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Food Policy Councils in the Mid-Atlantic: Working Towards Justice

Sam Boden

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Food Policy Councils in the Mid-Atlantic: Working Towards Justice

By: Sam Boden
Introduction:

The global food policy of recent decades could be described as a “race to the bottom,” as governments apply amoral principles of neoliberalism in search of the cheapest places and ways to produce food, with little attention paid to the justice aspects of food production and distribution (Carolan 2013). Food policy in the United States inhabits this description while also being incredibly complex—the state and federal food policy processes require the cooperation and funding of numerous agencies and political operatives and are subject to the push and pull of competing private interests and public objectives (Wilde 2013). In the midst of this jostling for food policy space, the voices of citizens are often unheard. This is problematic, as food issues like food insecurity—the inability to acquire nutritionally adequate and safe foods—remains a serious problem for many Americans, with 14.5% of U.S. households categorized as food-insecure (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011). Additionally, the persistent dichotomy between America’s urban and rural problems (its consumers and producers, roughly) is increasingly pronounced, which further isolates consumers from food policy which affects them (Pothukuchi & Kaufman 1999).

There has, however, been a recent shift of food to the local level as part of what many scholars call the ‘alternative food’ movement. Composed of organizations like urban farms, farmer’s markets, food-based nonprofits and NGOs, and local food networks, the alternative food movement is having its cultural moment. One needs to look no further than the nearest Whole Foods grocery store, or even the grocery section in a Walmart, with their promotion of local, organic, or “natural” foods,

Despite its cultural rise, the alternative food movement suffers from ideological deficiencies. Guthman (2011, 146) describes the alt-food movement as more critical of what people eat (“healthism”) than the injustices perpetuated in the food system. This movement also tends to be exceedingly white and wealthy, which is not reflective of the communities they seek to serve—it perpetuates an “affluent, liberal habitus of whiteness” (Alkon & McCullen 2010). This is especially problematic as this movement purports to be something of a "people's revolution;" however, the means it employs are often exclusionary. The alt-food movement promotes ideological frameworks like the “100-mile diet” and “voting with your fork;” messages which encourage coexistence with bad practices rather than re-regulation of such practices (Isenhour 2015). Agyeman (2013, 94) argues that localized food production and consumption is the means by which our society may achieve a more just food system, but that we often confuse the ends with the means. Allen (2010) argues that often consumer-based local food efforts are so difficult to disentangle from the dominant political economy that they inadvertently reproduce social inequities.

As a response to the inequities in the alternative food movement, a focus on justice has been encouraged. This food justice is defined by Gottlieb and Joshi (2013) in distributive terms: “that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown and produced, transported and distributed, and accessed and eaten are shared fairly.” There is also an evaluative
component, as Allen (2010) argues that members of food movements must be willing to examine the forces that have configured the current food system and reflect upon which of their activities will move further towards social justice. Both the distributive and evaluative components of food justice must work in tandem to form a sustainable food justice movement. Ideally, food justice movements can create a political space for local citizens and encourage “policy from the ground up” (Wekerle 2004). One way in which this “policy from the ground up” can be encouraged is through food policy councils.

Food policy councils are, in many ways, the embodiment of food justice. While ideologically rooted in the alt-food movement, FPCs embrace a democratic participation model to encourage stakeholder involvement and amplify unheard voices. Purifoy (2014) argues that food policy councils are the ideal institutions to integrate the environmental and food justice movements at three critical points: public health and safety, ecological health, and social justice. FPCs are innovative, as their multi-sectoral composition contributes to their ability to pioneer programs, policy, and planning approaches that may not have been created without such collaborative efforts (Agyeman, 2013). One of their greatest democratic advantages is the ability to work on multiple policy levels, topics, and programs simultaneously (Scherb et al. 2011).

The literature on food policy councils reflects this status—although much has been written in recent years, there are many facets of these democratic bodies that could be explored in greater detail. FPCs can be formed by legislation, executive orders, grassroots organizing, or as initiatives of nonprofit organizations (Harper et al. 2009). According to an American Planning Association report (2011), they often share the same techniques for participation, including pursuing long-term strategies, offering tangible solutions, focusing on place-based activism, seeking government buy-in, and establishing formal membership structures. Generally, they fall into 5 categories: independent coalitions, councils housed in government, embedded in universities, autonomous 5091(c)(3) nonprofits, or part of a larger nonprofit organization (Fox 2016). The primary policy focus of most FPCs is food access, and most of this work occurs at the city, institutional, and county levels.

After getting started, FPCs face many barriers to success, in spite of the exponential growth in the number of FPCs in recent decades. Their location inside or outside government is crucial, as proponents argue that in-government FPCs provide the councils with legitimacy and the listening ear of policymakers, but critics say that independence from governments allows the FPC to critique the government more sincerely (Fox 2010). Keeping operational costs down is also a struggle, as the majority of FPCs do not have a full-time staff person, relying instead on networks of volunteers, and grant funding is hard to come by (Harper et al. 2009). Most importantly for this discussion, different structures have been employed to varying levels of success—some have relied on strong mayoral systems to appoint members, worked hard to recruit government liaisons, leveraged their government connections to raise budget support, or focused on a number of different issues, not just hunger (Dahlberg 1994). It is also clear that FPCs without missional clarity or cohesive communities are often susceptible to failure (Coplen & Cuneo 2014).
In sum: the food policy problem is clear and the alternative food movement is an insufficient remedy. Food policy councils seek to reshape the alternative food movement by employing strategies of food justice, but the research on food policy councils is limited. What has yet to be explored, after accepting that food policy councils are adequate solutions to the injustices in food policy, is whether or not food policy councils reproduce the inequities evident in the alternative food movement. On paper, a food policy council engages stakeholders in systemic change for food justice, but is this true of FPCs in practice as well? More specifically, what is the relationship between an FPC’s founding and organizing structure and its emphasis on justice?

It is this question that this research is centered on. A food-just approach defines goals within a democratic framework and partners with the constituencies that the council seeks to represent, and a structural framework that encourages participation and partnership is essential to this approach (Hassanein 2003; Clayton et al. 2015). The concepts of food justice upon which this research is focused are taken from food-justice literature (Including Holt-Giminez [2010], Gottlieb & Joshi [2010], Wekerle [2004]): democracy, diversity, production, distribution, culturally appropriate, and local. Each concept, from our understanding, is either fundamental to the formation of a food-just FPC or is an issue often overlooked by FPCs.

Background on FPCs:

We focused on three FPCs in the mid-Atlantic region: Baltimore Food PAC, Philadelphia FPAC, and Adams County FPC. Each group functions differently and provides a unique structure and origination story. These groups are a testament to the fact that FPCs come in a variety of shapes and sizes, while all being centered on the cultivation of a new kind of people-centered food policy. Adams County FPC is located in Gettysburg, in the heart of what is regionally known as the “fruit-belt” of Pennsylvania, where approximately 70% of Pennsylvania’s apple crop is produced. Both Baltimore Food PAC and Philadelphia FPAC are in urban settings that suffer from food scarcity and inequities. Below we detail the history and status, funding situation, participants and structure, and priorities of each group.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>History/Status</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Participants/Structure</th>
<th>Priorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adams County FPC</td>
<td>Formed in 2009 by a proclamation of city commissioners. It is an affiliated task force of public-private partnership “Healthy Adams County,” which is administered by county agencies and healthcare providers like Wellspan Health. Informal/no 501(c)(3) status.</td>
<td>No consistent funding; grant funding for specific programs.</td>
<td>Largely composed of food professionals from nonprofit sector. It has de-facto leadership, and new participants can start attending at any time.</td>
<td>Focused mostly on food-access programs, working with local grocery stores and SNAP retailers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baltimore Food PAC</td>
<td>Started in 2010 by the City’s food policy director, as a part of the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative, which is an inter-governmental collaboration between the Department of Planning, Office of Sustainability, City Health Department, and Baltimore Development Corporation. Embedded in government (meetings housed in city planning office.)</td>
<td>Staff and initiatives are funded by city.</td>
<td>Many food professionals and academics represented. Led by city-employed food planners, with fully open meetings. Participants use a workshop model to collaborate on policy and program initiatives.</td>
<td>Large focus on retail and access to healthy and affordable food. Networking is also a priority of the participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia FPAC</td>
<td>Established in 2011 by then-Mayor Nutter, as a recommendation from his Food Charter. It is an advisory council to the mayor on food policy issues.</td>
<td>Staff member (FPAC coordinator) is funded by the city.</td>
<td>Appointed members (mostly food professionals) are nominated by current members and confirmed by the mayor’s office (no nominee has been denied). Ex-officio members are on the Council as a function of their role in city government. 8 sub-committees are used to guide the focus of the group. FPAC coordinator leads meetings with the appointed and ex-officio chairs.</td>
<td>Focus on urban agriculture, “good food” procurement, food access.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adams County FPC mission statement:
“In the interest of health and sustainability, The Adams County Food Policy Council promotes the integration of the individual, community, the economy, and the environment. We engage with businesses, institutions, social service agencies, community members, the agricultural sector, and government to develop food policy and take action.”

Baltimore Food PAC mission statement:
“Baltimore Food Policy Initiative and Food PAC collaborate to increase access to healthy, affordable food in Baltimore City food deserts by addressing health, economic, and environmental disparities.”

Philadelphia FPAC mission statement:
“The Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council (FPAC) facilitates the development of responsible policies that improve access for Philadelphia residents to culturally appropriate, nutritionally sound, and affordable food that is grown locally through environmentally sustainable practices.”

Methods:

We used a mixed-methods approach, engaging participants in interviews and focus groups and attending meetings, as well as conducting a conceptual content analysis of FPCs’ websites, meeting minutes, and foundational documents. These methods were chosen because they were time-efficient and inexpensive, and the results of the content analysis could be measured up against the qualitative testimony of the interviewees. For the months of February and March, 2017, we engaged in participant observation by attending one general meeting for each groups (an “executive” meeting of Philadelphia FPAC, which is still open to the public, but the discussion is tailored more for leaders within FPAC). During the meetings of Philadelphia FPAC and Baltimore Food PAC, we made connections with participants who were interested in interviewing for our research, and followed up with phone interviews, 4 from each. We conducted a focus group with 8 members of Adams County FPC because they were the only group able to schedule such a meeting.

The interviews and focus group followed a semi-structured layout, with a consistent list of questions framed around food justice with freedom to pursue lines of questioning that opened up according to participants’ views. We aimed to interview a representative sample from each group, including both people who were recent additions and those who were long-time members, as well as people in leadership positions. We asked questions about origin and
structure, recruitment, and policy and program priorities. (For a full list of questions see Appendix A.)

We recorded all of our interviews and analyzed the conversations based on the concepts of food justice from our research: democracy, diversity, production and labor, retail and distribution, local, and cultural appropriateness. The mentions or lack of attention paid to certain topics were ruled as indicative of the FPCs’ emphases on food justice. This was then correlated to the interviewees’ self-reporting on their FPCs’ structure, composition, and recruitment techniques.

After the interviews were completed, the content analysis was coded based on the frequency of the following concepts: justice, democracy, diversity, inclusion, stakeholders, “culturally appropriate,” wages, workers, local, land, growers, and retail. I sampled 8 webpages from each group and all of the meeting minutes from the year 2016. This data was then compared with the testimony from the interviews to gauge FPCs’ priorities.
Findings:

We are presented with three types of food policy councils: an informal, citizen-led coalition of mostly food professionals working on programs; an open networking and policy advising group led by city food planners, catering mostly to food professionals; and a highly structured city advisory council led by appointed members. Our research seeks to explore whether these different structures influence or determine justice-oriented work. Based on the literature review, we identified six areas of food justice to explore in relation to food policy councils: democracy, diversity, labor and production, retail and distribution, cultural appropriateness, and “local.” The findings will be explained along these ideological lines. Each of these conceptual categories have an enormous amount of crossover with the others, as they all reflect the idea of justice and point towards a holistic view of food justice. The presence of these concepts (or lack thereof) indicates the justice orientation of each group.

Democracy:

Taking a wider view of food policy, food policy councils stand alone as islands of democracy in an undemocratic environment. As discussed in the introduction, food policy at every level has often been entirely devoid of citizen participation, and FPCs seek to create and advise “policy from the ground up.” All three FPCs placed a clear emphasis on group participation, and the leaders (both formal and informal) were highly accessible. Each leader described their group as led by the will of the people who make up the group—a claim backed up by the answers of the participants. There was a shared emphasis on democratization in all FPCs, insofar as they valued members’ input and provided space for every member to share.

Some members of the councils reported that they were limited by weak relationships with policymakers. For example, the manager of Philadelphia FPAC reported that although the group was a part of city government and was an advisory council to the mayor, they had not actually had a chance to offer policy recommendations to the FPAC-initiating mayor until the end of his term, nor had they been given the opportunity to meet with the new mayor. Other members reported that freedom from policymakers was an advantage, as it gave them the opportunity to advocate freely and remain unburdened by government regulations.

Inclusion of stakeholders was a professed struggle for the three FPCs we surveyed, as nearly every interviewee reported that they wanted more community members to join their councils. Adams County FPC, for example, identified a paradox: the people who work in the apple-picking industry in Adams County, many of whom are Hispanic, are the ones without access to healthy food. However, they did not have anyone on their council from the conventional food industry. The majority of FPC participants were food professionals, and of the people we talked to, more came from a professional food background than those that were mere individual participants in the food system (average citizens). The Baltimore food planners, attempting to remedy the lack of stakeholders, have established a resident food equity advisory, which is a group of community members who are paid to come in and share their views on food equity in order to educate the planners.
Diversity:

Diversity was a professed struggle for every group. As one member of Baltimore Food PAC put it, “There are a lot of white people at the meetings, but it’s mostly black people in [Baltimore] that experience food insecurity.” It was clear that most of the people who attended the meetings of the three focus FPCs were food professionals, and the majority of these professionals were white, although the groups reported serving majority Hispanic and black communities. One FPC member reported, based on internal surveys, that their group was approximately 80% white and 10% African American—the city is roughly 45% white and 44% black, based on US Census data.

“Most people at the table are white and upper-class [...] while they mean well and have the theory, they need some reality.”
– Racial minority member of Philadelphia FPAC

Skewed racial representation was a pervasive theme, but a lack of ideological diversity was often mentioned as well. Similarly, Adams County FPC does not have any conventional farmers in their group, who are key members of the community and would arguably provide an alternative perspective on food issues. ACFPC members reported, however, that they would like to recruit more farmers, in the same way that members of Baltimore Food PAC and Philadelphia FPAC expressed a strong desire to make their groups less white.

“Sometimes [Baltimore Food PAC] feels like the ‘yes, and...’ club because everyone has bought in [to the group’s goals] so much. Without friction, it’s hard to innovate.”
– Member of Baltimore Food PAC

In order to fully understand the racial and ideological makeup of these FPCs, we must establish an understanding of their recruitment practices. All three groups relied primarily on word of mouth and member recommendations for recruitment. Both Baltimore Food PAC and ACFPC have an informal membership structure, wherein anyone can attend and consider themselves a “member.” Philadelphia FPAC has a formal nomination process, where people are nominated (or self-nominate) to join the group, their applications are considered, and the mayor’s office appoints members for specified terms (no nominee affirmed by FPAC has ever been denied by the mayor’s office).
“A lot of recruitment happens within nested circles of contacts.”
– Member of Philadelphia FPAC

Production & Labor:

In our interviews and content analysis, there was little discussion of equity in food production or laborers’ rights, and that silence indicates that some FPCs do not view food policy issues relating to labor and production as primary concerns. Except for a few mentions of urban farmers, there were no references to food production or food laborers as policy priorities, nor were there any conventional food laborers at the meetings in which we participated. As we reported in the “Democracy” section, members of Adams County FPC expressed a desire to recruit farmers more intentionally.

Although the interviews with Philadelphia FPAC did not display an emphasis on labor and production, they addressed these issues through their Workforce and Economic Development Subcommittee. According to their website, this subcommittee works to create a “food system in which workers along the entire food chain enjoy quality jobs that provide economic stability and upward mobility.” Additionally, Philadelphia FPAC’s Good Food Procurement subcommittee’s definition of good food includes that which is “produced by fair labor.” These mentions indicate that Philadelphia FPAC, through its subcommittees, is considering the rights of workers proactively. The FPCs did have a focus on local food production and the urban agricultural labor that supported it, and many members of the FPCs were engaged in urban agriculture.

Retail & Distribution:

All three FPCs considered food access issues to be top priorities. When asked what their FPCs’ top three priorities were, almost every respondent said food access or food security. Adams County FPC, for example, was led by the paradox that many of the pickers employed in the fruit-belt do not have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. To remedy this, Adams County FPC works with individual local grocery stores to encourage healthy options. They employed methods such as encouraging local grocery stores and farmer’s markets to accept food assistance programs, fighting against price hikes at the beginning of each month (when SNAP beneficiaries have more to spend), and doubling SNAP benefits for healthier foods.

“This is a hugely agricultural region, but people aren’t getting the food that’s produced here.”
– Member of Adams County FPC
Baltimore Food PAC, through the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative, employs a Food Desert Retail Strategy that uses 5 different approaches for encouraging food retail in limited supermarket access areas: attract and retain grocery stores, improve non-traditional grocery options, increase healthy food availability in market settings, address gaps in transportation that affect access, and support innovative strategies to amplify the food economy. The other groups did not have this kind of detailed, policy-focused strategy to address food access issues.

Buying local was also important to the groups, especially Adams County FPC and Philadelphia FPAC. ACFPC has a local foods guide, which is put out periodically on behalf of the FPC, and Philadelphia FPAC promotes the “Philly Food Finder” and “Good Food Guide.” These are program-based strategies for encouraging retail and distribution of local food. Food access programs are a key aspect of food justice, and all three FPCs emphasized food access to varying degrees.

Local:

Although “local” was not often explicitly mentioned in the FPC interviews, most of the answers were locally situated and provided a clear picture of local-ness as a priority. For example, the second-listed goal on Adams County FPC’s website is to “strengthen local economy by supporting and promoting local farmers and businesses.” This seemed to be a shared goal among all three FPCs, especially as the groups were largely composed of members of locally-based food and agriculture groups. Local farmer’s markets and food pantries were well represented in the meetings we attended.

Culturally appropriate:

Cultural appropriateness necessarily follows from democracy and stakeholder inclusion. The groups reported a sustained interest in designing culturally-appropriate solutions to food system problems, but struggled to achieve these goals because their inclusion of stakeholders was limited. Because we found the FPCs lacking in democracy and inclusion, it was hard to gauge the cultural appropriateness of the FPCs’ solutions. However, Philadelphia FPAC’s mission statement provides an insight into the desire that FPCs have to address this concept of food justice: “FPAC facilitates the development of responsible policies that improve access for Philadelphia residents to culturally appropriate, nutritionally sound, and affordable food that is grown locally through environmentally sustainable practices.”
Content Analysis:

After completing the interviews, we conducted a content analysis, coding for the concepts listed below. The analysis had its limitations, as frequency of concepts seemed to be based more on the FPCs’ web presence than their emphasis on justice. However, the emphasis on concepts such as “diversity” and “stakeholders” proved that although the FPCs struggled in these areas, their own websites promote a better vision. Additionally, the lesser emphasis on wages, workers and cultural appropriateness is appropriate, given the results of the interviews.
Discussion and Applicability:

It is important to situate this discussion in an understanding of the breadth of good work that these three FPCs do for their communities. While this research undertakes a critical analysis of three differently-structured food policy councils, it is crucial to reiterate that these groups have an exceedingly positive impact on their communities through food access programs, food retail strategy, and policy advising. It is our hope that the findings and discussion in this research serve as guideposts for constructing more just food policy councils.

While all three FPCs were engaging in models of democratic participation, they struggled with making these successes worthwhile. Inherent within the concepts of diversity and democracy is the inclusion of stakeholders—this is arguably the most important aspect of justice for FPCs. A locally-based FPC that does not represent the values, concerns, or views of their locality is merely an alt-food discussion group. Troublingly, there was a clear lack of stakeholder participation reported by many interviewees, and neither open recruitment (as practiced by Baltimore Food PAC and Adams County FPC) nor appointments/ex officio membership (Philadelphia FPAC) were conducive to inclusion of stakeholders.

While Baltimore's Resident Food Equity Advisory is undoubtedly beneficial to a just food system, as it brings unheard voices to the policy table, it circumvents a food-just FPC approach by incentivizing involvement. A more just approach would determine how to involve these members in the food policy council of their own volition. Moreover, there was not a targeted push to recruit from underrepresented groups, specifically underrepresented persons who are also stakeholders in the success of the FPCs' programs and policy advising. The FPCs declined to utilize proactive recruitment techniques, preferring to encourage recruitment by word-of-mouth and website and social media updates. In contrast, more stakeholder participation could likely be encouraged by engaging in some form of proactive recruitment or membership structuring process. Possible strategies include targeted recruitment campaigns in specific neighborhoods and quotas for neighborhood representatives that must be satisfied.

Similarly, all three FPCs struggled from a surprising lack of diversity. The groups were all majority white, composed largely of food professionals; while this composition made the groups helpful for the professional networking of their members, such a makeup arguably skews the purpose of a food policy council. This is specifically troubling because the majority of communities the FPCs worked in were composed of mostly minority ethnic groups. Moreover, the blinding effects of ideological homogeneity are dangerous, as a key principle of food justice is incorporating and allowing ideological differences in the pursuit of equity. What truly catalyzes democracy is the presence of various perspectives and identities.

This diversity problem can likely be traced back to the recruitment practices of the groups, as they reported recruiting from "nested circles of contacts" and through word of mouth. This type of recruitment seems antithetical to diversity, as members recruit and nominate people similar to themselves. Many members also discussed how much they valued the networking capacity of their FPCs, which begs the question: what would encourage people
to recruit members who don’t offer benefits from a "networking" perspective? Thus, it is unsurprising that many of the FPCs' members looked similar and shared similar views on food and justice.

Additionally, two of the FPCs suffered from weak links to policymakers, which made it harder for their democratic successes to reach their full potential. FPCs must exist within a broader democratic framework in order for their democratic achievements to be worthwhile. Philadelphia FPAC reported that their only meeting with their first mayor had been at the end of his term; although there were city employees on the council, they lacked connections to policymakers. Adams County FPC had county planners on the council but no formalized policy recommendation process, choosing instead to focus on programming. While the enactment of food programs through democratic engagement is certainly worthwhile, it fails to fully embody the principles of food justice by addressing only certain issues (e.g. healthy options for SNAP beneficiaries) rather than seeking to change policies which perpetuate unjust systems.

It seems clear that a FPC structure with direct links to government can comprehensively enact this change more easily. Although, as ACFPC members pointed out, government-embedded FPCs have much less leeway because of official regulations, that embeddedness establishes direct contact with the policymaking bodies. Without a connection to food policymakers, food democracy does not transcend the confines of the FPC and thus necessarily falls short of its goal to change policy. Baltimore Food PAC offered a possible template for a healthy government link, as it is led by food planners and the food policy director, who are responsible for making policy decisions directly related to the lives of the FPC members; furthermore, that structure provides an arena for citizen advocacy, as the planners are put in the room with the people they serve.

There are other structural recommendations to be gleaned from these findings. Regarding cultural appropriateness, there are advantages to the subcommittee structure employed by Philly FPAC in designing culturally appropriate solutions. Each of the subcommittees is “laser-focused,” as one member put it, which allows them to examine the issue from a variety of angles and arguably tailor remedies specifically to the communities. While the lack of stakeholder inclusion made it difficult to assess the relationship between FPCs' structure and their emphasis on this aspect of food justice, subcommittees could be targeted towards food justice areas that are often overlooked, such as labor and production. (It is essential that these committees do not merely pay lip service to overlooked issues; the committees designed to tackle issues must be robust and well-supported.) The lack of intersectionality in this structure is disadvantageous, however, as the same member said: “all food issues are related to each other.”

Baltimore Food PAC and ACFPC were both highly accessible and flexible on which members can work on issues, so they also have advantages for designing culturally appropriate solutions. Nevertheless, without the affected constituencies represented in the FPCs, the groups will only be able to guesstimate at the cultural preferences of the communities they seek to serve. Community input is needed, as the knowledge of organizations will only go so far
to prescribe relevant solutions, and without appropriate solutions neither an FPC’s programs nor policies will be sustainable.

We found that local-ness was a priority for the groups, as it was threaded through many of the answers we received, including discussions of urban agriculture. However, local food and urban agriculture are issues that are firmly within the alternative food movement; as such, they often benefit from elevated importance in the policy arena. Because these topics are largely uncontroversial, their inclusion in the food policy councils’ work is not necessarily indicative of an emphasis on food justice. Moreover, FPCs are inherently local, as they are generally designed to trumpet the voice of the people in their region—we are concerned with which voices are being trumpeted. As of this writing, many essential voices may be missing from the table.

Thus, each of the three food policy councils were using food justice strategies in some ways, and had improvements to be made in other aspects. All of the FPCs need to address the lack of diversity and stakeholder participation, as these problems are central to the mission of a food policy council. The best way to address these problems is likely through reforming recruitment strategies and proactively seeking stakeholder engagement. Strong links to policymakers—whether through leadership from city employees (like Baltimore Food PAC) or open lines of communication with policymakers—seems to be essential to the success of FPCs’ democratic goals. Additionally, employing a subcommittee structure which targets areas of food justice that are often overlooked—like retail and distribution—could be one of the most appropriate strategies for structuring a FPC to prioritize food justice.

There were significant limitations to these research, as scheduling conflicts proved to be prohibitive for the level of involvement we sought as researchers, and the time frame was rigid. However, these findings make it clear that much more research must be done on the structure of food policy councils and how they can prepare for success; as the number of FPCs continues to rise, careful application of best practices will become increasingly important.

Conclusion:

To reiterate, the food policy councils we surveyed were making remarkable progress in the cities and county in which they worked. We were able to witness burgeoning food democracies, wherein people had a voice in the food policy process and could work for the betterment of their communities. Each group exemplified the power and practicability of the food justice movement. Our goal was to determine the relationship between FPCs’ structure and their emphasis on food justice, and we were able to witness the ways in which the FPCs functioned. It is our hope that the recommendations contained in this research will contribute to the fine-tuning of these groups and the formation of new, justice-oriented food policy councils.
Appendix A

Interview Questions:

1. How did your FPC start?

2. Can you explain the structure of your FPC? For example: its relationship with government, membership structure, existence of subcommittees, leadership structure, etc.?

3. Are members recruited or appointed by your FPC?

4. What is the member composition?

5. What are the main challenges that your FPC faces?

6. What do you consider to be your food policy council’s 3 top priorities?

7. Who would you consider a primary partner in achieving your mission and priorities?

8. Who are the primary stakeholders in the success of your food policy council initiatives?

9. Does the general public participate in your meetings?
   a. What ways do you actively promote your meetings?

10. How do you learn about and represent the concerns of the public?

11. How do the interests of members influence the direction of the FPC?
References:


