**Food Systems Funders Meeting Notes**

**From Meeting on April 19, 2023**

**Zoom Attendees:** Dave Calvario (Community Foundation of Greene County), Lysia Gehris (UPMC Health Plan), Christina Matlick (Mylan Charitable Foundation), Renee Catacalos (SAFSF), Nick Hoffman (Frank Varischetti Foundation), Nina Sexton (Highmark Health), Sam Applefield (PFPC)

**In Person Attendees:** Jo Deming (PFPC), Jenny Nielsen (GWP), Andrew McElwaine (THE), Amber Farr (GWP), Sarah Buranskas (PFPC), Dawn Plummer (PA Dept. of Ag), Paula Dworek (GWP), Austin Price (Highmark), Jodi McLaughlin (PFPC), Emily Keebler (KIVA), Dan Barrett (Buhl), Dawn Seckler (Bridgeway Capital), Lindsay Crum (Eden Hall), Sally Elwein (United Way), Sara Noel (United Way), Scott Wolovich (New Sun Rising), Sienna Kane (URA), Emily Kincaid (State Representative - 20th District), Rebecka Manglanathan (Sampson Fdn), Neashia Johnson (Sampson Foundation), Anne Marie Tocket (Posner Fdn.), Amanda Sopata (Highmark Health), Carly Carstens (Eden Hall), Chris Ellis (The Pittsburgh Foundation), Elizabeth Saraceno (First Commonwealth Bank), Julia Koehl (United Way), Ray Prushnok (UPMC)

Registered but unable to attend: Brooks Broadhust (Eat n’ Park), Lauri Fink (Hillman), Lisa Johns (Hillman), Jacob Grande (United Way), Kenya Boswell (Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield), Mark Critz (PA Dept. of Ag), Melinda Gaus (Giant Eagle)

**Notes from meeting:**

Following welcome and introductions, we reviewed some [**background**](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1rjVra0Ei5-qHA4w3uemaJQpn-QYOygFzoWOT871g2xw/edit?usp=sharing)about what constitutes a food system, the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council, and the development of Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan and Regional Food Systems Partnership. Then we explored, as a group, the areas of the food system participants currently fund or are otherwise engaged with. Answers to that question within the categories of food access, agriculture, entrepreneurship and economic development, health & nutrition, food processing and distribution, food waste, and others can be found [**here**](https://jamboard.google.com/d/1jhIQb_x9ksMY6zOiSG1eeENjHjsItGIAI0ioxUZuUDI/viewer?f=0).

Following that exercise we launched into a discussion about:

**What gaps exist? Where is more funding needed?**

* Food deserts/ Food apartheid
  + Low-income people can’t afford to buy food. Food deserts exist because people live in poverty.
* Land access - who has ownership of land. Are communities of color able to own the land, use that as a vessel to grow land and provide it to other community members?
* Transportation
* From an individual lens, there is a confluence of other barriers that affect food security - it could be a utility bill, something else that you need to decide what to spend on. And assistance for these things is so siloed.
* For procurement, how do you make it practical to source locally at scale? You don’t want to have 50 different producers for 17 different kitchens.
* Have done some work with produce prescription programs, but there have been affordability problems. Also issues that come up with time, money, and knowledge. People don’t know what to do with fresh food, have different food preferences, etc.
* 50% of the population will be obese by 2040. It’s important to combine education with access.
  + BMI is an arbitrary reference point that is rooted in white supremacy.
* People have less money than they used to before as a result of a reduction of government benefits/programs.
* Hard to locate grocery stores in areas that don’t have population density; can’t access distribution at price point that makes sense financially
* Small grocers have a hard time sourcing food on a smaller scale. Big box retailers (wal mart, costco, etc.) have set standards for retail, so smaller grocers that are trying to provide food in food deserts but can’t compete.
* People buy food that is less expensive, but then it creates more health problems. Not helpful that there are a lot of unhealthy options out there.
* Operationalizing the system itself - a ton of costs that occur between each of the nodes we’re talking about. We’re good at funding 12-month projects, but not the connective tissue in between them; not great infrastructure for getting foods/products from one step to the next in the food system, it is costly. There is not a huge incentive for those in it to invest more since the food system has thin margins. There are a lot of hidden marketing/outreach/networking costs. We also must think of ourselves beyond Pittsburgh and Allegheny County - most food produced outside, most funders inside
* There should be options in food apartheid communities, things like gardens, farmers markets, small stores, so people have choices to make, not just being forced to shop at the only market in their community.
* Culturally significant foods.

**What has worked well and what has been difficult?**

* Staff; basic assistance
* Operations need to be funded. A lot of funders don’t want to fund operations, we want projects and impact, but we have to provide for overhead and not just focus on impact.
* See a lot of people jumping from funder to funder for short-term funding solutions; turning to AmeriCorps, temporary staff, etc.
* Collaboration is needed. So many silos. Need for more collaboration among funders and the service delivery folks.
* Pairing financing with grants to support and bolster small businesses. Some expenses for businesses like refrigeration are difficult to manage.

**What outcomes would you like to see from this group convening?**

* A lot of resources are invested in the food system - healthcare, philanthropic, governmental - How can we **align those resources** and leverage ourselves for the communities we serve.
* Mwanakuche, BUGS, Sankofa - these farms have been around forever; worth it to **focus on a collaborative approach to funding**
* Multiple foundations **coming together to support a project**
* **Need for shared goals**. Not sure people disagree, but there might be different priorities.
  + Not just shared goals but **prioritizing shared goals** - 100 things we could agree to work on walking out of this room, but what are one or two so we can use to build from.
* Identify a few things that we can actually accomplish and try to get there together.
* Non-profits are only one piece of the food system, we need to look at corporations, businesses, others - **including ALL entities that are involved in the system.**
  + We should make sure that we incorporate the public sector in that as well.
* **Develop a clear picture of who are the actors in our regional food system that we are trying to activate** - what farms are in our region, what is their capacity, etc.
  + The Farm Bureau and other stakeholders should be in the room as well. To give a sense of what farms in the region are doing, can do, etc. Focus can’t just be on consumption but needs to be the production as well.
  + Important to find overlap among different perspectives
* The goal with this grant is to **bring ideas developed from other tables to this group.**
* **Connect** with the Center for shared prosperity at CMU. Others?
* What can we **contribute to a national conversation** through the USDA?

**Next Steps:**

We will reconvene on Wednesday, July 26th from 9:00 – 11:00 AM at a TBD location. Communication with details about that session will be coming soon.