequate. You don’t need to go into the history of food stamps, why the name changed, where the funding comes from, etc. This would be a good time to recruit friends, family or others who might not be as familiar with community food systems work to look over the report and provide feedback on readability and ease of comprehension.

Finally, you’ll want to have a good text editor go through the report to find those grammatical or spelling errors. Simple spelling or grammatical errors are an easy way for someone to label the CFA as unprofessional regardless of how much great work was done in the research or organizing.

Presentation and Next Steps

Now that the report is completed, you’ll want to have a plan for getting the word out. This should include distributing a press release to all the relevant media sources. In the press release, include a brief description of the project and purpose and where people can access the CFA, whether this be strictly online or also in hard-copy.

Another avenue for presentations could include key community groups you might have met with in the research phase. Most should be willing to make space on their agendas for a brief presentation about the CFA. If a food summit wasn’t used for the review process, this would be another means for which to advertise the CFA and findings. It is also important to present the CFA to key policy makers such as city councils, county commissioners, and/or state and national representative. Consider which policy makers will be necessary to realize some of the opportunities contained in the CFA. That being said, any and all policy makers should be made aware of the CFA.

Don’t feel limited to these methods—utilize many different means to get the word out. A CFA represents a great deal of work and the last thing you want is a document that just sits on the shelf. Though presentation and outreach is but one way to keep the CFA as a living document. The next insert, titled Sustaining Momentum, provides even more ideas and examples for how to take the CFA to the next steps.
A CFA represents an incredible first step towards supporting a community to develop a resilient community food system. This process—and resulting document—creates a great deal of momentum in these communities towards realizing the desired changes within their food system. Capitalizing on this momentum is absolutely critical. Focusing on the grassroots and organizing efforts (highlighted throughout this guide in the red sections) will go a long way toward ensuring continued momentum.

While the report work will be done, there will still be a need for a food systems coordinator or organizer. In the best case scenario, there will be a staff member of either an existing, or newly created, food systems non-profit, or at another organization, such as Agricultural Extension office, Economic Development Corporation, local government, or faith based organization, that can continue on with the work as paid staff. In some cases, local organizations find funding to keep an AmeriCorps member for a second year. In other, existing organizations add on staff capacity, at either partial or full FTE (full-time employee) to focus on community foods organizing. Though this is not to say that a group of dedicated volunteers can’t also be effective. In several instances in Oregon, small volunteer groups have formed after the completion of the CFA, usually made up of folks who either helped with the report itself, or with organizing activities and events. These individuals or groups themselves take on the coordination role. Either way, the important part is ensuring that someone is available and willing to lead the coordinating efforts.

The key goal of the coordinator is to ensure that opportunities, logic models, or action plans created in the CFA and/or FEAST (or similar organizing event) are acted upon. While the assessment process itself can be more than worthwhile in terms of organizing and networking, at some point your community needs to move from assessment to action. The logic model is useful in providing a visual representation of the short, medium, and long term actions needed to complete the project. Smaller projects may not require a full logic model, however finding a way to break down projects into meaningful parts will definitely aid the action.

Promoting food literacy takes much more than hosting a one-off event or providing one resource. Local Food Guides are time-consuming endeavors that need to be updated yearly. It often takes a year or 2 of consistent programming to improve upon attendance and participation for events such as a food film series, cooking class series, small farm/gardening workshops, nutrition trainings. In consecutive years, you’re likely to see increased participation as more people become familiar with the programming and are able to plan and schedule accordingly. It is also important to solicit feedback on events, and continually improve and adapt to community needs and desires.

No community should feel that they are on their own in terms of implementing changes in their community food system. Organizations around the country have and are continuing to develop programs and policies around strengthening community food systems. Reaching out to these organizations to discuss best practices, strategies for developing similar programs, pitfalls to avoid, funding opportunities, or simply to network helps to avoid “recreating the wheel”. Through this type of research and technical assistance sharing, community food systems organizations can collectively strengthen the movement and build from one another.

While many grassroots efforts like to avoid financial issues and prefer to operate with minimal budgets, it is important to consider a plan for fundraising, either to support a staff coordinator position, or to cover the costs of organizing and/or food literacy events. This doesn’t have to be a lot though it can also be significant. A community group in Oregon’s Willamette Valley solicited donations for their Garden Resource Guide from local businesses to help cover printing costs. Donations ranged from $20 to $100. Though it can also be significant. When a local foundation decided to fund community food systems work in Oregon, several non-profits who had completed CFAs, were set up to be awarded implementation funding. Funding is a critical piece to consider when continuing the effort started through the CFA.

Completion of a CFA does not mean the work is done. Having a plan for sustaining the momentum created from this process is key to ensuring that the CFA is not done in vain.
The hunger relief system in this country was created based on two co-existing situations; problems that needed to be solved:

**People were hungry**

**Food was going to waste**

Because of a variety of beliefs and motivations, people were willing to volunteer and donate to feed those in need. Food banking began with donated food being distributed from church closets, extra rooms in community service agencies and through commodity distributions. There was no plan or thought about what the future of these efforts would be—these solutions were merely reactions to the problems at hand. Many of the original volunteers thought that they would close the doors to food banks and pantries in their lifetime, when the “crisis” had ended.

**Creative Tension: a situation where disagreement or discord ultimately gives rise to better ideas or outcomes** - Collins English Dictionary

The “Creative Tension” model gives us the opportunity to rethink hunger relief through a community food systems frame; focusing on what we want to create (healthy, resilient food systems), rather than problems that need to be fixed (hunger, food insecurity, waste).

The principle of creative tension is the central principle of personal mastery (Senge, 1990). Creative tension is not emotional tension or anxiety. Instead, it is the awareness of the gap between our personal vision and our current reality. That gap is the source of all creative energy.

“When we hold a vision that differs from current reality, a gap exists…“creative tension.” This tension can be resolved in two ways. One option is to take action to bring reality into line with the vision, while the other way is to lower the vision downward. Individuals and companies often choose the latter, because it’s easy to “declare victory” and walk away from a problem. That releases the tension. But these are the dynamics of compromise and mediocrity. Truly creative people use the gap between what they want and what is, to generate energy for change and remain true to their vision.”

- Peter Senge author of The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization

**Commitment to truth:**

This does not mean seeking the "truth", it means a relentless willingness to uncover the ways we limit and deceive ourselves from seeing what is, and to continually challenge the ways things are. It means broadening our awareness and understanding the structures that underlie and generate events.

Additional information can be found on the Creating Strategies website:

[http://www.creatingstrategies.com/articles/creativity_and_innovation/creative_tension](http://www.creatingstrategies.com/articles/creativity_and_innovation/creative_tension)
Community Food Organizing: Key Things to Remember

- Community Food Organizing (CFO) always highlights a community’s resources and assets as well as its needs.
- The act of doing an assessment is an organizing tool.
- CFO must include the grassroots of a community.
- CFO is done *with* communities, not *to* them.
- It’s about the conversation!
- This is both short-term and long-term work. Results may not be instant.
- CFO should reflect *local* realities.
- Make a plan for evaluation and follow-up.
- Make it a celebration!!!
Facilitating a FEAST is a unique combination of group facilitation and community organizing. Most community organizers are advocating for a particular issue or activity. During a FEAST you will be framing and advocating for an organizing concept that will be utilized by the participants and the community after the event.

**As a Facilitator you will:**

- Work with steering committee to plan the event.
- Guide the group through the agenda.
- Focus the energy of the group on the task at hand.
- Remain neutral in regard to the content of the discussions and organizing plans.
- Give clear direction for the visioning, organizing plan and report back segments of the event.
- Encourage each member to participate fully, especially during the planning breakout sessions.
- Keep group energy positive and focused.
- Never impose your own agenda or interests on the group.

**As a Community Organizer you will:**

- Provide a framework and common language for community foods organizing.
- Know your community and help them to know themselves.
- Be transparent about your goals and the goals of the steering committee.
- Focus the group on shared goals and shared ownership.
- Go where people are.
- Cultivate leadership.
- Encourage the community create strong ties that will not require external time and energy to maintain.
Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we would like to thank Oregon Food Bank leadership and board of directors for believing in the importance of community food systems work, and sharing in the vision that community food systems efforts build community food security. Without their support, none of this work would have been possible.

We would also like to thank Resource Assistance for Rural Environments who have shared in this vision and supported our efforts. Through their rigorous recruitment process, they have helped provide exceptional AmeriCorps members to coordinate CFAs in rural communities throughout Oregon.

Without the tireless dedication of the many RARE AmeriCorps members who were out in the field implementing, improving, and building upon this creative approach to community food assessment and community organizing, none of this work would be possible, and the guide herein provided could not have been created. Their experience and perspective is what has helped shape Oregon Food Bank’s community food systems work. The hope is that this guide will aid numerous communities who seek to replicate the model and the success it can create. A special thanks to John Dean, Chloe Rico, Joshua Russell, Roopika Subramanian, and Katie Weaver who took the time to share their insights, perspectives, and suggestions which informed this guide.

Lastly, we would like to share our deep appreciation for all the volunteers, partner organizations, public officials, and communities who have participated in Community Food Assessment and Organizing throughout Oregon, especially our CFA partners: Southeast Oregon Regional Food Bank (Harney and Malheur County), Clatsop Community Action Regional Food Bank (Clatsop County), Community Action Program of Eastern Oregon (Gilliam, Morrow, Umatilla, and Wheeler County), Grant County Oregon State University Extension Service (Grant County), Ten Rivers Food Web (Linn and Lincoln County), Klamath and Lake Community Action Services (Klamath and Lake County), FOOD for Lane County (rural Lane County), Northeast Oregon Economic Development District (Wallowa County), Josephine County Food Bank (Josephine County), Columbia Pacific Food Bank (Columbia County), NeighborWorks Umpqua (Douglas County), and Food Roots (Tillamook County).

Their work, and the success they’ve created, is what motivates and inspires OFB to continue supporting community food systems work.
LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

When a community comes together to discuss how it can build a healthier, more resilient food system, amazing things happen. Relationships with local growers flourish. Backyard gardens and new farmers markets sprout. And neighbors learn that, by working together, they can create a stronger local food system that takes advantages of the resources within the community.

OREGON FOOD BANK ENVISIONS COMMUNITIES WHERE CITIZENS ARE EMPOWERED AND ACTIVELY ENGAGED TO ATTAIN PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY.

We use three primary tactics to achieve this vision: community foods organizing following the FEAST model, community food assessment, and implementation through the placement of RARE AmeriCorps participants and food systems networking. This approach has proven successful in creating positive change through building community-based food system leadership, creating shared vision and action plans, and effective plan implementation.

To learn more about Oregon Food Bank’s Community Food Systems program visit oregonfoodbank.org/cfs, or contact:

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