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CHANGING THE FOOD SYSTEM TAKES MORE THAN CHANGE:

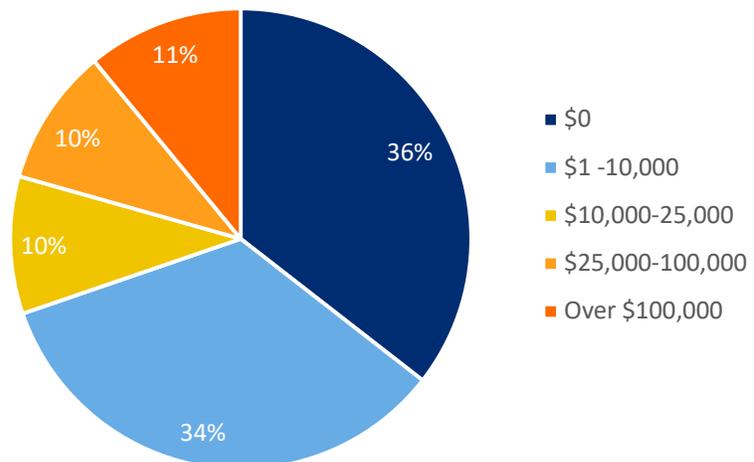
Stories of Funding Food Policy Councils

Most food policy councils (FPCs) in the United States operate on a shoestring, with 70 percent reporting an annual budget of less than \$10,000 (Figure 1).¹ While a small budget does not necessarily inhibit an FPC from achieving notable successes, their efforts could be enhanced and expanded if they had more financial support. FPC leaders frequently request technical assistance on securing and sustaining funding for staffing, council activities, and advocacy efforts. Initial funds may only support a few years of a council’s operations; a council may decide to transition its focus areas, changing which funders it attracts; foundations may prefer supporting short-term projects rather than longer-term networking and advocacy efforts; government and foundation resources may become unavailable. As an FPC’s initiatives grow and evolve, it may need more staff support. All of these reasons and more make funding a continuous challenge for FPCs.

In our first [Funding Food Policy Councils: Stories from the Field report](#), published in 2015, we highlighted how six city, county, and state FPCs across the country funded their efforts. Since FPCs exist at a variety of jurisdictional levels, and with a variety of organizational structures and priorities, we demonstrated that there is no single model for successfully funding an FPC. We did, however, observe one key theme across the case studies:

most councils pursue multiple funding streams to support their work. The funding situation has not substantially changed in the past four years—for the most part, councils still piece together operating budgets from various sources. The types of sources (Figure 2 and Table 1), however, have expanded

Figure 1. Approximate annual budget of U.S. FPCs (n = 228)



¹ Bassarab, K., Santo, R., & Palmer, A. (2019). Food Policy Council Report 2018. Available at: https://assets.jhsph.edu/clf/mod_clfResource/doc/FPC%20Report%202018-FINAL-4-1-19.pdf

over time, with councils increasingly exploring alternatives to grants, such as creating sliding scale membership dues or earning income from council-made products and events.

In this guide, we highlight how eight FPCs from across the country have sought funds to support their work. In addition to success stories, we include examples of councils that are navigating the funding process themselves due to changes in funder priorities or grant availability, as a way to highlight key issues and struggles that FPCs continually face. We know from our annual FPC census that the amount of funding an FPC receives influences the amount of policy work it is able to do.¹ We hope that these case studies will help councils exploring how to increase their funding, and consequently, their capacity to work on policies and programs that advance their missions.

Figure 2. Funding sources of U.S. FPCs (n = 146)

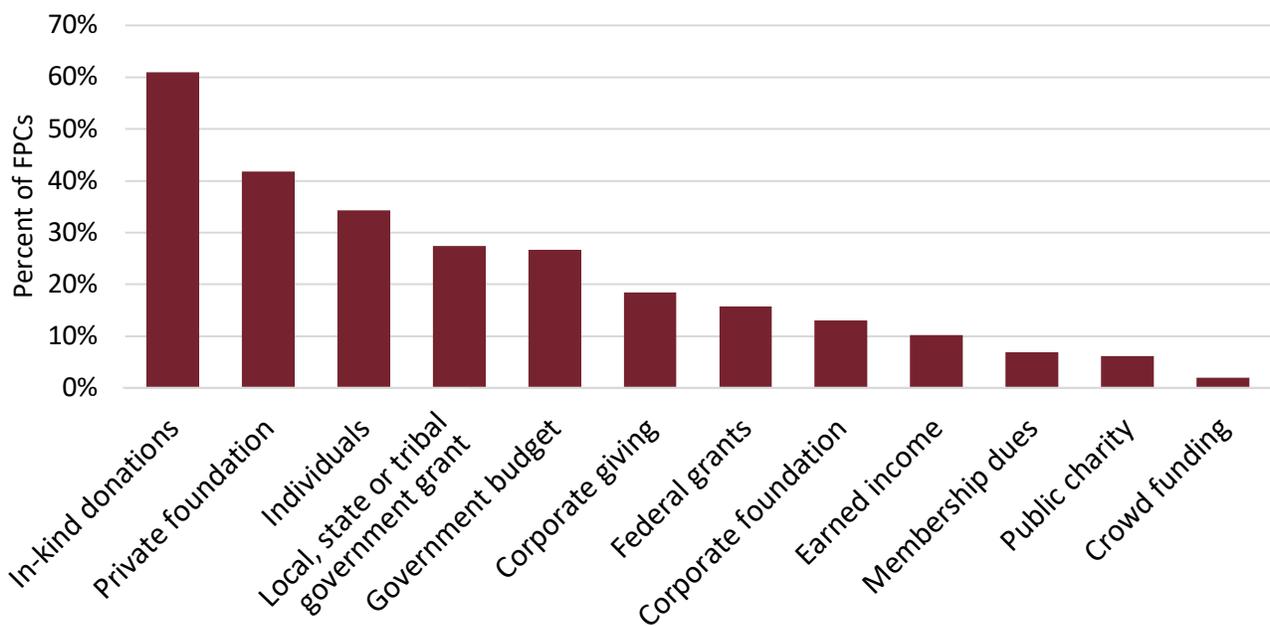


Table 1. Potential funding sources for FPCs

Funding source	Example
Local, state or tribal government agency budget	A line-item in the city budget is dedicated to FPC activities each year
Local, state or tribal government grant	FPC receives a grant from a state agency to conduct an assessment of retailers accepting food assistance benefits
Federal government grant	FPC receives a grant from a federal agency to conduct a community food assessment
Corporate-sponsored foundation	A private foundation set up by a corporation (but separately administered and subject to IRS foundation rules) gives a grant to an FPC for operations
Corporate giving program	A company provides employees the option to donate to an FPC through an employee giving program
Private foundation	A local family foundation agrees to fund a staff position to coordinate the FPC
Individuals	Individual members of the public donate to an FPC
Membership dues	Members of an FPC pay an annual fee to participate in the FPC
In-kind donations	A business, organization or local government donate event space, materials, or staff time to an FPC
Crowdfunding	FPC raises money through a website such as GoFundMe or Fundly
Earned income from goods and services	FPC sells materials, like a local foods business guide, it has created to raise money
Public charity	FPC receives a grant from an entity that derives its funding primarily from grants from individuals, government, and private foundations, and conducts direct service or other tax-exempt activities but may also engage in grantmaking activities

St. Louis (MO) Food Policy Coalition

- Individual donations • Private foundations • Federal grant •

For the St. Louis Food Policy Coalition, a bit of “seed work” led to a seed grant that got the coalition off the ground. While she was a law student and working for Missouri Coalition for the Environment (MCE), Melissa Vatterott wrote a [report about the St. Louis foodshed](#), published in fall 2014.

One of MCE’s members was excited about the report and gave a generous donation to help MCE continue working in this area. This led to a four-month outreach effort that brought together 12 food system stakeholders. After spending six months developing their framework and priorities, they launched the St. Louis Food Policy Coalition (STLFPC) in fall 2015.

The STLFPC launched with a two-year \$120,000 grant from the Missouri Foundation for Health, which has a focus on fostering health equity, especially for youth, that dovetailed well with the STLFPC’s priorities. The grant offered general support for advocacy, which included covering the staff time that Vatterott devotes to the STLFPC. When the two-year grant expired, the STLFPC received a one-year extension. As Vatterott explains, “we are so fortunate because my organization is an advocacy organization and there are so few [general] advocacy grants out there.”

MCE, as the backbone of STLFPC, has used the funding to support advocacy around reducing inequities in access to fresh produce, passing a backyard chicken ordinance and a bill to support the sale of agricultural products from urban farms and community gardens, and creating a process for residents to buy vacant land to preserve green space. Besides being a convener of the STLFPC, Vatterott also does work for MCE on state and federal policy, and keeps coalition members up to date on it.

One advantage of a general support grant is that, unlike a project-specific grant, it does not require MCE to show process numbers such as how many community gardens they initiated or how many food-related laws they helped pass in order to prove that the funding has been well-spent.

Since October 2017, MCE has also had a staff member devoted to farm-to-institution procurement, a position that was half funded by a USDA Local Foods Promotion Program grant and half by a local foundation supporting her community engagement work. Much of the work is aimed at connecting sustainable farmers in the region to new markets in the St. Louis area, including meeting with representatives from restaurants, grocery stores, local food procurement companies, schools, and hospitals to determine their level of interest in, and barriers to, buying from local sustainable farmers.

The STLFPC pitches itself to funders as a convening body that facilitates new collaborations between diverse organizations that are working on food system issues but have not worked on them together. For example, there are numerous non-profits in St. Louis working on nutrition, health, urban agriculture, and social justice issues. The STLFPC brings them together to advance a thriving local food system that supports the health, community, environment, and economy of the greater St. Louis area.

In doing so, the STLFPC has raised the profile of food systems work in St. Louis and has been a source of advice for local foundations that have come to recognize the importance of food systems issues. Some of the STLFPC’s member organizations have also received support from these foundations.

Maine Network of Community Food Councils

- Private foundations •

The Maine Network of Community Food Councils has been pushing the fundraising envelope in recent years by using a funding model called shared gifting. This model allows a peer group of grantees to decide how a pot of money should be distributed among themselves, after they have read each other's funding proposals and heard presentations based on them.

The Maine Network of Community Food Councils started back in 2010, convening the few local councils that existed in the state at the time. As the number of local food councils in the state grew, one of the Maine foundations that was funding the Maine Network (the Broad Reach Fund, a donor-advised fund working through the Maine Community Foundation) wanted to see most of its funding dollars go toward supporting the local groups. Around the same time this request was made, the Network learned about the shared gifting project that RSF Social Finance in California had developed. [RSF describes the shared gifting process](#) as “moving control of grant funds from donors to organizations” and explains that “the group uses its collaborative wisdom to determine the best use of the funds.”

The Maine Network modified the shared gifting process to fit its network and is now sharing about half of its funding with local councils. An RFP goes out to the dozen or so councils around the state, and each responds with a two-page proposal about what they want to do over the upcoming year and how much money they think they need. All the councils then meet to decide how their pot of money is to be divided, based on their collective assessment of the proposals. After all the councils have presented their proposals and discussed them, each council uses a ballot to choose how it thinks the funds should be divided. If one council has a particularly sexy proposal that draws most of the votes, it might volunteer to put some of that money back in the pot, if the allotment is greater than their perceived need. Councils generally receive at least \$1500 each, with a possibility of increasing to up to \$2000, through this process.

The councils follow up after the proposal selection process during monthly meetings where they give updates on their projects, including challenges and lessons learned.

From a logistical perspective, this model is enticing to funders because they can make a single grant to the Network that then gets divided up amongst many councils, reducing the paperwork the funder has to do. The Network is also exploring doing shared reporting and evaluations of the local councils' efforts. The most challenging aspect for the Network has involved trying to figure out how to

EXPERIMENTING WITH EVENTS

One local council in Norway, Maine, Community Food Matters, has experimented with an innovative fundraising strategy – a community food festival. The idea was inspired by the Common Ground County Fair, a large annual fair for organic farmers and gardeners that raises most of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association's operational funds each year. Community Food Matters raised money through sponsorship for the Foothills Food Festival, with the goal to use any surplus, after covering the costs of the festival, to support council work. The surplus is growing each year, but Community Food Matters is working on expanding it to cover more of its annual needs.

streamline the payment process, as it can be lengthy distributing the payments through the Network’s fiscal sponsor (a hospital) to individual councils’ fiscal agents.

[RSF points out](#) that **the shared gifting model “frees the recipients to create mutually beneficial collaborations not likely in typical competitive [funding] models.”** Ken Morse, former coordinator of the Maine network, has seen this phenomenon first-hand. “We talk a lot about how the heart of networking is sharing – sharing information, peer-to-peer learning, but more than anything it’s sharing resources.”

All this sharing of information and lessons learned “tends to accelerate innovation across the network,” according to Morse. For example, the Good Food Council of Lewiston-Auburn passed a food charter in 2016, shared its lessons, and spurred other councils in Maine to start developing their own food charters.

Greater Cincinnati (OH) Regional Food Policy Council

- Private foundations •

The Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council has had success in raising most of its operating funds from local foundations interested in health and sustainability. The FPC is an initiative that spun out of Green Umbrella, a local sustainability alliance that works to bring together different organizations across the region that have common interests. Green Umbrella had a Local Food Action Team that was interested in local sustainable food systems, and leveraged their partnerships with several local funders and one national funder to secure funding for establishing the FPC and its early work.

However, the Council is now in a transition phase in terms of funding, as it appears it will lose those its two primary funding sources for disparate reasons. The Council maxed out the number of times it is allowed to apply for grants through its national funder; meanwhile, a significant local funder redirected its health-focused funding efforts away from food systems issues and towards other public health priorities.

“We’ve had great relationships with our funders – they’re just changing their strategic priorities,” said the FPC’s director, Michaela Oldfield.

To smooth this transition, the council is talking with a funding consultant about ways to diversify its funding portfolio. Some ideas include organizing conferences with sponsorship packages and looking into how to break its broader policy and systems level work into smaller, discreet projects that can produce short-term outcomes that may be more appealing to funders. Oldfield has also attended a funding boot camp for food system leaders to help with developing a funding strategy. Lastly, the Council continues to engage with family foundations that have provided small grants in the past, seeking to increase funding from those sources.

One challenge the Council has faced involves funder priorities. Many foundations want to fund initiatives aimed at health or environmental systems change rather than policy advocacy. They frequently want to fund collective impact work, but don’t want to fund staff time necessary to organize meetings or want to see tangible impacts quickly when coalition and policy work take time. Collective impact work requires operational funding and time to generate results. **Oldfield wants to articulate to funders how some of her council’s policy advocacy can serve a systems change agenda.**

Montgomery County (MD) Food Council

- Private foundations • Earned income • In-kind donation • Local government agency budget •

The Montgomery County Food Council in Maryland started in 2012, with initial funding from the County Executive for a part-time coordinator. The council expanded to receive additional support from private foundations, primarily from a family foundation and a regional foundation. One of these two funders decided to stop funding food council work, which left the council with a large funding gap.

In looking to bring in funds from other sources beyond the county government and private foundations—especially ones which they have more control over since politicians’ and foundation priorities may shift—the council decided to create the [Montgomery County Food and Beverage Guide](#). The 2017 guide was created in collaboration with the county’s Economic Development Corporation, which provided in-kind use of its graphic design team to create a “MoCo made” logo and a cover for the guide, as well as some sponsorship funding. The 2018 Guide was expanded to feature sponsorships from local food businesses, including retailers and farmers markets where MoCo Made products are sold, and other community partners.



While it does not bring in a lot of revenue, the guide does cover some of the council’s costs and serves as a valuable outreach tool.

Businesses pay \$25 to be in the guide, and this gives them access to the “MoCo made” logo, priority invitations to sales and networking events, and access to other small business support resources. The guide includes 68 food and beverage businesses in the county and is fairly comprehensive in its coverage of the county’s packaged food companies. With the newest guide, the council for the first time reached out to the county’s food producing farms. So far, their

representation in the guide is small, but council Executive Director Heather Bruskin expects that number will only grow, as there are 200 food-producing farms in Montgomery County. The council has distributed over 6,000 copies of the guide and is currently developing an online searchable database of local food and beverage products, to increase distribution while reducing the environmental and economic costs of print-only circulation. They also regularly share the guide with elected officials and community stakeholders, as it helps highlight the council’s work.

The “MoCo made” logo has also generated support. The council sponsored a MoCo Made Happy Hour series this year, where they are partnering with local breweries on events where 10% of sales are contributed to the council. The “MoCo made” logo has also been used to make t-shirts, onesies, and other promotional materials for sale at events and now being piloted for retail at a few local stores.

The council plans to more actively pursue individual donations and corporate sponsorships, now that it has recently been awarded 501(c)(3) status and is developing other public-facing initiatives to increase awareness of their initiatives and local food system issues.

New Orleans (LA) Food Policy Advisory Committee

- Private foundations • In-kind donation •

The New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee (FPAC) has a staff of one – and that one person, Elisa Munoz, has worked through inconsistent funding for her food council work. Munoz is a former W.K. Kellogg Foundation fellow. When that fellowship ended, she applied to Kellogg for a one-year planning grant to do more food council work in New Orleans. That grant ran out in September 2018 and though they recently received a two-year grant from the Foundation, there was a gap of six months, during which Munoz worked without pay in order to maintain momentum. As Munoz explains, “Foundations say they want to fund systems and policy work, but when it comes down to it, foundations want to fund programs rather than policy work.”

Munoz is now pursuing a different strategy, seeking funding for the FPAC as part of larger grant applications by other organizations. The FPAC is written into these grants to provide policy work, technical assistance for projects, value-chain coordination, or convening work. The FPAC is included in grant applications related to corner store projects, food aggregation projects, and farmer assistance programs. One grant would have them help with connecting farmers to universities, hospitals, and other large institutions. But, this kind of work does not excite funders as much as, for example, projects that link youth with jobs. **As Munoz theorizes, “maybe FPCs aren’t sexy enough for big grants but could be part of big sexy grants [that foundations] give to programs.”**

Munoz is currently paid for her work as a contractor of the FPAC through the Tulane Prevention Research Center, FPAC’s fiscal sponsor.

This is the second iteration of a food policy council in New Orleans. The first one went dormant in 2011, as it had been mostly a place where organizations gave updates on what they each were doing. It released two reports and enacted specific policy change around access to fresh food in post-Katrina New Orleans and school food but after that never developed action items for the group as a whole.

In 2014, there was a community meeting to see who would be interested in restarting a council. Munoz expected the same 10-15 people to attend, but instead 40 showed up. So, the FPAC was revived, but it encountered the same lack of direction, and that’s when Munoz reached out to Kellogg for the planning grant.

“I’ve heard people say that planning money is the hardest to get, but that’s the main funding we’ve received until now,” Munoz said.

There seems to be a consensus in the community that a food council is needed. Munoz receives a lot of calls for help with networking or with technical assistance. She is being careful not to direct funding away from partners for work the partners could do themselves, and is eager to ensure that the FPAC is adding value to local food work.

Madison (WI) Food Policy Council

• Local government budget • Local government grant •

As a municipally established and funded entity, the Madison Food Policy Council is not required to seek external funding, although it has secured grants to complement municipal funding in the past. The City's Food Policy Director George Reistad is a staff member within the Mayor's Office, and the council's other 23 members are volunteers. In addition to Reistad's salary, the City of Madison in its 2018 and 2019 budget approved a \$10,000 operations budget for the food policy council, meaning the council can now pay to do things like table at events, develop promotional materials, and support projects that spring up from the council's seven different work groups.

One of the biggest advantages of having a food council housed in the Mayor's Office is that it obviates the need to fundraise for soft money to function. Madison's previous mayor had established that food access and security would be a top priority, even co-chairing the United States Conference of Mayor's task force on food policy from 2016-2018. After the administration changed in 2019, the new mayor has continued to support the city's food policy work. This demonstrated that **as long as the city has a mayor who is supportive of the Council's work, its funding is secure**. [The Council was established through a city ordinance](#) and Reistad is a civil servant rather than a political appointee, which also helps with continuity.

Reistad's tasks include managing two food-related grant-making programs: [The SEED Grants program](#) and the [Healthy Retail Access Program](#). The SEED Grants program, launched in 2014, provides \$50,000 worth of grants each year to food access projects, funded through the Mayor's budget appropriations. Meanwhile, the Healthy Retail Access Program—launched in 2015 at \$300,000 per year through the Economic Development Division's capital budget—helps retailers in [priority neighborhoods](#) increase access to healthy food through improvements such as expanded inventory, equipment purchases, or low or no-cost transportation for customers. The Healthy Food Retail Access Program can also support non-traditional food sources such as bulk buying clubs and mobile grocers.

The SEED grants have gone through six funding cycles through 2019, disbursing \$300,000 to over 50 community organizations. The most recent round of funding drew 19 applications requesting over \$125,000, or more than 2.5 times the amount of money available. Reistad sees that as a sign of strong demand in the community for these kinds of funds. He said this grant program is also popular because it is less restrictive than other funding sources. For example, the program is willing to pay for equipment *and* staff time, unlike most other funders.

Reistad has also been working on revamping the Healthy Retail Access Program, which was initially modeled after healthy corner store initiatives. That was not an ideal model for Madison, which does not have the population density to support the corner store business model on a widespread scale. A recent evaluation of the program by the Food Trust and American Heart Association showed a need for dedicated staffing, a streamlined application process for small businesses unaccustomed to applying for grants, and a set of stated goals for the program. Up until now, the program has merely identified food retail business owners operating in priority neighborhoods who needed infrastructural improvements to their businesses.

Indy Food Council (IN)

- Federal government grant • Public charity • Individual members •

The Indy Food Council has been going through a funding transition period. The council was formed in 2014 with support from the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), a nationwide public charity that supports community development projects through grants, loans, and investments. The LISC contributed funding to support the council, a mini-grant (The Indy Food Fund) for food related initiatives in the city, as well as a part-time staff position for the council. The LISC shifted its priorities and stopped supporting the council at the end of 2017.

The Council received two federal Partners for Places grants for \$50,000 each, but these were temporary grants. The council also received in-kind support in the form of a staff position from the Office of Sustainability, but that position was eliminated in the beginning of 2018.

Seeking to find alternative revenue sources, the Council launched a membership fee system. The council was originally a 25-member board, but they opened it up so that anyone can join. Individuals who would like to be members are asked to contribute \$100/year, \$50/year plus volunteer five hours/year to grow the food system, or 10 hours/year of volunteer activities. They do not specify which activities would count for volunteering – as long as it helps improve the food system. They also have a membership category for corporations (\$250/year or 25 volunteer hours/year, which could be spread out among multiple employees) and philanthropies (\$1000, straight donation). **They hope this membership fee system will serve as a solution for the council's funding and capacity issues.**

The council spent about four months developing this strategy before it was adopted and implemented on January 1, 2018. They hoped it would attract at least 5-6 philanthropic donations, along with individual and corporate member support. The LISC was the first member to join – it wanted to remain part of the discussions but didn't want to be the primary funder. So far, most members have signed up for the non-financial membership option and they are still working to figure out how to corral those members to contribute to the food council capacity via volunteer hours.

The council is continuing to look for support from foundations as well. They have reached out to ten potential backbone agencies, including the local health department, a public university, an Extension office, a local hospital, and the City government, in an attempt to secure consistent funding. As of now, on the philanthropic level, only the City of Indianapolis has contributed a financial donation and Newfields (formerly the Indianapolis Museum of Art) has contributed with in-kind donations. Meanwhile, the council continues to function with in-kind support from the City's food program coordinator and a VISTA member, both based in the City's Office of Public Health and Safety.

Conclusion

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to finding adequate and consistent funding for FPCs. The stories described in this guide reveal several common themes—of both successes and challenges—to funding FPCs. FPCs are finding private foundation funding to be inconsistent and unreliable, and are turning to innovative strategies to diversify their funding streams. Of critical importance is the ability of FPCs to demonstrate the value they add to their communities to all types of funders.

Even well-funded councils go through periods of transition in funding, as half of the councils in this guide discussed. These are often precipitated by the short-term nature of grants, which do not coincide well with the reality that coalition, policy, and systems change work can take years to demonstrate outcomes. The shifting nature of funder priorities poses another common challenge for FPCs. Funders may invest in food systems work for a period of time but then decide that other emerging issues, like gun violence, school budget shortages or opioid addiction, take precedence.

For FPCs embedded within—and fiscally supported by—government, such as the Madison Food Policy Council, maintaining support throughout transitions in administrative priorities is key to supporting FPC staff and operations. It is important for FPCs to understand the priorities of an incoming administration and be able to demonstrate how their work aligns with those priorities in order to maintain support through political changes. Demonstrating alignment with local government priorities is not unique to FPCs embedded in government, this strategy can help any FPC looking to garner financial support from local government.

Demonstrating the value of FPC work for a community is also a strategy that FPCs can use to obtain grants from private foundations. This guide highlighted how FPCs can help reduce inefficiencies in local food systems through sharing resources and fostering new collaborations and coordination among existing food system organizations. This is particularly important to emphasize, given the inherent tension on many FPCs when member organizations (and often, the FPC itself) compete for funds from the same foundations.

Other strategies that FPCs are using to overcome challenges with foundation funding is to break apart their systems work into discrete projects, as the Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council is trying to do, or by being written into larger grant applications by other organizations, such as the New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee's strategy. The latter strategy may be particularly useful in helping funders realize that improving food system equity and resilience can coincide with addressing other social inequities.

Beyond articulating how their work enhances communities, councils are experimenting with innovative ways to bring additional value to funders themselves. The St. Louis Food Policy Coalition is providing a service to local foundations by being the go-to knowledge hub about food systems issues. Meanwhile, the Maine Network of Community Food Councils' shared gifting model both streamlines grantmaking processes and evaluations for funders and distributes funding decision-making power to local councils.

Other councils have also expanded their funding searches beyond traditional foundation and government coffers. The Indy Food Council's dues experiment seeks to build member buy-in for council

work, both in fiscal and logistic capacity. The Montgomery County Food Council and Community Food Matters seek to gain revenue through sponsorship, whether for producing guides or organizing events.

Ultimately, there is a need for funders to recognize the value of funding policy advocacy, staff time, and long-term networking/coalition work rather than solely projects or programs. This is something that FPCs and the Food Policy Networks project must pursue to continue moving the work of FPCs forward.

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