

## **The Food Project – Final Case**

Ivelina Borisova, September 2005

### **I. Introduction and background to the Food Project**

The Food Project was founded in 1991 as a three-year, self-funded pilot project, working with two acres of land and twenty youth. The Food Project has since grown steadily into an independent nonprofit organization, based in the Boston area (with offices in Lincoln, Roxbury and recently Lynn), and a nationally recognized model of engaging young people in personal and social change through sustainable agriculture and community work.

The mission of the organization "...to create a thoughtful and productive community of youth and adults from diverse backgrounds who work together to build a sustainable food system" reflects the three main elements of the Food Project: *sustainable agriculture, youth development, and outreach and education*. In its vision to "create personal and social change through sustainable agriculture," The Food Project (FP) brings together youth workers and adult volunteers to grow an average of 250,000 pounds of vegetables annually on a 31-acre farm. About 40 percent of the produce is donated to homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and food pantries in Boston. The rest is sold through memberships in a suburban community supported agriculture program, through the urban Farmer's Market and through direct sales of produce and prepared foods to restaurants and whole food markets.

Aside from the rural and urban agriculture and community outreach, a critical aspect and strength of the Food Project (FP from here on) are its youth development programs, designed to build self-confidence, bridge differences of race and class, teach work skills, develop leadership, and increase civic awareness. While the FP has steadily increased the number of youth (ages 14-20) participating in the Summer Youth Program, it has also tried to create additional opportunities for the *continuous participation* of youth in the project once they have gone through the initial Summer Youth Program (SYP). In this way the FP has shown success in sustaining young people's participation and involvement in the work of the FP.

This case will focus precisely on the issue of *sustained youth engagement and commitment* to meaningful socially-responsible work. This is an exciting theme to explore in light of many organizations in the US and abroad currently trying not only to involve more young people in community work and leadership, but more importantly to *sustain* their commitment and involvement over time. Although the FP is still in the early stages of developing a stable path that will allow the continuous participation of FP youth in the organizational mission and vision, it has already shown success in this endeavor. One way that the FP has been able to provide its youth with opportunities for extended engagement has been through a tiered progression of stipended opportunities that begins on the land with 14-year-old crew workers, proceeds through an academic year Saturday program, an internship program and may result in a full-time staff position. This step-wise progression of involvement is best described by the youth: *"The summer youth program is like having a high school job, the year-round program is like a college job and the internship program feels like my first real job."*

While presence of opportunities within the organization to sustain youth involvement is a key factor to discuss, the more important question that this case is concerned with relates to the motivations and commitments of the young people at the FP who choose to continue working there after the initial Summer Youth Program. *What brings them back to the FP? What motivates them in their continuous involvement with the mission/vision of the project?*

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### **II. The Internship Program (IP)**

This case seeks to explore the theme of sustained youth engagement by focusing on the *internship program*<sup>1</sup> at the FP, which was developed in response to increasing interest among young people to continue to be involved with the Food project beyond the initial Summer Youth Program (SYP from here on). The number of interns has increased progressively each year from 5 in 1999 to 30 in 2005 (*please see exhibits at end*). Interns work in a specific part of the Food Project, most often guided by their own choice or preference, with direct supervision from a staff member who is expected to be a mentor as well as supervisor. (*Please see exhibits for a list of internships offered at the FP this summer and the number of interns working in each internship*).

Given the proven return rate of the interns to the FP (All of the youth involved in the Internship Program (IP from here on) has worked with the FP for over a year; many of them coming back to the project for over 2-3 years), the IP became the primary lens through which this case was constructed and conceptualized around the following few questions:

- 1) How do interns at the FP understand and describe their sustain engagement with the FP?
- 2) What personal qualities, values or beliefs, background and experience with the FP affect/guide/facilitate the desire of the FP interns to keep coming back to an organization like the FP?
- 3) What organizational characteristics, practices, values or expectations of the Food project as an organization allow and/or encourage young people to continue their involvement? How does the internship program specifically facilitate or encourage youth's continuous engagement?
- 4) What challenges does the FP/IP meet in its efforts to sustain young people's involvement?

To address the questions above I spent a month working alongside the thirty interns at the Food Project this summer and learning about and from them. In the development of this case study I worked with 18 female and 12 male interns, ranging from 15 to 18 years of age, currently working at the FP in various internship positions. Of the 30 interns, 12 are from African-American background, 14 are white Caucasian and 4 are from Latino background. (*Please see exhibits for further information*) The primary methods of my inquiry constituted of ethnographic interviews with the interns, observations and field notes I recorded on daily basis and a few more formal individual interviews with the interns. To provide context to my further discussion, I offer a brief excerpt from my field notes during my first day of work with the interns at the FP.

### **III. Brief Anecdotal Context**

...7:55 a.m. and the commuter rail finally stops at the Lincoln (MA) station. I am feeling a bit tired and anxious to begin my first day of what I consider ethnographic work at the Food Project. More importantly, as I walk off the train, sensing the heat beginning to accumulate in the air, I realize that I have no idea how to get to the farm land where I was to find some of the Food Project's interns. I look

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<sup>1</sup> The primary objectives of the internship program in the words of the Food Project organization is "to allow an opportunity to 1) build upon knowledge and skills they have acquired in the Food Project programs 2) learn job-readiness and job-specific useful skills and 3) engage in meaningful work that contributes to the organization."

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around wondering which path to take to the fields, and to my relief I notice a young African-American girl in a dark green Food Project T-shirt that has "INTERN" spelled on the back.

...As she takes me down the "shortcut path" to the farm, my learning experience at/of the Food Project has already begun.

*... 'I have to leave my home at 6:15 a.m. just to make sure I'll get to the train in time,' begins Dina. 'If I miss this one, I can't get to the fields until 9 and then I get a violation for being late. I don't want no violations this summer. So I wake up at 5:30 and make sure I get out of my house on time ...'*

I feel lucky listening to her- I left my house at 7:15 and clearly had no reason to complain because I wasn't going to get a violation if I were late for work.

*'When you get a violation, you know, it's no good. You lose part of your paycheck and you can't earn it back afterwards. Last year in SYP (summer youth program) you could earn it back, but this year the rules are more strict. It's like I have to be more serious, and there's more responsibility and stuff...'*

As we see the fields approaching my young companion kindly offers me sunscreen and bug spray- sure enough I have not prepared myself well for the day of work outside.

*'...My teacher told me about this program last year and I got interested. At the time I was 14 and nobody was gonna hire a 14-year old at a job. And I needed one- here they said it was Ok. So this was my first job...I really liked it. I liked the people a lot. So this year I applied again. They told me in the interview 'you can be a real intern if you want' and I was like 'yeah, I like that'. But I wasn't sure what position I would be good for. My first choice was the kitchen, 'cause I really liked the stuff we did in there during the school year. So it was the kitchen or this (Urban agriculture) that I really wanted to do and I got this...I really like Urban Ag (agriculture) – I like to be outside; I don't really care for being behind a desk or anything like that...'*

By the time we reach the farm land I feel encouraged by the ease with which I was able to talk with the young lady I had just met. In the distance I see a group of supervisors and youth harvesting carrots together and I get closer. I am immediately invited to participate in the work and one of the young people working close by explains to me the way to harvest carrots properly and "how many carrots should go into a bunch".

After a day of working with the interns on the farm, I am convinced that being welcomed in the work with ease and enthusiasm is the *norm* at the Food Project. Further, I note everywhere around me an attitude of acceptance and welcome- between staff, between youth and supervisors, amongst youth themselves, even towards strangers to the Food Project, like myself.

Alex, another intern, confirms my observation: *"Yeah, this is a good place to work - you will like it a lot for your project (the case study I have just described to her). I like working here because of the people. At the Food Project you are invited, nobody is discriminated against, and they make you feel good. They help you to improve yourself."*

#### **IV. Youth Engagement/Commitment Identified**

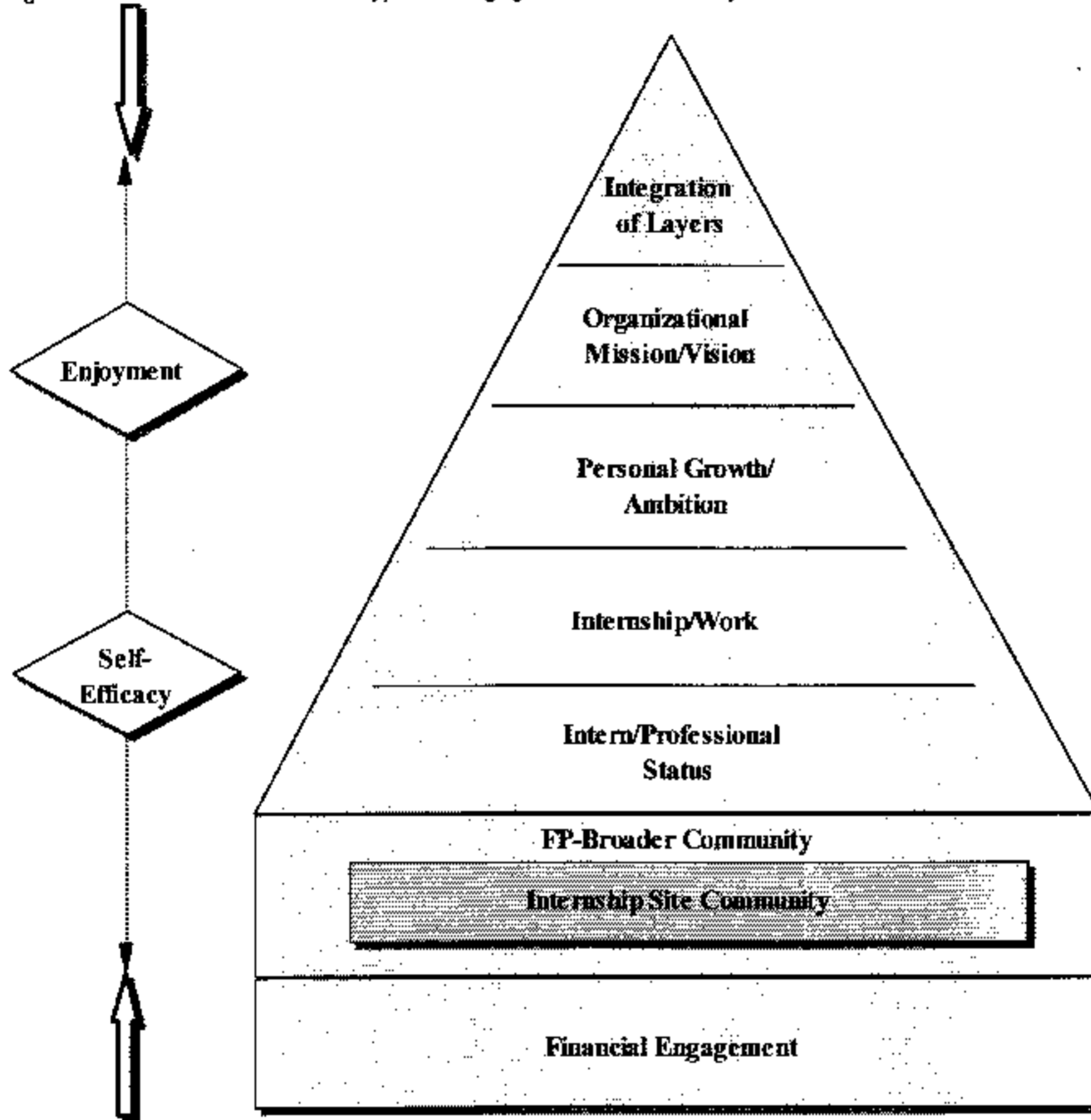
In my conversations with the interns from the various internship sites, it became clear that interns perceived their engagement with the Food Project not in a uniform way, but rather in a number of different ways (later I refer to these as layers/kinds of engagement) depending on a number of factors they discussed- personal background, the type of work they were involved with, the specifics of the internships they had chosen, the number of years they had experience with the FP etc. The questions I asked them over a period of a month provoked interns to explain their individual reasons that helped them decide to stay with the FP for multiple years and that pushed them to apply for an internship this particular summer. The questions also aimed at uncovering each young person's sources of motivation, enjoyment / satisfaction in what he/she does at the FP as well as the sources of disappointment /contention (if any) with their work at the FP. In a sense the last piece of questioning was aimed at allowing the youth to share their perception of what could potentially be better at the FP and at their internship site in particular.

As my work with the interns progressed over the summer, I began to perceive/understand the issue of youth engagement at the FP as a series of layers of a pyramid (in this case youth engagement pyramid). The different ways of engagement/commitment to the FP that the interns described translate into separate layers within the pyramid that nonetheless remained interrelated (*please see graph below*).

Although the layers of the pyramid may imply a kind of hierarchical structure amongst the different kinds of involvement interns defined, I do not envision the layers as a necessary progression of "low" to "high" kinds of engagement. Rather, I use a pyramidal structure in this case to indicate the extent to which each layer was *represented/shared* amongst the interns in their experience at the FP. For instance, the two very bottom layers - Financial engagement and Community belonging – always became the focal points in my conversations with the interns regardless of the number of years of experience each of them had with the organization, their racial or social background, or the specific characteristics of the internships they were engaged in. These two ways engaging with the FP I perceived as shared by all interns.

As one moves up the pyramid, the kinds of engagement described by the interns become less communal/shared and more internship-specific or intern-specific, in other words less representative for all youth involved in the program. What I find important to note here is that the specific pyramid shown below is based on all thirty interns I worked with. The layers of the pyramid are not fixed in the same way for each internship taken separately. Besides the first two layers, shared across all internship sites, the pyramid may look slightly different for each of the internships at the FP as well as for interns divided by racial or social background or by number of years of previous experience with the FP. I will try to further describe these possible differences in engagement in later section of this case.

Figure 1: A model of the different types of engagements identified by the FP interns



At all layers of the pyramid enjoyment and a sense of self-efficacy seemed to serve an important role for all interns in their experiences at the FP. Enjoyment at each layer looked differently – for instance at the first basic financial layer, enjoyment derived from the mere satisfaction in earning personal income, while at the Internship/work layer, enjoyment was derived from the content of the job and the meaning the intern found in what he/she did. A sense of self-efficacy, or youth's sense of personal accomplishment and success, was also an important piece of youth's continuous engagement with the FP. Similar to enjoyment a sense of accomplishment took on a different shape at each layer of the pyramid above. At the first layer for instance, feeling efficacious derived from youth's recognition of their

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independence and growing maturity in holding a job, being held to high standards that they tried to meet on regular basis. On the Internship Community level self-efficacy was related to youth's sense of belonging to a community that they contributed to in unique ways. Based in their communities they felt capable of taking upon difficult tasks and they felt supported and trusted that they will do a good job or that they can get things done in time etc. Most young people I spoke with recognized well the importance of feeling 'like you know you can do it, no matter how hard it is' in their feeling good about being at the FP and in their desire to keep coming back.

Based on these brief descriptions of Enjoyment and Self-Efficacy, I perceive these as cutting through all layers of the pyramid and serving as primary motivators and facilitators for young people's commitment to keep coming back.

### **V. Layers of engagement detailed**

#### **FINANCIAL**

As the pyramid shows, the first and most widely shared kind of engagement amongst the interns was the financial. All interns described the very practical aspect of their continued involvement with the FP – it provided them with a source of individual income that was important, and in some cases critical to their personal life circumstances and needs. Despite the differences between interns (based on social and racial background, for instance) they all confirmed that "working and earning money is important" to them at this age and that doing the work at the FP had it not been a paid internship, would not be desirable and for some of them impossible to commit to.

Financial engagement became an interesting topic of discussion with the interns. In describing their sense of maturity and need of personal earnings in order to feel independent, it became clear that the capacity of the FP to compensate its interns is critical in some ways for its success. On one hand paid internships allow for a genuine diversity amongst the youth who apply for the positions. For many of the African American youth from poorer urban areas and less well-to-do families working during the summer is not just an option, but a necessity and a requirement. Many of them noted that they could not have done the Food Project had it not been paid. *"I needed a job for the summer and I was ready to do anything... But getting paid was important. I couldn't do this, at the FP, if I wasn't paid. I might do it for a few hours per week, but I couldn't not work, you know. I need to help my mom. And I need to be independent too."*

On a separate note, developmentally many of these young people seemed ready and eager not only to earn their own income but even more importantly to feel like they are given responsibility and respect. In this way the financial engagement has further benefits – the weight that a paid internship carries for a young person's motivation to work well seems important to consider. To many of the interns monetary compensation holds a different level of responsibility and commitment than voluntary work. It is a powerful motivator for many of the young people not only to show up to work every day, but to also do good work and try their best. Most of the 15 and 16 year olds I spoke with perceived their compensation at the FP as a sign of respect for them and acknowledgment of their maturity on the part of the organization and expressed an appreciation for the FP in that realm. *"Being paid means that the effort we put is being respected at the same level as adults"*.

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### **Some implications/challenges**

Very few programs provide compensations for the work of youth at a young age. Often community service or social work is voluntary on the part of the interns, some programs even ask interns to contribute a fee in order to participate. Although it requires a lot of resources for a program to be able to compensate interns, I do argue here that it seems like an important piece in sustaining young peoples' involvement in positive community and socially responsible work as well as in allowing diverse groups of youth to participate in this kind of work, who may otherwise not be able to afford to volunteer.

I see two main challenges related to this layer of engagement. The first challenge relates to the sustainability of intern's compensation in programs that want to increase the number of youth involved. At the FP, interns stay for multiple years and each year they may apply to become a higher level intern, which would mean that they will not only get more responsibility at their site but they will also have a raise in their compensation. This kind of compensation progression may be difficult to maintain over time and also relates to the second challenge I see in the financial engagement of youth. That is the possibility that the financial side of youth's involvement may become too central in their experience at the FP and may take away from an otherwise intrinsic commitment to the work they are involved with.

### **COMMUNITY (FP Internship site)**

Aside from the sheer opportunity to earn money, interns insisted that it "isn't just the money". Almost all youth shared that they had other options for summer jobs. Many of them said that they would have been paid more if they had taken some other job they knew about. Choosing to stay at the Food Project did not seem like a default decision for almost any of them. Rather, their responses struck me as reflective and evaluative of the Food Project as a community where they felt respected and values in a way they did not believe they would be treated in many other jobs.

All young people I spoke with emphasized their connection and belonging to the FP community and often it was the community that most powerfully motivated them to return and sustain their involvement in the FP after the initial encounter with the program during the SYP. A young person summed it up "...I really like it here. At the Food project it is like no other job- you get to meet people, good people, and you feel respected here...It's like a good family- it makes you feel good about yourself, and makes you a better person in general."

The reasons interns described for why this community meant so much to them were varied. Aside from the shared "FP uniforms"- green colored T-shirts with the FP emblem, mentioned by most all interns, they noted the following characteristics of the community that seemed important to their desire to keep coming back:

#### **Diversity**

*"The people, they are what I like the most. The different people - it's definitely why I liked it here so much from the start. I got to meet so many different people – I mean it is amazing. People I would have never gotten the chance to talk to otherwise"*

#### **Acceptance and support**

*"This is one of the most positive things in my life right now. I love the people- they make me feel good about myself and about what I do here. I feel like I could be myself, you know... I feel like I am better person at the FP."*

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**Openness (and feedback)** is not only encouraged, but expected at the FP. Interns are aware of the value of the “straight talk process, which is the primary way in which youth and staff are held accountable for their behavior”. Straight talk “is when your peers and supervisor tell you how to improve yourself and you tell them too. And you listen and decide what to accept and what makes sense and what you can work on and then you share with them your thoughts on their strengths and all”<sup>2</sup>. Many interns agreed that part of the reason why they feel accomplished is the straight talk sessions they have participated in and the learning about themselves they have been able to do through that open process. “Straight talk helped me improve myself – for example I was not able to sit in a meeting for too long at all, now I can do that for as long as I need.”

### **A sense of communal standards being shared**

*“I like that staff also wears the FP shirts- I think it shows we are all the same.”*

*“Like the violations chart and stuff- that’s for everyone- for interns and SYP and maybe even for the staff. And our chart is more strict but we are interns so it’s OK... Everyone has to know what their responsibilities are if you are the FP- you can’t mess ‘roud because you’ll let them down...”*

It was a challenge to understand what interns truly meant by the “FP community”. Many of them discussed the overall sense of the organization, including people beyond their specific internship site – supervisors, other staff they saw in and out of the office, the working spaces as communal and dynamic meeting places, the land, the peers they knew at other internships, the SYP. Thus there was the broader kind of FP community that they sensed often in a more indirect way.

The more direct and tangible sense of community, however, came from the specific internship sites they worked at. It was the internship sites that anchored their experiences at the FP and contextualized their overall sense of the organization as a community. The same few characteristics interns mentioned in speaking about the FP an organization were also used to describe their specific **internship sites as nested communities** where they found sources of motivation, joy and fun as well as comfort and acceptance:

*“...I just love being around these guys. They make it worth it to come to work every day. Like today I woke up and I felt lousy and didn’t feel like coming in at all, and then I started thinking about these guys here and the work we were going to do today and it made me feel better and excited even.”*

*“I like watching us accomplish things as a group- that feels real good to me. Just seeing how everyone has something new to add, a talent of their own...”*

*“It feels good to be around them (the internship team) and to see them every day. It starts to feel like a small family, you know. I guess I like the people I work with a lot. This job might be really hard without them.”*

The importance of the internship site communities was confirmed by most interns as central for their experience and desire to come back. A few internships this summer lacked this sense of an internship community because only 1- 2 interns were placed at the site. These interns on multiple occasions suggested their sense of disconnectedness and on some ways solitary experience.

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<sup>2</sup> There are explicit rules on how to speak and listen during straight talk, e.g., be kind, be honest, state details, look at the person speaking, listen, open up.

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*"... I wish we had more like a team, you know. BLAST(one of the internships) has like 7 people – they do stuff together all the time. I miss that about this year. Like last year (in SYP) we had a crew and I really liked meeting new people and getting to know them and hang out. This year I feel more isolated. I don't really know the SYP kids and I almost never see any other interns."*

### **Implications/Challenges**

A few implications follow in relation to this layer of engagement. The first one relates to the centrality of the internship community to the experience of the young persons I worked with. As the FP grows and expands in staff number and office locations, it is likely that the broader sense of community at the FP will become even less tangible to the interns, thus they will rely even more on their specific internship sites as tangible sources of belonging and community. (A few of them mentioned that they already are starting to feel that way as compared to previous years when the FP used to be smaller and it was easier to feel like a big family on an organizational level.) It seems that the internship community should be considered as a necessary part of the intern experience as it serves as an anchor for many of the youth and is generally a greatly appreciated and valued source of motivation and desire to return to the FP over time. If this layer of involvement is lacking in a young person's experience, they feel disconnected in ways and may find it more difficult to engage in the FP on other levels than financially.

One further implication worth considering at this layer is the role of supervisors in facilitating the sense of community at each internship site. Interns that expressed the strongest anchoring and belonging to their communities didn't fail to mention their supervisors as a part of that feeling.

### **INTERN STATUS/PROFESSIONAL GROWTH**

The intern status is defined by many of the first year interns as a "special position" at the FP – one that sets interns apart from the SYP program youth and that gives them a sense of pride, and professional growth. Many interns spoke of the greater responsibility they feel that they have as interns and the 'more respect from the adults and more freedom as well'. The separation between interns and SYP is certainly a very important motivation for the continuous involvement of the young people I interviewed. Being an intern 'carries a different weight' for many of them and provides for them a sense of accomplishment, an opportunity to be role models -something that seemed important to them.

*"My biggest responsibility here is being a role model. For the crew workers who are now starting in the summer program. That is huge. If they see us doing something they know we are not supposed to do they'll probably say "well, if they (the interns) are doing it and they have more responsibility, why can't we? I feel like I have to think a lot about how I am around them..."*

This quote is not uncommon for most of the interns I worked with. They shared the satisfaction they got from feeling like they have a 'higher position and responsibility' at the FP. Only secondary they mentioned their job-specific responsibilities and duties.

*"To be an intern means you are ready to be a role model for the other youth. I like that. It makes me feel good to try my best all the time and to be trusted more"*

An important aspect of this layer of engagement is the *challenge* interns perceived came with their status at the FP. Many of them mentioned that being challenged to be in this new role, trying their best, being held accountable on higher standards and being paid more than the year before is a challenge

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that they appreciate and often even seek. Further, the difference in the violation chart (as compared to the one used in SYP) and the increase in pay level are also important for this sense of belonging to a professionally higher group at the FP – all interns feel camaraderie around the shared standards, the harsher rules (as they perceive them), the status of role-models amongst the younger youth in SYP.

### **Implications/Challenges**

One of the main challenges of this layer, I believe, relates to the difficulty in sustaining the sense of professional growth for interns who have worked at the FP for multiple years. Currently there are 'levels' of interns based on the number of years one has served and based on some milestones interns are expected to reach before they can get to the next level. However, many of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> level interns described their lower motivation and satisfaction with this status as it seemed to not differ very much from the status of the 1<sup>st</sup> year interns.

*"I feel like I have been here for a long time and I just feel like I should be given even more responsibility and treated differently. At the end of the day I am still an intern and there is nothing else to be after that. Like, I am paid a bit more, but that's about it. I feel like I am doing the same things mostly and I'm not as psyched about the work as I was last year..."*

### **INTERNSHIP/WORK**

The basic question that this layer of engagement deals with is the extent to which interns felt grounded in the work they were involved with at the FP. To what extent their experience with the work they did served as a source of motivation to come back to the FP year after year?

In my conversations with the young people it became clear that for some of the interns the work they did at their internship was *essential* to their experience at the FP, the content of the work, their interactions with it and their learning experiences were the motivating factors for these interns to come back to the FP. These interns expressed a strong connection to what they were doing and described that it was the work that often got them going the most.

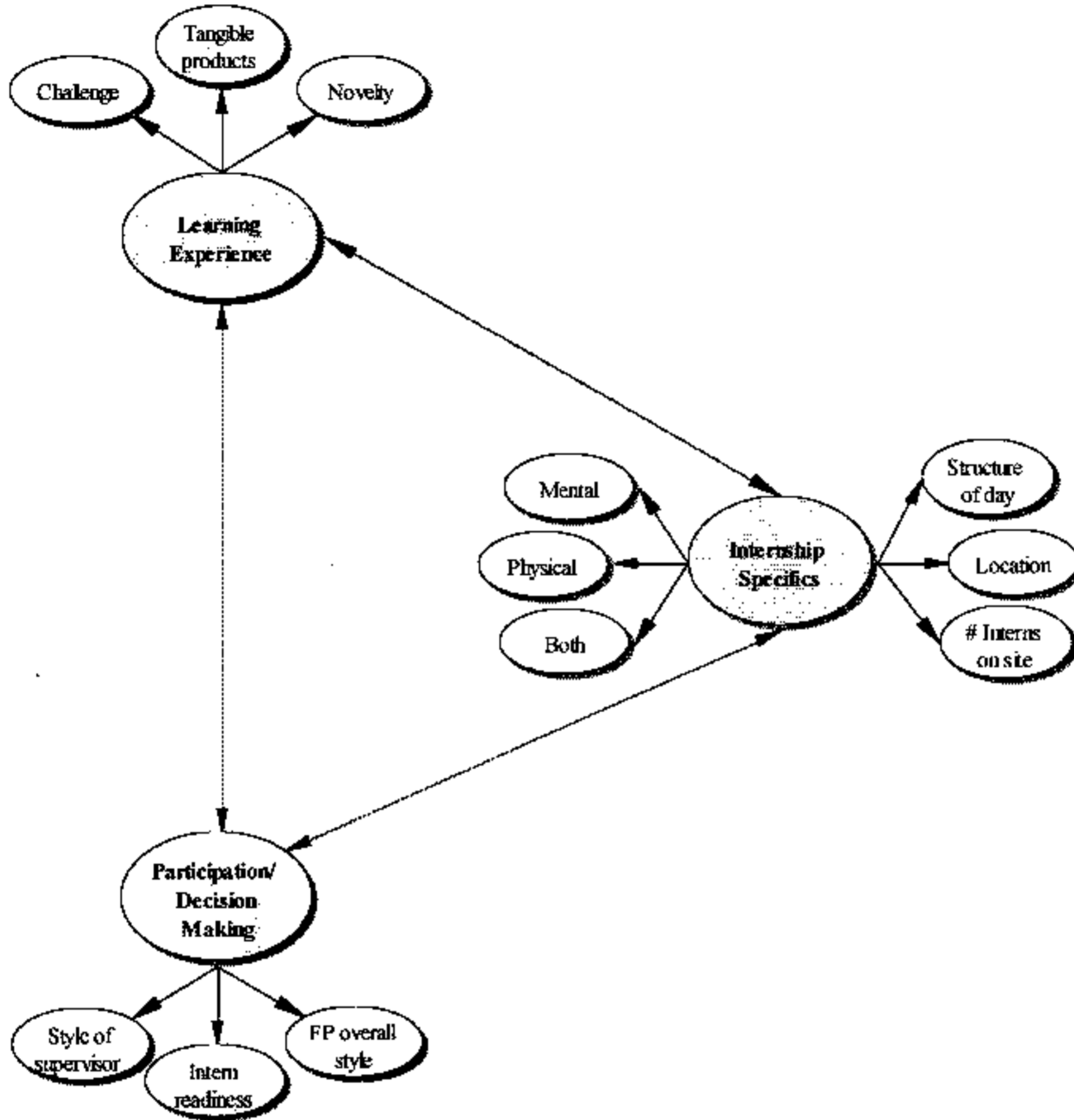
For other interns the work was not as essential to their motivation to come back to the FP. The content and routine of the work was only a *supplementary* piece to their experience at the FP. They did not feel as connected to the activities they were engaged in on a day to day basis and had a difficult time envisioning goals for themselves in relation to the work. They remained committed to the FP and to coming back, but their source of engagement and commitment was not the work itself, but rather the lower layers of the pyramid – community, interns status etc.

The difference in the role of the work for youth's involvement in the FP derived in large from the difference between the internships offered at the FP this summer. Internships differed on multiple dimensions from one another, which meant that the experiences interns had at each site were often quite diverse. Below I have tried to show some of the dimensions the interns discussed with me as important to the way they perceived their work and the way it affected their overall experience, motivation and engagement.

*Figure 2: Descriptive dimensions of the internships at the FP*

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As seen from the figure above, there were three main elements that distinguished the experiences of interns at different sites. The internship specifics, as I call it here, relate to the general feel of the internship – the location (land of office), the intern community, the breaks youth get throughout the day etc. as well as the type of work that each internship involves –mental or physical (in some instances both). These internship specific factors relate closely to each intern’s learning experience and the type of skills he/she gains, the individual vs. group work interns are involved in etc. The learning experience on another hand is also described by the interns as determined by not only the nature of the work, but also the level of novelty present in the work over time, the presence of challenges and opportunities to test knowledge and understanding and also the having of tangible products coming out of their work.

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Finally, both of these internship elements are related to the participation/decision making that interns are involved in. The participation factor stands for the genuine opportunity given to interns to take leadership roles at their sites, to make important decisions about their work and generally to share the leadership with their supervisor rather than being instructed about the tasks they are to complete. This turned out to be an important piece of youth's experience at the FP that influenced their desire to remain committed to the FP over time.

In my conversations with the interns what stood out was that the youth who emphasized a commitment to their work were often youth working with a team (internship community) and feeling a sense of collective as well as personal efficacy. These were also interns who experienced some kind of novelty and challenge in their work and learning almost on daily basis and who felt that they truly participated in the decision making and planning of the work within the internship. They often described their relationship with their supervisor as central to their sense of commitment to the work: *"My supervisor is a big part of why I love this internship. She has the perfect balance of everything. She guides us but never takes decisions without us or for us- I appreciate that. She pushes us to get better at certain things and always supports us in the projects we develop. She is serious when she really needs to be, but for the most part she is great fun to be around and makes you feel comfortable and all"*

In general it seemed that not all interns felt a strong connection to the work /internship they were involved with. While participation (at an appropriate level for each intern), novelty and challenge and some combination of positive working environment and internship community affected the positive engagement of youth at this layer, monotonous and less challenging or novel work, as well as lack of participation often affected youth in the opposite way. Many of these interns however explained that they indeed did not necessarily need this close connection to the work they were doing because they felt excited about the FP on other levels.

### **Challenges and Implications**

An interesting implication at this layer relates to the possibility of all youth engaging at the work level in their experience. Despite the fact that there are many challenges in making all internships uniform in the way they allow youth to take on leadership roles, enjoy novelty and challenges in their work and feel like they have tangible products of their labor, it is perhaps worth the energy of the FP. There seemed to be a great potential in keeping youth's excitement and commitment to the organization if they gained enjoyment and sense of efficacy and accomplishment from their work.

### **PERSONAL INTEREST / AMBITION**

This layer of engagement relates in many ways to young people's level of self awareness as well as understanding what could be gained from their experience at the Food Project. Some interns discussed their desire to stay on with the Food Project as related to their ambition to gain competence in a certain skill that was important to them – either on a personal or professional level.

*"Diversity is important to me, because I care about the way people recognize and deal with differences between them. I think there is a lot I don't know about this and I really want to feel more at ease with the topics we are doing workshops on. I have more to learn, I think."*

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*"I want to have my own farm one day and I need to know all the things I am learning in this internship in order to do that. I have experience only on small farms- this is so different- there is a lot more to keep track of and plan and understand."*

Many of the interns who were engaged at this layer were 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year interns, who developmentally as well as professionally were more aware of their experiences at the FP and had a clearer vision of how their experiences thus far had helped them in their personal lives. Some of them knew for instance that skills like public speaking, team work or leadership would be useful to them in future jobs or positions they took on and that was a motivating factor for them. Others, as mentioned earlier, had a more specific interest in an aspect of the FP or an internship and that kept them going, at times for multiple years.

*"I love being outdoors and working the land – I don't think I will be a farmer one day, but I still feel very good working outside.... I can't imagine an office job... It is my third year returning to the land- I still enjoy that part of my experience here the most."*

### **Challenges and Implications**

This type of engagement was one that seemed to develop over time with youth's experience at the FP. If they were attracted to certain aspects of the FP and the work from the start, these get better defined over time and interns become more aware of why these aspects of the work are important to them. If they started working at the FP for financial reasons only, staying on with the work for more than one year often allowed them to perceive concrete evidence (other than financial support) that something would be gained for them if they continued to be involved, that certain parts of their experience are beneficial for them in the long or short run. Personal interest or ambition has a potential to play an important role in youth's decision to remain committed to the organization.

### **FP's MISSION/VISION**

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*"Well, it is not like just having a job for the sake of it- not like spending your summer scooping ice-cream on the side of the road. There is more to what I do here- it is important work. It helps communities, it changes people... And I am a part of all that. It makes me proud to say I work here... It's the ideas and the programs we have at the FP and the real concern for important issues that make me come back."*

*"...I see how what we do is important. I think that the FP has some good ideas about the way communities can grow their own food and help themselves and the environment. I think we are activists in a way and I care for these ideas too."*

The above quotes represent best this layer of engagement. Although very few youth described their connection and commitment to the values and ideas of the program itself, the ones who did certainly derived a lot of motivation and purpose from these. Many of the youth knew and readily 'recited' the exact mission and vision of the FP, as it was written on the first page of their "Intern Manual". The gap between knowing the mission and truly connecting with it on a day to day basis was interesting to observe. The difference in the role the FP as an organization served for its youth's motivation was in part due to the way the FP's values and vision were implemented or made visible in each internship. Different internships exemplified to a different degree the FP's vision and mission. For instance the BLAST internship seemed most closely connected to the organizational larger purpose. The interns in

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BLAST were involved in all parts of the FP's mission- advocacy, organic and sustainable agriculture, leadership development. On the other hand, the Kitchen interns were involved in less direct ways to the FP's broader mission and vision. Kitchen interns spent most of their days cooking and preparing food for different events, but it was harder for them to link their job with the broader ideas the FP was engaged in.

The implications of this layer are important, I believe. For organizations like the FP, whose work and ideology is very powerful and can serve as a strong motivating factor in interns' experiences, more effort may need to be put in designing internships that represent equally well the organization's premise and vision.

### **INTEGRATION OF ALL LAYERS**

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In the definition of this layer I drew upon the conversations I had with a few interns who described their experiences at the FP and their internship in a dynamic and more intricate way, where they described their engagement on multiple layers:

*"I can't really envision my life without the FP. This is my third summer with them and I feel very connected to the community, like I belong here. They've invested in me and I have invested in them too... I think you start off thinking that its' a good job-makes money and is fun and different than other jobs kids get, but then it become much more than that. The work draws you in, it starts to mean a lot to you. And the people- they make me come back too...my internship team is awesome.... I think I appreciate a lot more what the FP is really about –not just helping us, the interns and the SYP kids, but more the activist things we do here... my job is about changing communities and helping them get awareness about their food, their health- I love feeling like I am doing important work, work that I believe in now. I think I will try to do more social work later in college and this job will help me a lot to learn more about it..."*

While this young person is in ways an exception in the way he expressed his experience at the FP on all layers of the pyramid, many other youth spoke of their motivations and engagement with the organization on at least 2 or 3 layers as well. The idea of being engaged on multiple layers is a powerful one because it does imply a stronger, or more durable, perhaps, way committing to the work at the FP. Questions like "what helps youth reach a more integrated experience and involvement at their internship or in the organization as a whole?" or "Is it important or necessary for youth to experience engagement on multiple layers if one kind of engagement is sufficient for many of them to keep coming back to the FP?" are worth exploring with the organizational mission and vision in mind.

### **VI. Further Questions/Conclusions**

This case study raises, I believe, multiple questions related to the engagement of young people over time in socially responsible and leadership work. While it is based on just one organization that has been successful in sustaining the involvement of youth, it may serve as a springboard for discussions and further reflections on this issue. Some of the many questions that this case brought up for me include:

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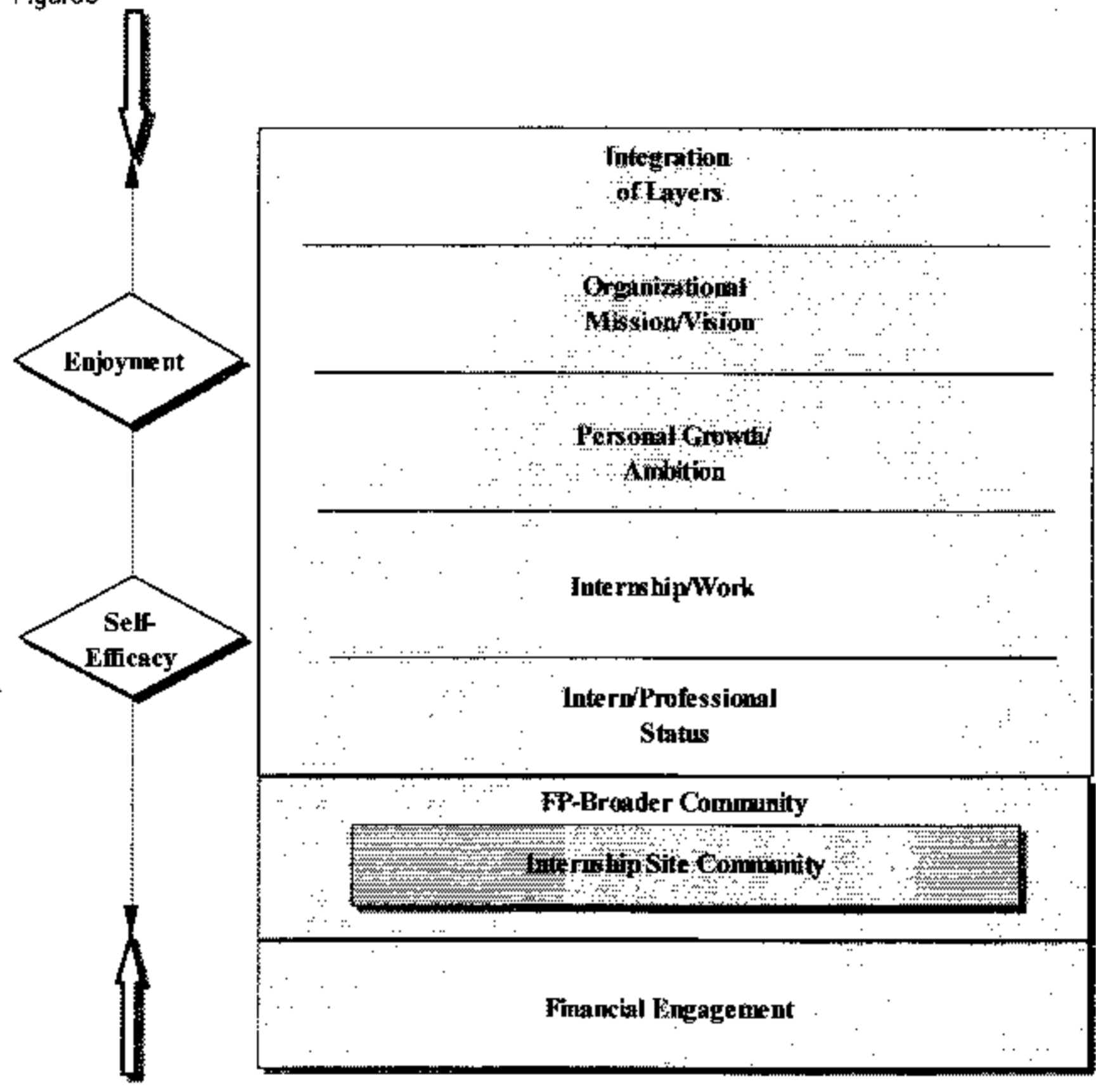
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- Using the pyramid model to describe the different ways youth were engaged with their experience at the FP, it is worth reflecting in more detail on the specific challenges and benefits of each of the layers of engagement. Are some types of engagement more powerful and necessary than others? (Ex. Financial) Are there types of engagement/layers that are more durable over time? Therefore more desirable?
- What are the minimally sufficient combinations of layers necessary for a successful and sustained engagement?
- Is it possible/desirable that all interns at the FP engage on all layers identified? The shape of the pyramid would then change to a square (see *figure below*) where all youth are equally connected and grounded in their experience at the FP. Which layers of engagement are more flexible and dependent on the individual youth? Which layers does an organization have the capacity to really impact?
- What are the benefits and challenges of having a diverse group of interns, working at diverse internship sites? How does that affect their involvement in the FP in general? How may the proposed pyramid model look for African-American vs. white youth, or for urban vs. suburban youth?
- How do the different internship types affect the way youth commit themselves to working at the FP? What kind of practices on behalf of the FP seem to foster multiple layers of engagement among interns? How can these be replicated?

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Figure 3



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**Special Thanks**

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I would like to extend my special thanks to the CASE Fellowship foundation for letting me have the opportunity to work on this case study, Prof. Gardner and Prof. Casey for sponsoring my work, The Food Project for their absolutely generous and wonderful interest and support of this case and of course the 30 young people who trusted me and helped me understand what it was that they were experiencing individually and as a team.

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Internship	# of interns	Location	Description of duties
Urban Education and Outreach	5	Roxbury	Meet with neighborhood gardeners to test for lead contamination and map gardens. Plan and teach workshops for urban gardeners about pesticide/herbicide use in gardens, lead contamination, sustainable agriculture methods, and compost. Host educational events and conduct tours of the urban land. Participate in field trips and resource visits. Speak at outside conferences and workshops.
Rural Agriculture	4	Lincoln	Interns assist in all areas of the farm work, including farm preparation, planting, weeding, harvesting, special agriculture projects and other farm related tasks. Interns also lead groups of youth and volunteers throughout the growing season to cultivate, harvest, and distribute produce. A primary responsibility is to demonstrate hard work and enthusiasm for youth and the volunteers.
Urban Agriculture	1	Roxbury	
Diversity	6	Lincoln/Roxbury	The Diversity team is responsible for learning, teaching, using, and modeling Visions tools for Multicultural Change. Interns participate in the development and facilitation of diversity workshops for the SYP, AYP, and Internships. They travel as necessary to meet with other youth doing similar work and to speak about diversity issues. Meet the same expectations as full-time employees regarding office norms and task completion (promptness, accountability for assigned work, personal use of equipment or telephones, lunch and break times, etc.).
BLAST	7	Lincoln/Roxbury	The goal of the BLAST internship is to educate others about and advocate for local food systems and equal access for all people to healthy, affordable and sustainably-grown food in our communities. Interns work toward achieving this goal through: <u>Network Building</u> : Interns interact with youth from other organizations through visits to the organizations, a youth philanthropy program, and participation in conferences and regional meetings. <u>Activism &amp; Advocacy</u> : Interns coordinate a national week of activism called Eat In, Act Out Week. In addition, the interns plan local activities, such as the Day of Action. <u>Education</u> : Interns educate others about the benefits and impacts of different food systems and food choices. They do this through the development and presentation of workshops, written materials, and web-based information.

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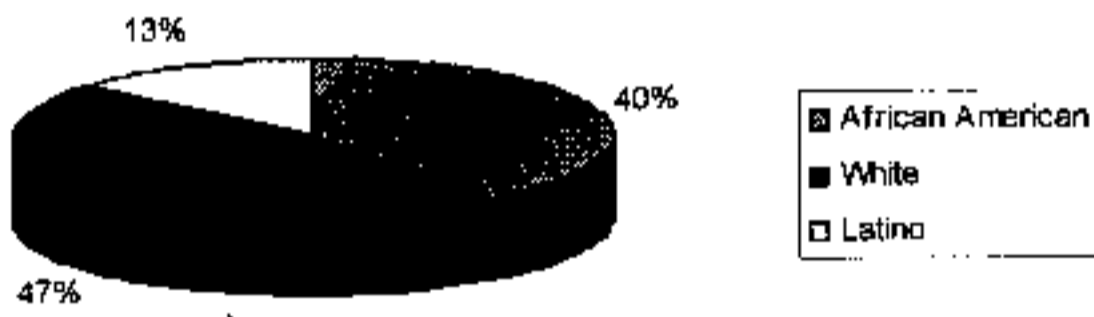
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<b>CSA (community supported agriculture)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Lincoln</b>	The Interns assist in the harvesting, distribution, setup and cleanup of the CSA program. They gain customer service and marketing skills through assisting CSA members with their vegetable pick up and farm experience. The Interns also assist in all areas of farm work, including but not limited to farm preparation, planting, seeding, weeding, harvesting, special agriculture projects and other farm related tasks. A primary responsibility is to model hard work and enthusiasm for the Summer Youth Program participants and also professionalism when dealing with CSA customers.
<b>Kitchen</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Roxbury</b>	In this internship interns learn how to cook great, healthy food for not only customers, but also family and friends, using locally grown produce. They also learn how to create and develop specialty products that promote eating local, and learn how to profit from them. Interns assist in meal preparation for catering, FP events and production of specialty products such as salsa, sauces and baked goods and kitchen cleanup. The interns also participate in training sessions on all areas of food preparation, hygiene, and proper food handling procedures. Office work and market research/customer service for the FP kitchen enterprises is planned.
<b>Farmer's Market</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Roxbury</b>	The Farmer's Market Intern is involved in a combination of activities during the spring and summer with the option of staying on for the fall Market Analysis with the DIRT crew. The Intern is integrally involved in the workings of our Farmers' Markets, including harvesting for the market and co-leading crew trainings and market analysis sessions. On Tuesday mornings the intern helps the urban grower and farmer's market manager with the market harvest, on Thursday mornings they co-lead the crew training for running the market. During market times, the intern is responsible for helping the Market Manager to lead youth, during setting up, running, and taking down the market. The intern is engaged in record keeping, data collection, and data recording both during the market season and after.

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**Division of interns by racial background**



**Division of interns by gender**



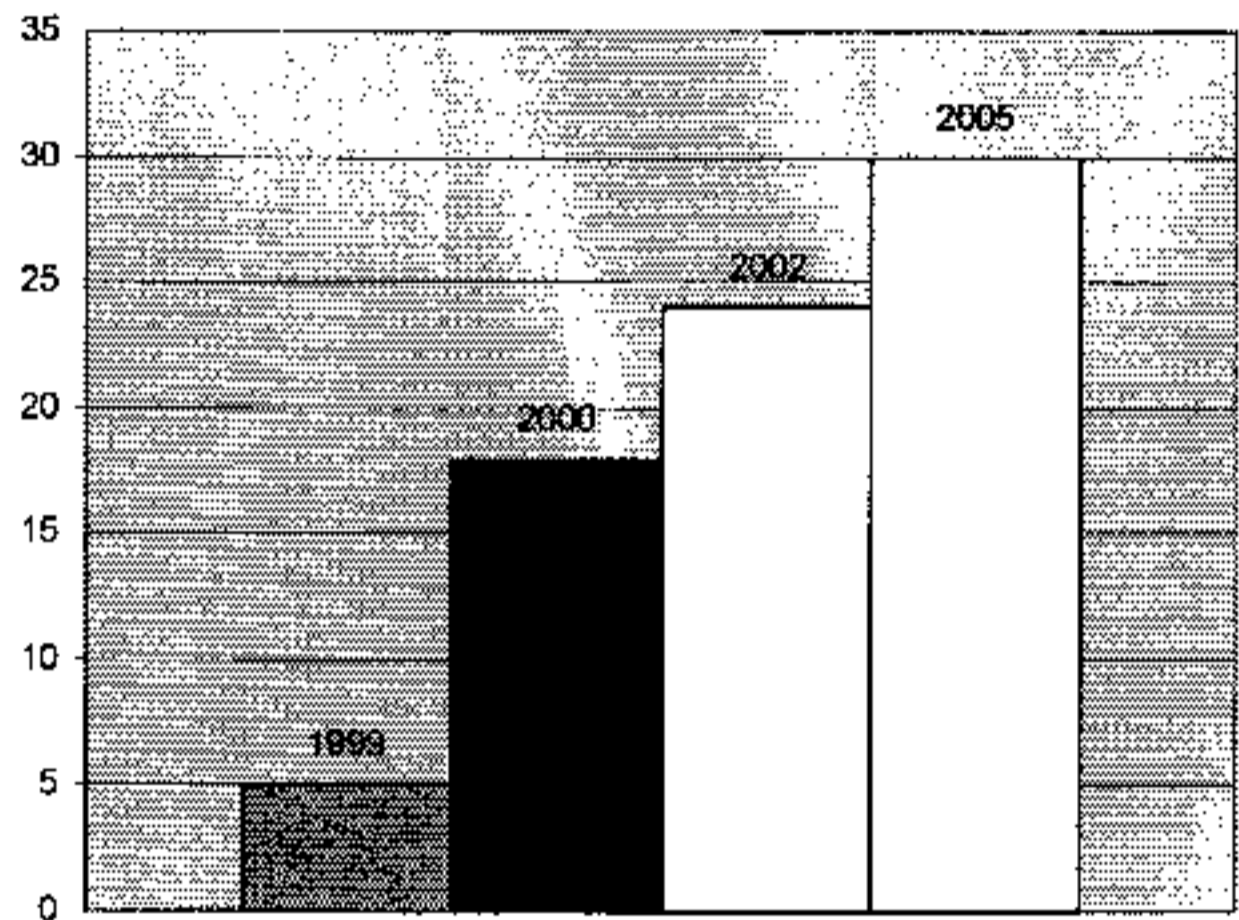
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**Division on interns by the number of summers they have been with the FP**



**Number of interns per year**



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### **Interview Protocol Used for Case**

#### **I. Introduction – background with the FP and internship questions**

1. Name and age
2. Where do you go to school? Where do you live?
3. How long have you been with the FP? When did you first begin working with TFP?
4. How did you get involved on first place? What attracted you to the Food project when you first got involved?
5. Why did you decide to stay on and do this internship? What attracted you initially to this internship?
6. *(Tell me a bit about your internship and the kinds of things you do in it? – if you had to describe your internship to someone who doesn't know anything about what you do how would you describe it so that he/she understands?)*
7. If you hadn't gotten this internship what would you be doing instead? What was your second choice?
8. What kind of things are you trying to accomplish in this internship? Do you have any goals for the summer? What are they?
9. What are other personal goals you have for yourself?
10. What do you like (enjoy) /dislike most about what you do now at the Food Project and this internship?
11. How is doing an internship different from the SYP you did before?
12. How do you work differently from when you first started at the Food Project?
13. Tell me about one positive experience so far at your site.
14. What do you find difficult /challenging at your site?
15. What have you been most surprised with since you started working at this site?

#### **II. Goals and responsibilities**

1. Do you have a larger goal in life that leads you to the kind of work you do here? What is that goal? Why is this goal important?
2. What motivates you in your work at this site? (about the work or yourself) What helps you do good work?
3. In your work at the Food project do you have any responsibilities? What do you consider your responsibilities here?
4. *(What do you find meaningful in your work?)*
5. Are there values or principles that guide you in your choices and life?

#### **III. General impressions at work**

1. Tell me about one really positive experience at this internship/TFP?
2. Tell me about one negative- disappointing experience?
3. Are there specific qualities that you know are helping you do a good job in this kind of work you are doing now? / Are there qualities that hinder your work?
4. What in your work are you most proud of?

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5. Tell me about your team – how would you describe working with them?
6. How is your supervisor supportive of your work here? What do you think he/she wants you to achieve this summer?
7. How is the FP staff supportive of you- can you give me an example? Have you ever felt disrespected – when was that?

### **IV. Formative background**

1. Is this internship important to you or your life? Why/how?
2. Is your family supportive or not of your work at the project? How do they support you?
3. Do you do other service work? Voluntary community service?
4. Do you plan to continue being involved in the Food project in any way after this internship? Why/Why not?
5. What have you learned about yourself while working at the Food Project?
6. What have you learned about the Food project and its work?
7. *What are some of the important things you have learned while at this fellowship so far?*
8. Tell me about the people you've met at the food project so far? Are they similar/different to you and in what ways?
9. What are you learning from the people around you in this internship?
10. Are any of your friends involved in this kind of work? What do you tell them about what you do here?
11. Do you retain ties with people from the Food Project?
12. What direction do you see yourself going into in the future?
13. Tell me about a dream of yours for your future?
14. What would you advise an SYP member who is thinking of doing your internship next year?
15. What do you contribute to your internship that makes it unique?
16. Have you experienced conflicts at your internship so far?
17. describe yourself in three words

Email address and information about following up