

Key Informant Report 2024

Conducted by the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice Workgroup

Background

Oakland County Food Policy Council (OCFPC) launched in 2017, and from 2021-2023 OCFPC members participated in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) learning cohorts facilitated by Michigan Local Food Council Network (MLFCN). This learning cohort launched the council's first DEIJ Workgroup. The original goal of the workgroup was to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion both within council operations and ensuring alignment with community priorities. The workgroup members developed a workplan which included objectives to increase community awareness of the council, increase engagement with the council, and diversify membership.

During a cohort learning session, a MLFCN facilitator recommended key informant interviews to further inform efforts surrounding community priorities and council engagement. The group members conducted 21 key informant interviews with community leaders and community residents. This report will highlight the findings from the interviews and will lay out next steps for both workgroup and council members.

Survey Process

Survey Design

Workgroup members developed a series of open-ended questions intended take no more than 15 minutes to complete for the workgroup member and interviewee. The questions were focused on top community priorities, connection to and understanding of equity and food sovereignty concepts, and lived experience. The survey questions were modified mid-interview cycle after feedback from community resident interviews, and two surveys emerged: 1) for community leaders, and 2) for community residents (see final questions in Appendix). Community respondents were received a \$25 gift card to compensate them for their time and acknowledge their valuable insight.

Identifying list of interviewees

DEIJ Workgroup members first created a list of community leaders to interview, and then those interviewed were asked if they recommended others to interview, commonly referred to as snowball sampling. Community leaders were identified and interviewed across the food system and related sectors.

Community residents were identified based on participation in existing food assistance programs, and such they are a convenience sample and may not represent the thoughts and viewpoints of all Oakland County residents.

Summary of Findings

Community Leader Voice

DEIJ Workgroup members interviewed thirteen (13) Oakland County Leaders. Key priorities commonly identified that emerged were workforce development and job opportunities and housing. Food was identified as a secondary concern. One leader interviewed stated, “It is more likely that housing will solve for food or social issues than that food will solve for housing or social issues.” Workgroup members assert this secondary focus being the result of more readily available and visible food programs (i.e. SNAP, WIC, and number of emergency food providers across the county).

Overall, the community leaders interviewed saw alignment with their organizations’ and the council’s priorities, specifically regarding focus populations, focus on equity, and food security and access. They did highlight an area of opportunity for the workgroup members which was to increase and improve communication with the community at large, including with faith-based organizations.

Resident Voice

DEIJ Workgroup Members interviewed approximately eight (8) Oakland County residents. The following key themes and concepts emerged from these interviews. First, and foremost, food security and access were a cited concern for the interviewees. Other areas of concern centered around the social determinants of health, including: cost of living; affordability of food, housing, and healthcare; access to transportation.

“I am currently receiving food stamps, WIC, and Medicaid. What me and my two babies receive as far as food goes is not enough to last the rest of the month. The last two weeks of the month I don’t have any money left and I’m so stressed out trying to find ways to provide what I need.”

When asked about concepts regarding food security and sovereignty, equity, diversity, and inclusion, interviewees understood these concepts and aligned their recommendations as such, focusing on policy and systems level changes that could positive address affordable food access, such as increasing SNAP benefits. They also recognized the disparity and impact access to healthy, safe, affordable foods and other Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) on their and other’s health and well-being.

“Adults and children that are eating a balanced diet, breakfast, lunch and dinner and drinking clean water free from lead and other contaminants are healthy, make better decisions, perform well in school, work, feel good emotionally, mentally and physically.”

Additionally, when interviewees were asked about alignment with community and OCFPC priorities, there was a split regarding priority alignment. This is a potential area of community for the Council at large to address.

Next Steps

The dichotomy between the community leader and resident priorities highlights the need for and importance of people with lived experience being involved in the discussion and solutions to address food insecurity. There appears to be a disconnect between people who have lived experience and people who are directing community improvement

Additionally, workgroup members note the conflicting priorities may have impacted past Council operations and priorities as a convener of community groups with minimal community capacity building and engagement.

The workgroup members identified two next steps for both the workgroup and council at-large.

1. Improve engagement at the community level, specifically with residents

The workgroup proposes creating a separate affinity group for community residents. Affinity groups are designed for a cohort to come together in a safe space, outside of regular Council meetings, and freely share ideas, provide feedback, and recommendations for the Council. The affinity group will be modeled after the Michigan Local Food Council Network's Advisory Council. Workgroup members recommend affinity group members be compensated for their knowledge and shared experience.

2. Convene a group of stakeholders invested and engaged in the social determinants of health

Community leaders cited housing and employment as two larger priorities over food access. This proposed group of stakeholders could assess inputs that are modifiable at the local level to possibly impact cost of living, specifically housing and employment, that would have a secondary impact on food security.

Appendix

Survey for Community Leaders

Key Informant Interviews

I am a member of the Oakland County Food Policy Council, and also work with [*name your role/organization here*]. The council's vision is that Oakland County has a fair, sustainable, and culturally friendly food system that encourages healthy eating for all. It's mission is to lead and advance food policy and system change that will increase equitable and healthy access for all.

Our council is looking to have a better understanding about Oakland County residents' needs regarding food access. We are having a series of conversations to understand the gaps in our community, like food access. Our goal is to align our work with community priorities and voices. We want to respect your privacy, we will not share specific details that would identify you or your organization, but will share lessons learned to help inform council's strategies.

From your perspective, what are the top 3 priorities/issues your community [or business, family] faces? (*If food is not top 3, ask why not.*)

Do your or your businesses priorities overlap with the OCFPC's priorities? (*If yes, how?*)

Key Informant Interviews

How do you see your priorities intersecting with food security, sovereignty, diversity, equity, and justice efforts? See *list of key definitions*.

What do you see is needed (i.e. resources, policy change, learning opportunities, etc) to address diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), food sovereignty, and food security in your community [business] etc.?

We aim to serve the residents of Oakland County. How could your skills or lived experiences impact food security work in Oakland County?

Key Informant Interviews

We want to get information from as many people in the Oakland County community as possible? Who else in your community (i.e. business network, neighborhood, school district, congressional district, etc.) would you like us to reach out to have this same conversation with?

Key Definitions

- **Diversity:** The presences of different and multiple characteristics that make up individual and collective identities
- **Equity:** The process of identifying and removing barriers that create disparities in access to resources, and the achievement of fair treatment and equity opportunities to thrive
- **Food Security*:** Consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life.
- **Food Sovereignty**:** the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems
- **Inclusion:** Creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to participate fully

Sources:

Oakland County Health Division, [Key Concepts and Definitions](#)

[2022 Michigan Good Food Charter](#)

*Feeding America, [Definition of Food Insecurity](#)

**[University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension, Definition of Food Sovereignty](#)

Appendix

Survey for Community Residents

Key Informant Interviews

I am a member of the Oakland County Food Policy Council, and also work with [*name your role/organization here*]. The council's vision is that Oakland County has a fair, sustainable, and culturally friendly food system that encourages healthy eating for all. It's mission is to lead and advance food policy and system change that will increase equitable and healthy access for all.

Our council is looking to have a better understanding about Oakland County residents' needs regarding food access. We are having a series of conversations to understand the gaps in our community, like food access. Our goal is to align our work with community priorities and voices. We want to respect your privacy, we will not share specific details that would identify you or your organization, but will share lessons learned to help inform council's strategies.

As compensation for your participation you will receive a \$25 Visa gift card, which will be mailed out to you within seven (7) business days of your participation.

1. Participant's Name:
2. Mailing Address*:
3. Phone:
4. Email:
5. Interview Date:
6. Name of Person Conducting Interview:

**This is the address where the participant will receive their gift card. If participants prefer, they can pick up their gift card at either North Oakland Health Center (Pontiac) or South Oakland Health Center (Southfield), but all other information still needs to be provided to Amanda besides address*

Key Informant Interviews

From your perspective, what are the top 3 priorities/issues your community or family faces? *(If food is not top 3, ask why not)*

What do you see is needed (i.e. resources, policy change, learning opportunities, etc) to address food security and/or the priorities you listed as top concerns in your family and/or community?

(After re-reading Council's vision and mission) Do your or your community's priorities overlap with the OCFPC's priorities? *(If yes, how?)*

Key Informant Interviews

What do these concepts mean to you or your community: food security, sovereignty, diversity, equity, and justice efforts? See *list of key definitions*.

We aim to serve the residents of Oakland County. How could your skills or lived experiences make a positive impact on these priorities for Oakland County residents?

Key Informant Interviews

We want to get information from as many people in the Oakland County community as possible? Who else in your community (i.e. business network, neighborhood, school district, congressional district, etc.) would you like us to reach out to have this same conversation with?

Key Definitions

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