

Food Policy Councils Finding Their Way to Financial Stability

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As early as 1988, Clancy identified eight critical elements for successful food councils, which included funding for staff and projects. Decades later, funding remains a significant challenge for most councils. The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future's (CLF) 2018 census of US and Canadian FPCs found that 68 % of them have an annual budget of under \$10,000.

However, the lack of financial support has not slowed the growth of new councils – the number rose from around 60 identified groups in the US in 2007 to 341 in 2017. Notable differences in the levels of funding for FPCs can be found when looking at factors such as structure and age. Not surprisingly, FPCs that are housed in a non-profit (44 %) or are a non-profit (56 %) reported budgets of over \$10,000, likely due to fiduciary capacity. Twenty-seven percent of FPCs in government also report budgets over \$10,000. When CLF examined the age of the FPCs and their funding levels, it was found that a larger percentage of groups that were over 10 years old had budgets of over \$100,000 compared to groups that were under 5 years old. Further, as FPCs evolve, they may seek a more formal structure, such as that of a non-profit, that allows them to fundraise more aggressively. In addition, the longer an FPC has operated the more likely it is to develop relationships with various stakeholders including funders and become an integral part of the food system landscape.

Outside of in-kind contributions, which most FPCs receive, private and community-based foundations are playing an increasingly important role in supporting the work of FPCs.

Allocations from a government budget and government grants also support a sizable number of efforts, especially in Canada.

In making the case to donors, FPCs can point to several functions that are appealing:

- 1) FPCs play a convener role, bringing together people from various sectors to work collaboratively on projects and providing a forum for learning about different sectors.
- 2) When executed effectively, FPCs serve as a community voice by building community capacity to advocate for greater equity in the food system.
- 3) FPCs' technical expertise has proven to be a valuable asset for governments that lack specific knowledge or skills in food system related topics.
- 4) Finally, FPCs provide an overarching perspective on a complicated system by conducting food system assessments, developing food plans, working with institutions on food-related policies and recommending policy actions that promote equity, health and sustainability.

It is worth bearing in mind, however, that most donors are reluctant to support policy and advocacy work because the bulk of the resources are dedicated to a staff position, a line item that many funders would like to eliminate. Projects, on the other hand, appear to be doing something, even if that something is weakly evaluated and provides little in the way of systemic change. Thus, an FPC must make the case that investing in someone's time to organise advocacy activities for policy change is a worthwhile investment.