8 Building the foundation to grow food policy

The development of a toolkit to measure advocacy capacity

Anne Palmer and Raychel Santo

Introduction

In order for social change to be effective and long lasting, change needs to occur at the political, social, and economic levels (Economos et al., 2001). Programmes and services directed at changing human behaviour can influence social norms, but those norms need to be reinforced by a supportive policy environment to achieve scale and sustainability (Stachowiak, 2013). Advocating for policy change helps to create a supportive policy environment for programmes to operate successfully (Huang et al., 2015). Ideally, programmes and policy mutually support one another, but in practice, this convergence is challenging (see also Chapters 2, 5, 6, & 11, this volume). Advocacy can help to overcome that challenge and is a critical tool for food policy councils (FPCs) to utilize.

Broadly defined, advocacy is any activity that aims to shape political, social, and economic outcomes in government and society (Reid, 2000, p. 6). Organizations use various methods to advocate for issues such as mobilizing and training community members, conducting public education, using mass and social media to change social norms, pressuring companies and corporations to enact socially responsible policies, registering voters, and conducting research. Lobbying is a form of advocacy that is directed at influencing policymakers or the public to support or oppose a specific piece of legislation (Harmon et al., 2011). Many FPCs are reluctant to lobby because of its inherent political nature, however, lobbying is an important tool for any group advocating for social change (Chen et al., 2019).

This chapter is specifically focused on how FPCs can build their capacity to advocate effectively for their issues (see also Chapters 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, & 11, this volume, for more on capacity building). They have opportunities to shape public policy, particularly at the local and state levels where relationships with policymakers may have a more immediate influence. FPCs are groups that engage diverse stakeholders to address food systems-related issues and needs within a specified jurisdiction, primarily through policy. Our definition of policy is broad and includes laws and ordinances;

how policies get administered, funded or implemented at local, state, tribal/First Nations, or federal levels of government; as well as changes in institutional (e.g., schools, hospitals, government agencies) practices. Policy work could include working directly to change these various policies, as well as educating or coordinating others who might be advocating for such policies. Other groups that have chosen a different name, such as food council, network, alliance, coalition, committee, collaborative, or partnership, may also fit this definition and benefit from the toolkit. We choose to refer to them as FPCs because that is the most commonly used term¹ to describe such a group in North America.

FPCs organize at the local (city or county), regional, state/provincial, or Native American/First Nations levels² to discuss, shape, and assess food system policies and programmes in their communities. While many exist as grass-roots coalitions independent of government, they may also be sanctioned by a local or state government body. Heterogeneous in structure, membership, and issue priorities, they share a collective desire to reform food system programmes and policies through strategic partnerships. While many FPCs aspire to influence policymakers, they may lack knowledge about how government works, whom to approach, and how to frame their issues, all of which hampers them from achieving their advocacy and policy goals. Others strategically decide to avoid policy work because of political realities in their communities.

Recognizing these common challenges, we created a comprehensive online self-assessment toolkit that helps stakeholder groups like FPCs reflect upon their capacities to influence local and state level³ food policy in order to identify how and where they can build upon them. The toolkit elicits responses to a number of indicators that reflect the specific activities or capacities that each FPC may have. It also provides a sequence of activities to help FPCs better understand the advocacy and policy process, evaluate their current advocacy capacity, or use the results to guide discussions about how to get started. While the toolkit was designed to assist FPCs embedded within the North American policy context, FPCs and similar entities in other industrialized countries (CLF, 2018b) may also benefit from employing it with their groups. With the exception of indicators on specific policy actions that groups may take – which local, regional or state governments in other countries may have different authorities over – the indicators on organizational leadership, decision-making, strategy, and communication are all integral to efficacious organizational operations even beyond advocacy.

This chapter discusses the development of the toolkit; its goals, objectives, and contents; and an example of how it has been used. In the following section, we describe how the toolkit was grounded in Kingdon's (1995) policy windows theory, an approach that encourages advocates to both create and take advantage of opportunities to promote their policy issues when certain conditions are met. In the subsequent sections, we describe the goals, development, and content of the toolkit, with specific attention

to equity and systems-thinking metrics. We then reflect on the experience of one FPC that used the toolkit to assess their readiness to advocate. We conclude by discussing how the process of creating this toolkit could inform other efforts aiming to measure the impact of local food initiatives on local food policies.

Theoretical foundation

Several theories of change exist that explore how policy change happens and the effectiveness of specific advocacy tactics, from the ‘Large Leaps’ (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993) and ‘Power Elites’ (Domhoff, 1990; Mills, 2000) theories at the global level to tactical theories around ‘Messaging and Frameworks’ (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981) or ‘Diffusion of Innovations’ (Rogers, 2003). Stachowiak (2013) presents a summary and comparison of ten different theories of change. By assuming a proposed policy strategy, one is selecting a theoretical approach that will undergird the design and implementation of advocacy efforts. We selected John Kingdon’s (1993, 1995) policy windows theory to inform the development of the toolkit because it accounts for the opportunistic nature of policy change, while not discounting the need for a strategy.

This theory suggests that certain conditions foster a ‘policy window’ to attract policymakers’ attention: (1) The issue needs to be identified by policymakers as a serious issue that warrants intervention; (2) Ideas need to be generated about potential solutions to the problem that are feasible, supported by the public, affordable, and reflect commonly held values among policymakers’ constituencies; and (3) Political factors such as who is in office, the current political climate, and the influence of the opposition are also considered. According to this theory, at least two of these conditions need to be in place in order to create a ‘policy window’ – that is, an appropriate and effective time to introduce a new policy.

First, a condition needs to be elevated to a level of concern to be considered actionable. Conditions may garner public attention because of publicized research findings, advocacy campaigns by alliances, or natural or human-caused disasters. Some conditions transition to problems when the public perceives the issue as contrary to public values and subsequent attention shifts towards solving the problem. Next, policymakers propose how they would approach policy discussions to address the problem. When the problem moves into the proposal phase, policymakers inquire about the feasibility and associated costs of the potential solution as well as the public’s perceptions of potential solutions. Policy proposals may be influenced by research, but researchers are not the only experts whose advice needs to be heeded. Finally, politics of the problem will be factored into whether or not a policy gets support. When the problem, proposal, and politics align, there is the strongest chance for policy change. According to Kingdon (1993), being positioned to respond to a policy window is more important for advancing

policy change than gathering substantial empirical evidence that may or may not influence policymakers.

Many FPCs follow a policy windows approach to their work, although they likely do not identify it as such. The genesis of FPCs' work clusters around food system themes including food access/security, economic development, environmental sustainability, health, food justice/equity, community foods infrastructure such as food production, food processing, food distribution, food procurement, and food recovery/waste. Members may have different perceptions of the problem(s) informed by their world views. Ideally, they gather to understand how solutions need to consider their various perspectives and positions, although it should be acknowledged that some are involved to protect their self-interests. In these early stages, their work may focus on building social and commercial networks, collecting and reviewing existing data, sharing knowledge of the issues, and conducting assessments of their current local or regional food system. This enhanced understanding can help all members appreciate the dimensions of the various issues and how to position those issues to attract support. Significant time, resources, and energy are needed to move a problem into a policy opportunity.

Most FPCs organize themselves into working groups divided by food system sector (e.g., food production, food waste/recovery), function (e.g., fundraising, communications), or both. Working groups assess problems and actions that are likely to have the most influence in their sector. Policy may be one of those actions. Regardless of what policy or policies they focus on, they undergo a process to determine the feasibility of success. Ideally, an FPC will have several options it is ready to propose, when and if the political conditions are deemed appropriate; hence, they will seek to open policy windows as opportunities arise.

One hallmark of most FPCs is diverse membership, with representation from actors across the supply chain and those influencing the sectors, such as government, civil society, and academia representatives. Many FPCs, even those that are not embedded within a government agency, include government staff (79 per cent of US FPCs) or elected officials (30 per cent of US FPCs) as part of their membership (CLF, 2018a). These partnerships with policy experts provide legitimacy and visibility for the FPC, as well as insights as to whether the political context is – or could be – supportive for policy change (Clayton et al., 2015). Those relationships are also vulnerable when political leadership changes. The most effective groups also spend significant time allowing members to develop relationships with each other. These internal relationships can help FPCs hone their policy agendas by providing a diversity of member opinions about the logistical and political feasibility and impacts of potential solutions (Clayton et al., 2015) and may help groups weather leadership changes. Members educate one another about respective challenges and reach consensus on which policies to move forward (see also Chapter 7, this volume). In practice, this process can

take years and leans heavily on visionary leadership, in-kind contributions, strong relationships with existing organizations and communities, and a strategy or plan as to how the group will move forward. Many FPCs also include (though not always successfully) citizens who are most impacted by food system challenges and potential solutions (McCullagh & Santo, 2014). Their on-the-ground experiences can provide meaningful ‘reality checks’ for FPCs as they are designing and implementing policy changes.

Goal of the toolkit

The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future’s Food Policy Networks (FPN) project began in 2012 to build the capacity of local, state, regional, and tribal groups that seek to influence food policy in their jurisdictions. By hosting a listserv of nearly 1,500 members, the FPN project maintains a virtual network of individuals and organizations that shares resources, success stories, and challenges in order to support the greater community of practitioners. The FPN website also collates a database of 1,200 resources, compiles a directory of all the food policy groups in the US and Canada, and engages researchers via a research forum. Project staff provide in-person and virtual technical assistance to groups around the country. These engagement methods allow staff to gauge the struggles FPCs experience while working on policy and tailor FPN’s work to fit their needs. FPN’s annual census survey collects information on FPCs’ demographics, structure, funding, achievements, and challenges. Through this census, FPN has learned of numerous FPC policy accomplishments, ranging from mobile meat processing ordinances and farm-to-institution policies to acquiring funds for farmer trainings and anti-hunger programmes (CLF, 2018c). Notably, the longer a council has existed, the more they are likely to engage in a variety of policy activities, from submitting testimonies and providing policy recommendations to supporting or directing an advocacy campaign (CLF, 2018a). Groups also frequently mention that they are unsure of how to engage in advocacy work. In fact, policy training/guidance was listed among the top three technical assistance needs reported by FPCs from the 2013, 2014, and 2015 surveys (CLF, 2016). It was because of these findings that the Food Policy Networks project decided to create the ‘Get It Together: Assessing Your Food Council’s Ability to Do Policy’ toolkit (Palmer & Calancie, 2017).

The toolkit has a lot to offer FPCs and their members. Given the variety of sectors and experiences that FPC members represent, they may have little previous exposure to policy work. Thus, educating members on the advocacy and policy process is critical to optimizing their participation. Education can take many forms including informal conversations with other council members, presentations by local or state government staff on how policy changes are made, guided discussions on why advocacy and policy

are important, and opportunities for people to see first-hand what issues stakeholders are facing.

The short-term goal of the toolkit is to provide a foundation for FPCs to better engage in advocacy. This includes identifying who needs to be involved, suggesting steps to develop a strategy, demonstrating how to conduct and sustain advocacy efforts, and increasing FPCs' understanding of how policy is implemented. Using Qualtrics as its software platform, the toolkit's length and scope can be adapted to meet the needs of each FPC. Each section takes less than 15 minutes to complete and participants are provided a cumulative score at the end of each section based on their responses. Once the survey has been submitted, participants are emailed their scores with a corresponding set of resources to increase their capacity in specific areas of need. The scores provide a metric that FPCs can use to identify their strengths and weaknesses. By completing the assessment, groups improve their understanding of the policy process and their group's assets and challenges, thereby increasing their capacity to advocate for policy change. Over the long term, groups can use the toolkit to monitor their performance and assess progress in areas in which they have concentrated resources over several years. The FPN project will use the responses to track FPCs' evolution and capacity over time and as a data source for programming decisions.

Process of developing the toolkit

FPN staff began developing the toolkit by conducting an extensive search for other policy evaluation resources and tools that could be adapted for this purpose. The Alliance for Justice's (AFJ) Bolder Advocacy project, which provides expertise and information to non-profits and foundations to support their engagement in advocacy, was particularly impressive. They created the Advocacy Capacity Tool (ACT) as a guide for non-profits engaged in advocacy (Alliance for Justice, 2018). Also available online, the ACT guide provides real time scores that give a numerical measure of groups' advocacy capacity, and specifically, their readiness to engage in advocacy work.

In addition to using ACT, FPN partnered with Larissa Calancie, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Health Equity Research at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, who developed a self-assessment for FPCs as part of her dissertation (Calancie et al., 2017). We adapted her survey for the toolkit's first section on organizational assessment. We also reviewed tools and surveys specifically designed to measure equity and inclusion and adapted questions for our purpose (University of Virginia, 2010; Curren et al., 2016; Public Health Law Center, 2018). Finally, we had representatives from nine organizations – Greater Cincinnati Food Policy Council, Jefferson County (Colorado) Food Policy Council, Lehigh Valley Food Policy Council, Memphis Tilth, Omaha Food Policy Council, Prince George's County Food Equity Council, Public Health Law Center, United Way of New York City, Virginia Food System Council – pre-test the toolkit

and make recommendations for clarification and relevancy. Most of their suggestions were included in the final version.

Contents of the toolkit

The toolkit is divided into six sections: (1) organizational assessment; (2) advocacy goals, plans, and strategies; (3) conducting advocacy; (4) advocacy avenues; (5) organizational operations to sustain advocacy; and (6) policy implementation (see also Chapter 9, this volume, about the development of a City Region Food Systems toolkit). Below, we provide a brief description of each section of the toolkit, along with example indicators. Because some FPCs may also support other organizations' advocacy efforts, sections two through six offer a 'relies on partners' response option, which is not scored but noted. 'Relies on partners' means that the FPC has determined that they do not need to embark on this activity themselves and have identified partner organizations on which they can rely, or in some cases, support.

The toolkit can be completed by the organizational leader or facilitator, working group leaders, or by many members of the group or network. For example, it was rolled out among a network of FPCs in Michigan in fall 2018. The respondent's role(s) in the group is identified as part of the demographic information collected with each survey. As the name implies, the toolkit is a tool to gather different perspectives on the readiness of a group to engage in advocacy work; the diversity of those perspectives creates a profile of what members consider to be the group's strengths and weaknesses and can be used to guide a group discussion about next steps.

The first section of the toolkit, on organizational assessment, has three sub-sections: leadership; structure and membership; and networking and relationships. We use indicators such as receptivity to new ideas; decision-making processes; and creating an organizational climate that welcomes participation, provides leadership opportunities, and helps resolve conflict. The structure and membership indicators stress diverse membership and identify steps that enhance the functionality of the group such as by-laws and working groups. Networking indicators seek to determine the connectivity and perceived value of networking among members.

Section two concentrates on advocacy goals, plans, and strategies. It covers three topics related to this theme: preparedness; food policy agendas, plans, and strategies; and adaptability. Preparation acknowledges the need for the group to engage its members in creating a vision that is regularly communicated to all stakeholders. As part of those goals, FPCs should understand the potential policies, priorities, and environment in which they work. When they delve deeper into this process, they may conduct a policy scan or talk to other stakeholders, especially people affected by the issues. The final section includes indicators that consider knowledge of the power structures that influence the policy issue as well as monitoring schemes to assess progress.

The third section on conducting advocacy is the most robust section and explores what research the FPC uses, how they build the capacity of their members to conduct advocacy, whom they partner with to achieve their goals, and how they use communication activities to support their work. Research and analysis questions inquire about their data sources: from whom they get data, if they collect their own data and what methods they use, how they verify accuracy, and collaborative partners.

Section four assesses the FPC's administrative, institutional, and legislative advocacy skills, knowledge, and actions. Administrative advocacy (Alliance for Justice, n.d.) refers to actions related to rules, regulations, and other administrative actions that are not specific to legislation. Institutional advocacy refers to actions within government or a private institution. Legislative advocacy refers to actions that take place in legislative bodies such as a municipal council or state congress rather than other government bodies. The questions assess the extent to which the organization understands the processes involved in advancing these different types of policies; works on – or supports partners working on – the development of such policies; and serves as a resource for policymakers.

Section five reviews the organizational operations that support advocacy such as leadership's understanding of regulations about advocacy and lobbying, investment in training for members to do advocacy, and involvement in passing policies. Ability to fundraise for advocacy activities has been a challenge for many FPCs and this section also includes a number of metrics that assess relationships with funders, ability to obtain support for their work, and financial management practices.

Section six focuses on policy formulation, enactment, outputs, and outcomes. Indicators assess if members have organized community members to advocate, and whether they have provided testimony in support of or against any policies, met with policymakers, and developed monitoring mechanisms. In addition, this section asks about whether or not there has been an increase in awareness of food policy issues among various audiences, and whether or not the group is perceived as a resource for policymakers. A long list of possible food policy outputs is intended to expose participants to the variety of policies that groups can work on. Finally, we ask groups to speculate about how the policies they have worked on may have contributed to desirable outcomes in their communities.

Evaluating equity and inclusion

In addition to thematically organizing the toolkit into sections based on the steps of engaging in policy advocacy work, we integrated into all sections of the toolkit two themes that we believe should be central to the work of all FPCs: (1) equity and inclusion and (2) systems thinking. Table 8.1 highlights the metrics we selected for groups to determine if they are implementing their work with a lens on equity and inclusion. Equity was explored in terms

Table 8.1 Indicators assessed in each section of the toolkit

<i>Section</i>	<i>FPC features assessed</i>	<i>Equity and inclusion metrics</i>
Organizational assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership, group structure and functions, membership recruitment, engagement, networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization promotes and supports diverse representation and participation on the council; provides opportunities for members to build leadership within the organization; and shares power in decision-making with the organization's members. • The organization adequately reflects the racial, economic, gender, and ethnic diversity of the community it represents.
Advocacy goals, plans, and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, relevant agenda that defines food policy goals, prioritizes activities, and reflects community needs • Flexible plan to carry out policy priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization regularly provides opportunities to hear about food-related issues from community members who are not on the council. • The organization partners with community groups to increase and promote community engagement in local decision-making, particularly in low-income and historically marginalized neighbourhoods. • The organization has considered how the proposed policy agenda will impact socially disadvantaged and marginalized groups.
Conducting advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization researches policy issues and good practices • Capacity building of members to work on policy issues • Partners with other organizations and decision makers to advance policy goals • Communication strategy and media engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization uses surveys, focus groups, or other research methods to better understand community interests, needs, or concerns about a specific policy issue. • The organization identifies segments of the public to educate about its agenda. • The organization implements a plan as needed to expand the size and diversity of its membership to achieve policy objectives.
Advocacy avenues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization's skills, knowledge, and actions related to administrative, institutional, and legislative advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None specific to equity and inclusion.

(continued)

Table 8.1 (Cont.)

<i>Section</i>	<i>FPC features assessed</i>	<i>Equity and inclusion metrics</i>
Organizational operations to sustain advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational commitment, funding advocacy, and decision-making structure indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The organization invests in building the capacity of its members to strengthen its advocacy work. The organization has increased its budget over time.
Policy implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy formulation and enactment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The organization has mobilized community members to advocate on behalf of a priority policy issue. The organization engaged community members in forming policy statements. The organization has included community members to help with policy adoption, implementation, or evaluation processes.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy outputs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The organization has worked on policy changes that support living wages. The organization has worked on policy changes that improved labour conditions. The organization's actions have provided financing or credit for people who would otherwise not have access (for food-related enterprises). The organization has worked on or supported organizations that are working on policies that address economic or housing development and food access simultaneously.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy outcomes (have contributed to an increase in ...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The wages of food systems workers (Improvement in) the state of working and living conditions for food or agriculture workers Jobs for people that have had employment challenges Access to credit or capital for people who would not have had access through traditional means Value-added processing facilities that provide economic opportunities to those who need them.

of how the group considers the effect of policies and programmes on communities of colour, people living in poverty, indigenous groups, rural communities, (im)migrants, and youth and how it elevates the power of those groups to participate in food system changes. As mentioned previously, the survey can be completed by group leaders or by many members, which elicits various perspectives in the organization's assessment.

Systems-thinking metrics

In addition to equity measures, we included metrics that would nudge groups towards systems thinking. Systems thinking can be defined as 'an enterprise aimed at seeing how things are connected to each other within some notion of a whole entity' (Peters, 2014). Complex issues such as those that affect the food system, are best understood when using systems thinking and systems approaches (Clancy, 2014b, see also Chapter 4, this volume). Systems thinking acknowledges that solutions will require engagement from more than one sector/organization; considers long-term, short-term and unintended consequences; identifies leverage points that could lead to change; and considers how things change over time and accounts for tracking changes. Many of these concepts are allied with the principles of FPCs, although members may articulate them differently. We hope that by making these concepts more explicit, groups will be more comfortable in the application of systems thinking throughout their work.

Even if and when FPCs apply systems thinking, it is worth acknowledging that they may encounter difficulties when attempting to tackle multidimensional food systems issues within conventional policy paradigms. Most food issues are typically addressed in silos within traditional policy sectors (e.g., production, economic development, health), which makes advocacy on systems issues more diffuse and complex.

Toolkit in action: a reflection on one FPC's experience

Since the toolkit was released in winter 2017/2018, at least 70 people from 30 FPCs have completed it. These numbers were too small to analyse the toolkit's impact on practitioners at a quantitative level. Thus, we decided to speak with three representatives from one of the toolkit's early adopters, the Lynchburg Area Food Council (Virginia), to provide some initial qualitative perspectives.

Background

The Lynchburg Area Food Council (LAFC) formed in 2012 with the goal of collaborating on tangible programmes that would support the community across several counties in central Virginia. Informant 1, a charter member and vice president of the LAFC, was involved in the council's early efforts, which

Table 8.2 Systems-thinking considerations

<i>Section</i>	<i>Systems-thinking considerations</i>
Organizational assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The leadership is receptive to new ideas. • The organization promotes and supports diverse representation and participation on the council. • The organization adequately reflects all food system sectors (producers, policymakers, food businesses, public health, etc.). • Joining the organization has helped coordinate efforts among various organizations that other members belong to or represent.
Advocacy goals, plans, and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization understands the overall policy environment related to its priorities. • The organization gathers information and recommendations from constituents and other stakeholders in the development of its food policy agenda. • The organization has considered how the proposed policy agenda will impact socially disadvantaged and marginalized groups. • The organization has some monitoring mechanisms in place to help assess progress and make course corrections when necessary.
Conducting advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization seeks guidance from other organizations and stakeholders to understand their policy priorities. • The organization identifies stakeholders (outside of its membership) that have similar goals, including those with complementary knowledge/skills, with which it could collaborate on policy. • Outside of its membership, the organization seeks support from stakeholders who may not be traditional allies, but with whom it could partner on a specific policy issue.
Advocacy avenues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Organizational operations to sustain advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Policy implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization has monitoring mechanisms in place to know whether or how the policy is being implemented. • The organization's actions have led to an increase in awareness of food system issues among the FPC members, elected officials, or general public.

concentrated on food access and food security research to identify food deserts. In response to those efforts, Randolph College conducted a community food assessment with residents living in low-income neighbourhoods, and United Way played a facilitative role for the council. Over time, the LAFC has shifted to focus more on local food, small farmers, sustainable production, and agricultural extension activities and less on food access, primarily due to membership changes. For example, after the local health department received a grant to construct a garden, LAFC also began offering small garden grants to communities.

At one of their bi-monthly meetings, Informant 2, one of the council members, introduced the toolkit to the group as a way for them to gather information to decide what they should focus on next. The timing seemed fortuitous. Informant 1 and Informant 3, an employee of the Virginia Department of Health, noted the group's readiness and desire to move activities forward. Every member was encouraged to complete it (8 out of 10 of them did), so that the results would include a range of perspectives.

What they learned

Once LAFC completed the toolkit, Informant 2 discussed her realization that 'we have been limited only by the fact that we didn't know all that was possible. That's one benefit of completing the toolkit, it gave us ideas we may have not thought of before.' While they excluded the term 'policy' in their council's name, she recognized that they could still work on policy; they just needed to consider how they could manoeuvre into the policy arena. As a group of community members, the LAFC aspired to work with city council members. Answering the toolkit's questions helped them acknowledge that in order to do that, they needed to identify specific policy partners. The section that helped them review their tangible accomplishments would further build momentum to work on policy.

The toolkit also helped the LAFC members realize that they had not taken time to think about their current role in the community and what they would like that role to be. Completing the toolkit encouraged members to think about those issues and use the results as a discussion starter. The scan of potential food and agriculture policies that FPCs could work on also prompted them to think about the council's potential to serve as a resource to gather information to share with the public, and more specifically, how they might be more of an asset to the community. As Informant 3 shared,

we need to be creating knowledge and educating. We haven't been amassing a group of people who care about this work and what we do. Having a communications strategy would help us to communicate with the public. I don't think many people know we exist right now.

Informant 1 valued how the process of completing the toolkit gave members time to reflect on broader questions such as what the LAFC's overall goal is, what their individual roles as council members are, and how they make things happen. 'The toolkit asks good questions as to what your leadership looks like, what difference are you making in social change or policy? Have we done enough in our local city council to have a voice?' He also remarked that while they have made several attempts at short- and long-term planning, the toolkit experience highlighted how asking the right questions and listening to the answers may be more important.

The results illuminated points of convergence and divergence among members, such as whether or not the LAFC's representation reflects the diversity of the community they support. Some people thought it did, others not so much. As Informant 2 contemplated, 'Is it important for us to have agreement about these issues? How do we come together and answer those questions?' Where there were areas of discrepancy in the responses, they realized they would like to have a better idea of how to approach such differences in opinion. In its list of additional resources, the toolkit does include two documents that provide guidance on problem-solving and decision-making in groups (CLF, 2017).

The toolkit also revealed opportunities for enhancing the LAFC's organizational structure. Informant 3 described their group as relatively informal and embraced several suggestions about policies and procedures that they could work on to improve the group's operations. For instance, she noted that they have no orientation for new members and thought they could do more activities to build relationships among members. Such activities could help members learn from one another, 'We need to expand our horizons and group learning; members need to be educated about other [food] issues.'

As with many FPCs, the Lynchburg Area Food Council tries to balance its time and resources to meet community needs. Informant 1 described it as the tension between 'Are we about programs, or are we about systems change and advocacy and policy – the 30,000-foot view?' As Informant 3 reflected, the toolkit helped them assess where they are right now and where they might go in the future. 'We've got a lot of work to do, and a big future ahead and now we have a target line as to what we can be shooting for.'

Conclusion

We embarked on developing this toolkit as a way to provide FPCs with an easy means of assessing their current capacity to advocate on behalf of their food system issues. Time and again we found themes from the FPN trainings, listserv conversations, conferences, surveys, and research, which indicated that people were looking for a how-to guide to begin their advocacy work. By necessity, many groups spend a couple of years in development before they actually begin identifying a 'policy' issue that begs for

attention. Once they arrive at that place, their next steps are not always clear. The toolkit presents an opportunity for any group working on food system change to better understand the advocacy process and what needs to be in place to optimize their resources. This learning occurs at various scales. The people using the toolkit get feedback on their status and can periodically repeat the assessment to measure change over time. Groups can also use the results to make decisions about how their resources are allocated, who else needs to be engaged in the work, and what strategies they could employ to improve their outcomes. Simultaneously, FPN project staff use the data to determine what additional materials, webinars, or other activities can be offered to support groups. Moreover, aggregated results from the toolkit can be shared with other food policy groups working on food system change to transfer knowledge among groups at the local and state levels (Clancy, 2013). All of this feedback helps to avoid repetition of mistakes.

Another concept that is covered in the toolkit is governance: ‘managing, steering and guiding of public affairs by governing procedures and institutions in a democratic manner’ (Pisano et al., 2011, p. 3, as cited in Clancy, 2014a). Many FPCs structure themselves to influence public or institutional policy, sometimes both. By building relationships with actors in the various food sectors, identifying government departments that influence particular administrative actions, examining legislative options, and inviting institutions into that process, they encounter short- and long-term policy opportunities. As Informant 2 from Lynchburg noted, the toolkit ‘made me realize that we were limiting ourselves to what we thought we could do’.

When many FPC members from the same organization complete the assessment, the points of convergence and divergence among member perspectives become obvious. This heterogeneity reflects a feature of systems thinking (Clancy, 2014b). More important than any score, if facilitated effectively, these differences provide insights into various world views and a starting place for rich discussions.

When the group agrees to allocate time to using the toolkit, they may also want to consider how they will manage survey administration and interpretation of results. FPN has held phone consultations with a few groups as well as compiled the scores and shared the raw data, in the event they want to do any analysis. It may be appropriate to invite an outside facilitator to help the group process the results, particularly if dramatic differences emerge. Taking time to discuss those differences will test the trust among group members. Since most groups use consensus-based decision-making, these discussions can help members understand conflicting views and discuss promising places for policy change. How to form a specific policy position among a diversity of member perspectives is still a challenge that many FPC leaders face, but maintaining a place to have those conversations is the first step to overcoming such divergences (Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2018; see also Chapter 6, this volume).

The final step, which is never really final, is deciding what's next. It would be easy to get overwhelmed by the volume of questions and subsequent scores. Given the paucity of resources for most groups, prudence in moving forward is highly recommended. FPN created the list of resources for precisely that reason – to give people a limited amount of information that they can choose to use if they want to improve their ability to work on a particular issue. When possible, each question was considered a discrete metric and a companion resource was identified for that metric. Most of these resources already existed in the FPN resource database. Some groups may not search the resources to answer their questions, instead using the process of doing the toolkit as a starting place to collectively answer the question, 'what's next?' Deciding to explore further, with resources in hand, can improve the efficacy of any group's work.

The toolkit can help FPCs pause and reflect, a process that is difficult for individuals, let alone when one is part of a group. A group may decide to use it annually, as a way to measure any change. Or they may only focus on one section with the goal of improving their performance in a particular area. The goal is to provide a starting point for all the members to think about broader goals and objectives. Reflecting on their work forces them to think and rethink about how they are adding value to the greater good of creating a healthy, sustainable, and fair food system. Many groups hesitate to explicitly state that they work on policy (Schiff, 2008, p. 211; Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2018, p. 10), but they might be underestimating their ability to work on policy issues. Policy is just a way to change standard operating procedures, whether they exist in legislation, within government administrative actions, or in private institutions. FPCs are more frequently mentioned as a means of mobilizing at various levels to affect food system change, however, that recognition has not attracted commensurate resources to match the interest. With diverse partnerships, adequate resources, and training, their capacity to actively engage in advocacy and policy can increase substantially. FPN aspires to use the results from the toolkit to improve the content, expand the indicators on systems to a more sophisticated level and, if groups choose to use it on a regular basis, compare their change over time. These metrics shape our understanding of how policy can be driven by food policy groups.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the members of the Lynchburg (VA) Area Food Council, Liza Dobson, Lindsay Cawood, and Pat Haley for being interviewed for the case study. We would also like to acknowledge Dr. Larissa Calancie, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Health Equity Research at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, who co-developed the toolkit with Anne Palmer.

Notes

- 1 Of those that have responded to an annual census of food policy groups in the US and Canada, 28 per cent of the ‘active’ groups in 2018 had names that included the term ‘food policy council’, 21 per cent used ‘food council’, 9 per cent used ‘network’, 8 per cent used ‘alliance’, 8 per cent used ‘coalition’, 5 per cent used ‘committee’, and 21 per cent used other terms (CLF, 2018a).
- 2 Seventy-one per cent of FPCs in the US and Canada operate at the local level, 20 per cent operate at regional (e.g., multi-county, multi-state), 8 per cent at state/provincial, and 1 per cent at Native American/First Nations levels (CLF, 2018a).
- 3 It is worth noting that many local and state-level policies are often constrained by national (e.g., Farm Bill) or international (e.g., trade agreements) policies over which local FPCs do not often have significant capacity to influence individually (Clancy, 2012, 2014a). Some FPCs do engage in public education about such policies, and a few are very active in the national policy scene. In theory, local groups could also collectively advocate around higher-level policies, though such activity has been limited thus far (Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2018).

References

- Alliance for Justice (2018) ‘*Advocacy capacity tool*’, *Bolder Advocacy*. Available at: https://afj.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3g5BupEfjKpkFqR.
- Alliance for Justice (n.d.) ‘*Administrative advocacy: Influencing rules, regulations, and executive orders*’, *Bolder Advocacy*. Available at: <http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/food-policy-resources/?resource=964>.
- Baumgartner, F.R. & Jones, B. (1993) *Agendas and instability in American politics*. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press.
- Calancie, L., Allen, N.E., Weiner, B.J., Ng, S.W., Ward, D.S., & Ammerman, A. (2017) Food policy council self-assessment tool: Development, testing, and results. *Preventing Chronic Disease*. 14(160281), pp. 1–14.
- Chen, C., Santo, R., Ellison, B., & Maiolatesi, A. (2019) *Advocacy and Lobbying 101 for Food Policy Councils*. Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future and Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic. Available from: <https://www.chlpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Advocacy-for-FPC-toolkit.pdf>.
- Clancy, K. (2012) Issues of scale. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. 3(1), pp. 21–23.
- Clancy, K. (2013) Feedback loops. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. 3(3), pp. 5–7.
- Clancy, K. (2014a) Food system governance. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. 4(2), pp. 3–6.
- Clancy, K. (2014b) A different way to approach policy change. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. 4(4), pp. 9–11.
- Clayton, M.L., Frattaroli, S., Palmer, A., & Pollack, K.M. (2015) The role of partnerships in US food policy council policy activities. *PloS One*. 10(4).
- Curren, R., Nelson, J., Marsh, D.S., Noor, S., & Liu, N. (2016) *Racial equity action plans, a how-to manual*. Berkeley, CA, University of California, Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society.
- Domhoff, G.W. (1990) *The power elite and the state: How policy is made in America*. New York, Aldine De Gruyter.

- Economos, C.D., Brownson, R.C., DeAngelis, M.A., Foerster, S.B., Foreman, C.T., Gregson, J., Kumanyika, S.K., & Pate, R.R. (2001) What lessons have been learned from other attempts to guide social change? *Nutrition Reviews*. 59, pp. S40–S56.
- Harmon, G.M., Ladd, J.A., & Evans, E.A. (2011) *Being a player: A guide to the IRS lobbying regulations for advocacy charities*. Washington, DC, Alliance for Justice.
- Huang, T.K., Cawley, J.H. Ashe, M., Costa, S.A., Freiches, L.M., Zwicker, L., Rivera, J.A., Levy, D., Hammond, R.A., Lambert, E.V., & Kumanyika, S.K. (2015) Mobilisation of public support for policy actions to prevent obesity. *The Lancet, Obesity*. 3(385), pp. 2422–2431.
- Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future [CLF] (2016) *Food policy council trends 2013–2015* [Data file and personal communication].
- Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future [CLF] (2017) *Recommended resources for ‘Get it Together: Assessing Your Council’s Ability to Do Policy Work’*. Available at: <http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/fpc-map/FPC-around-the-world.html>.
- Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future [CLF] (2018a) *2018 Food policy council census results* [Data file and personal communication].
- Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future [CLF] (2018b) *Food policy groups around the world*. Available at: <http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/fpc-map/FPC-around-the-world.html>.
- Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future [CLF] (2018c) *Food policy council achievements wheel*. Available at: <http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/food-policy-resources/?resource=1236>.
- Kingdon, J. (1993) How do issues get on the public policy agenda? In: Wilson, W.J. (Ed.) *Sociology and the public policy agenda*. American Sociological Association Presidential series. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications.
- Kingdon, J.W. (1995) *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies* (2nd ed.). New York, Harper Collins College.
- McCullagh, M. & Santo, R. (Eds.) (2014) *Food policy for all: Inclusion of diverse community on food policy councils*. Baltimore, MD, Center for a Livable Future.
- Mills, C.W. (2000) *The power elite* (revised edition). New York, Oxford University.
- Palmer, A. & Calancie, L. (2017) *Get it together: Assessing your food council’s ability to do policy*. Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future.
- Peters, D. (2014) The application of systems thinking in health: Why use systems thinking? *Health Research Policy and Systems*. 12(51), pp. 1–6.
- Public Health Law Center (2018) *Focusing on equity and inclusion when we work on Public Health laws*. Saint Paul, Mitchell Hamline School of Law. Available at: <https://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/resources/focusing-equity-and-inclusion-when-we-work-public-health-laws-2018>.
- Reid, E.J. (2000) Understanding the word ‘advocacy’: Context and use. In: Reid, E.J. (Ed.) *Structuring the inquiry into advocacy, Volume 1*. Washington, DC, The Urban Institute, pp. 1–8.
- Rogers, E.M. (2003) *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.) New York, Free Press.
- Santo, R., & Moragues-Faus, A. (2019). *Towards a trans-local food governance: Exploring the transformative capacity of food policy assemblages in the US and UK*. *Geoforum*, 98, 75–87.
- Schiff, R. (2008) The role of food policy councils in developing sustainable food systems. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*. 3(223), pp. 206–228.

- Stachowiak, S. (2013) *Pathways for change: 10 theories to inform advocacy and policy change efforts*. Center for Evaluation Innovation and ORSIMPACT.
- Tversky, A. & Kahneman, D. (1981) The framing of decisions and the psychology of choice. *Science*. 211(4481), pp. 453–458.
- University of Virginia, Institute for Environmental Negotiation (2010) *Food Policy Audit*. Charlottesville, VA, University of Virginia. Available at: <http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/food-policy-resources/?resource=271>.