Washington Regional Food Funders

Strategic Plan
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Cover photo: Growing greens during the winter at Even’ Star Organic Farm in Southern MD.
Introduction and Guiding Principles

In 2011, approximately six foundations, all members of the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers (WRAG) formed the Washington Regional Convergence Partnership with the support of the (national) Convergence Partnership. The group wanted to better understand how philanthropic investments focused on access to healthy, affordable food were being made in the Greater Washington region. They also wanted to identify the steps needed to remove barriers to good food and to support the development of an equitable food system. The group quickly grew to nearly a dozen funders.

A scan of members’ investments in the regional food system revealed an imbalance in funding across different elements of the system from land to fork, and in where these investments were being made in the region. For the period 2010-2012, the bulk of member investments were focused on marketing, consumer education and access in Washington D.C. and less so in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs. There were fewer investments to support the supply-side of the food chain, especially food production targeted to low-income communities.

Their assessment of opportunities for building a more equitable food system also revealed the need for a stronger equity frame. In a series of stakeholder interviews, they learned that few of the staff and leadership “working on the front lines” to tackle food insecurity were members of marginalized communities in the region. Organizations interviewed also spoke of community members who desired to be more involved in the business of the regional food system, but didn’t have experience getting start-up loans, writing grant proposals, or networking with institutional funders.

In 2013, they continued their work by holding meetings and several major convenings for stakeholders within the regional food system, including funders. These included a gathering of area food policy councils and a learning event on the function and role of food hubs in building a more equitable food system. Building on the theme of equity, they also supported a WRAG-wide event on understanding unconscious bias.

In 2014, the group renamed itself Washington Regional Food Funders (WRFF). It functions as a work group of WRAG.

WRFF work is informed by several guiding principles. These include:
- keeping considerations of equity at the forefront
- collaborating to bring together a broad range of stakeholders committed to improving access to good food within the Greater Washington region
- increasing opportunities for small and medium-sized farmers within the communities of the broader Chesapeake Foodshed to supply good food to Greater Washington.

Good Food is:

- **Affordable** to and accessible by everyone.
- **Healthy** and provides nourishment that enables people to thrive.
- **Fair** with no one exploited involved in its creation.
- Environmentally **sustainable**.

*Adapted from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation*
WRFF defines the Greater Washington region as the member jurisdictions of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG). This region (shown at right) includes nearly 5 million people, 22 local governments, 2 States and the District of Columbia. One MWCOG report found that products grown in Greater Washington comprised little of the total food sold here.

Many are working to increase production in Greater Washington, however, farms beyond the region will remain important to supplying it in the future also. The larger Chesapeake Foodshed (shown at far right) is a way to delineate this area. It has been conceptualized as the 100 mile radius around Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, MD. It includes portions of DE, MD, PA, VA, WV, and all of Washington, D.C.

Our Vision

An equitable food system in the Greater Washington region which makes good food available to all, harms none, nourishes bodies, communities, and ecosystems, and provides all involved in the supply chain with a livable wage.

Our Mission

Washington Regional Food Funders envisions a cohesive framework for action to ensure access to good food throughout the Greater Washington region within the next 5 years.

For such an agenda to be developed and implemented within 5 years, better information and broader awareness about the opportunities and challenges specific to the region in ensuring universal access to good food is needed. Over the next few years, WRFF seeks to build a stronger foundation of information, especially around policy issues, and a larger coalition of collaborators, especially funders, for regional action to eliminate barriers to good food. This strategic plan is a key step in this process.

WRFF also supports collective learning and collaboration amongst a diverse group of funders that encourages action to advance equity in the Greater Washington regional food system.
Goals

The Washington Regional Food Funders has identified three goals to achieve its mission. The goals, objectives and strategies below focus on work for the next two years. They will be revisited by WRFF’s Steering Committee periodically.

Goal 1: Elevate policy solutions and opportunities for action and aligned investment in the supply side of our region’s food system – from production to aggregation and distribution – to advance equitable workforce solutions and sustainable practices.

Goal 2: Identify opportunities for action and investment to support increased demand for good food among regional consumers, particularly for those who do not currently have access to good food.

Goal 3: Maintain and expand a strong community of diverse funders with interdisciplinary interests to broaden the coalition committed to regional action to eliminate barriers to good food.

Each goal contains specific strategies within the fields of:
- Data
- Learning
- Collaboration
- Inclusion
- Policy

Keeping Equity at the Forefront

The Washington Regional Food Funders is committed to using an “equity lens” in considering opportunities to convene stakeholders and for collaborative action. An equity lens suggests a magnifying glass to identify avoidable, unnecessary or unintentional barriers, exclusions and lack of opportunities to achieving good well-being. It prompts a system which considers factors like gender, age, socioeconomic status, disability, language, culture, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and geography when planning, implementing and evaluating elements of the food system (not to exclude services or programs). It also encourages the system to consider the impact of discrimination, social cohesion, or isolation, levels of support, control over life choice; and includes the voices of those most affected by the barriers.
**Goal 1:** Elevate policy solutions and opportunities for action and aligned investment in the supply side of our region’s food system – from production to aggregation and distribution – to advance equitable workforce solutions and sustainable practices.

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**Data**

Strategy 1: Develop a matrix of emerging food hub and food innovation projects in the Chesapeake Foodshed as a follow-up to the food hubs learning event.

Strategy 2: Create a list of non-profit organizations working on other efforts to produce, process, aggregate, and distribute good food in the region, highlighting those that seek to benefit low income and marginalized communities.

Strategy 3: Develop a brief white paper or map of the infrastructure and workforce programs in place in the Greater Washington region to support the development of an equitable food system and where there are gaps in data and programs to address these issues.

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**Learning**

Strategy 1: Create an opportunity for funders to discuss finding from data collection efforts, Accokeek learnings on farm incubation, and other regional initiatives.

Strategy 2: Convene a day-long meeting on food sector innovation to provide public and private funders, decision-makers, and community leaders with information on how investment in this sector can benefit the food system and local economies.

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**Inclusion**

Strategy 1: Provide opportunities to learn from a diversity of on-the-ground experts on supply side issues, such as during the food sector innovation convening. Create space to hear directly from impacted low income and socially disadvantaged communities.

Strategy 2: Publicize the food sector innovation event to as broad a group of funders as possible.

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**Policy**

Strategy 1: Raise the visibility of food and agriculture as a regional planning issue, especially with MWCOG as well as existing networks of food and agricultural specialists.

Strategy 2: Determine what policy obstacles might be inhibiting the development of a farm incubator(s) and other types of food system infrastructure.

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**Collaboration**

Strategy 1: Disseminate the matrix of emerging food hub and food innovation projects in the Greater Washington region to public and private funders; highlighting any committed to sustainable production and workforce development.
Goal 2: Identify opportunities for action and investment to support increased demand for good food among regional consumers, particularly for those who do not currently have access to good food.

Data
Strategy 1: Create a list of food policy councils and other advocates for access to good food in the region. Develop a short survey for these groups on policy and systems accomplishments with respect to healthy food access and their interests and information needs moving forward.

Strategy 2: Develop a matrix of jurisdictions in the Greater Washington region that have determined the extent of food insecurity in their communities, including where there are not enough outlets of healthy, affordable, nutritious food. Note any policies or programs in place to increase access to good food.

Strategy 3: Develop a summary on the ways in which major hunger relief and food assistance organizations in the region are trying to improve access to good food within the context of cuts to safety net programs.

Learning
Strategy 1: Reconvene food policy councils and other advocates and stakeholders on timely topics, such as potential funding opportunities through programs in the 2014 Farm Bill and other governmental and non-governmental initiatives. Provide networking opportunities.

Inclusion
Strategy 1: Create opportunities to hear directly from impacted low income and socially disadvantaged communities about food access issues. This could include learning journeys or a town hall style meeting(s).

Strategy 2: Publicize the reconvening of food policy councils and advocates to as broad a group of funders as possible.

Policy
Strategy 1: Identify what action funders might take, including working with MWCOG or individual local jurisdictions, to share any policy obstacles impeding service providers from improving access to good food, as well as the possible responses.

Strategy 2: Determine if there are opportunities to change the way policymakers consider input from communities to facilitate more effective advocacy for good food.

Strategy 3: Understand what research is available on the affordability of healthy food produced regionally and where there are gaps in knowledge.
Goal 3: Maintain and expand a strong community of diverse funders with interdisciplinary interests to broaden the coalition committed to regional action to eliminate barriers to good food.

Inclusion

Strategy 1: Build trusting relationships and collaboration among members, retain current members, and recruit new members through the proposed activities.

Strategy 2: Rebrand the Washington Regional Convergence Partnership as a food funder group and identify Steering Committee members willing to refine the group’s structure.

Strategy 3: Share the benefits of WRAG membership with non-WRAG funder members.

Data

Strategy 1: Work with WRAG to develop a special section on the Annual Giving Survey related to food to establish a baseline of giving in this area among a broader group of funders.

Strategy 2: Develop a simple evaluation tool to be administered following convenings, with subsequent follow-up, to evaluate the impact of WRFF’s work.

How to Join Washington Regional Food Funders

WRFF welcomes new funders (WRAG and non-WRAG) who are aligned with the group’s guiding principles, goals, objectives and vision for removing barriers to good food in the Greater Washington region.

For more information about WRFF’s next meeting or event, please contact Lindsay Smith at smith@washingtongrantmakers.org

WRAG Membership Benefits

Founded in 1992, the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers is a nonprofit membership association of approximately 100 of the most well-respected foundations and corporate giving programs in the Greater Washington, D.C. region. Dedicated to improving the health and vitality of the region and all who live here, the WRAG network provides a robust arena for grantmakers to collectively learn, problem-solve, and develop cross-sector solutions to achieve greater impact with limited philanthropic dollars. For more information, please see www.washingtongrantmakers.org
**Goal 3:** Maintain and expand a strong community of diverse funders with interdisciplinary interests to broaden the coalition committed to regional action to eliminate barriers to good food.

**Learning**

Strategy 1: Provide diverse learning opportunities for funders.

Strategy 2: Develop a strategy for periodic electronic communications and for sharing educational resources outside of face-to-face interactions or other conversations.

- Create a web page to house resources and information

**Collaboration**

Strategy 1: Promote effective food system funding by identifying critical gaps in the regional food system and empowering funders to take action together, as well as encouraging other collaborations.

Strategy 2: Maximize opportunities for information sharing where common interests converge to improve efficiency and network development.

- Consider opportunities to engage with the Health Working Group, the Community Wealth Building Initiative, the Baltimore Area Grantmakers, the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network (Agricultural Work Group), MWCOG, the Chesapeake Foodshed Initiative, and others.

Strategy 3: Host a retreat with the Steering Committee before the end of 2014 to: review members’ investments and beyond dollar contributions to the food system, assess progress on collaborative action, and make updates to this plan.

Strategy 4: In 2015, assess interest in developing collaborative funding mechanisms.

**Policy**

Strategy 1: Develop an advocacy policy for member consideration.

*A meeting of food policy advocates and council members from Greater Washington (below, left) and the Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program (FVRx) at a DC farmers market (below, right)*
Some Opportunities for Potential Near Term Collaboration, Including Aligned Grantmaking

- Provide a space for funders to share and discuss grant opportunities with one another
- Create opportunities to share “beyond dollar” contributions that funders can make to advance systems change
- Support fruit and vegetable prescription programs (FVRx) to maximize opportunities for addressing nutrition-related chronic disease and access good food
- Support double value nutrition incentive programs for farmers markets and mobile markets
- Support food policy councils and coalitions
- Encourage local and State governments to leverage funder investments by providing matching funding or in-kind support on programs and issues such as those listed here
- Support emerging food hubs and other innovation projects with assistance for business planning and feasibility assessments, especially when the hub is committed to workforce development and using an equity lens
- Support scholarships to help facilitate participation from representatives from Greater Washington in the National Farm to Cafeteria Conference
- Support or otherwise provide assistance with capacity building for non-profits committed to improving access to good food

Above: Preliminary recommendations for ways that funders can collaborate to support the development of a more equitable regional food system. This list will evolve and does not capture individual member priorities and funding areas, or the full range of food-related programs in need of continued support.

Structure and Support

Washington Regional Food Funders is led by a food systems consultant and two funder member co-chairs. (At the winter retreat, the Steering Committee will make a recommendation for a schedule for leadership rotation.) The founding members of WRFF will function as the Steering Committee for the group along with any other WRAG funder who makes a financial contribution to sustain the work of the group.

Steering Committee members will provide input to WRFF’s co-chairs and consultant on determining agendas, recommending participants, and more. Steering Committee membership requirements for subsequent years will be determined at the fall retreat but will require a financial contribution to support the on-going work of the group.

All funders will be welcomed to meetings and convenings, however, non-WRAG funders making financial contributions to the work of WRFF in 2014 will have additional access to the consultant’s technical expertise. After one year of participation, non-WRAG funders wishing to continue working with WRFF will be asked to consider WRAG membership or make a financial contribution that supports its work. (Part of this contribution will cover administrative support provided by WRAG.)
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Washington Regional Food Funders
A Working Group of the
Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers