

# ROOT CREW



IMPACT STUDY 2020-21



Analysis & Report by SEED IMPACT





# The Food Project

For 30 years, The Food Project (TFP) has partnered with youth from diverse backgrounds to foster personal development while simultaneously building a stronger, healthier, and more equitable food system. Food and farming are the medium through which youth learn:

- ***The root causes of (and potential solutions to) food inequity and insecurity***
- ***How to work together across their differences***
- ***How to lead change in their communities***

The Food Project has roots in several communities across Boston, the North Shore, and MetroWest. Shortly after launching on a Lincoln farm in 1992, The Food Project established its first urban farm and office in Boston's Dudley neighborhood. Today, The Food Project operates four urban farms, two suburban farms, and greenhouse-growing operations in Dudley, Lincoln, Lynn, and Wenham.

Over The Food Project's history, over 1,800 youth, working together with numerous staff and volunteers, have cultivated over 5,000,000 pounds of produce, provided 100,000 hours of service at hunger relief organizations, and built over 1,400 raised-bed gardens for family homes and community spaces.



*"TFP has taught me a lot. It may not be the most traditional work setting, but there is so much I've taken from here such as how to work with others, how to come up with an idea and implement it successfully, as well as self-management skills."*

-Robbie A., 17, North Shore

Root Crew is The Food Project's most advanced youth crew and drives much of The Food Project's work to create a just and sustainable food system. As graduates of Seed Crew (their initial summer experience) and Dirt Crew (the following school year experience), Root Crew leaders apply their knowledge and skills to projects addressing food system issues in their own communities.

In September 2020, The Food Project welcomed Root Crew members back onto its farms for the first time in over six months due to the Covid-19 pandemic. While in a typical year this work includes managing farmers' markets, leading volunteers, and coordinating workshops, their work was redesigned during the pandemic. Root Crew played a major role in coordinating virtual workshops for first-year crew members, as well as meetings for residents engaged in Lynn Grows and Dudley Grows food systems initiatives.



# ASSESSING IMPACT

The Food Project seeks to empower youth to lead and engage others in creating personal and social change.

In alignment with empowerment theory, gains in confidence and awareness enable youth to then take action to change their environments (Zimmerman, 2000).

The Food Project applied empowerment theory to measure gains in confidence, awareness, and action using the following three domains:

## INTRAPERSONAL

Youth feel confident in themselves and in their ability to make a difference

## INTERACTIONAL

Youth have a critical awareness that connects them to the communities they work with

## BEHAVIORAL

Youth can effectively educate, motivate, and lead others to create food systems change

**THE FOOD PROJECT SEEKS TO EMPOWER YOUTH TO LEAD AND ENGAGE OTHERS IN CREATING PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE.**

*“I learned a lot about my own identity, and I have to thank TFP for that. It has always been a place I could be myself and find myself, and feel comfortable doing so. I can proudly share my TFP story outside when I’m telling my friends about The Food Project and how impactful it has been.”*

-Elvira L., 16, North Shore

I CAN BE MYSELF

*“At the start of this year, I did not know much... Through workshops and experience, I now have a solid understanding of food justice concepts and TFP’s work. I believe that I can share my experience at TFP and relate it to my identity ... and I am comfortable facilitating conversations across difference.”*

-Pranav K., 16, Greater Boston

SOLID UNDERSTANDING OF FOOD JUSTICE



# EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK

The Food Project, in collaboration with SEED Impact, customized an assessment tool for tracking empowerment growth. **Three practices** were defined to capture the spirit and breadth of challenges posed to crew members, in each domain:

## INTRAPERSONAL

Youth can lead groups and take initiative in work

Youth can use and give constructive feedback

Youth can take steps out of their comfort zone

## INTERACTIONAL

Youth can identify the systems of oppression and privilege that affect their lives

Youth can name and celebrate the parts of their identity

Youth can work in diverse groups

## BEHAVIORAL

Youth can manage food systems projects

Youth can encourage other to make change in the food system

Youth can perform successfully as employees

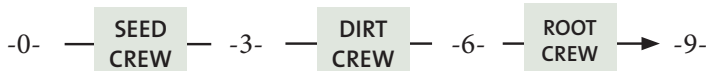
## FRAMEWORK LOGIC

The Food Project provides increasingly challenging opportunities and expectations for youth as they progress from Seed to Dirt to Root Crew engagement. The complete set of progressive mastery levels are provided in the **Appendix**.

Starting at the bottom of the scale, it is anticipated that **Seed Crew** members will begin with mastery levels near zero for the nine practices. Some will be more familiar, such as working hard; while others, like catalyzing change, will appear more foreign. As their first summer progresses, they begin doing these practices with increasing confidence and skill (achieving levels 1 to 3).

Having graduated from their Seed Crew summer experience, **Dirt Crew** members advance over the school year to more challenging variations of these same practices. During this phase, they are expected to perform at levels 4 to 6.

Those continuing to **Root Crew** are provided more advanced opportunities and challenges, allowing them to achieve maximum mastery levels of 8 and even 9 with several practices.

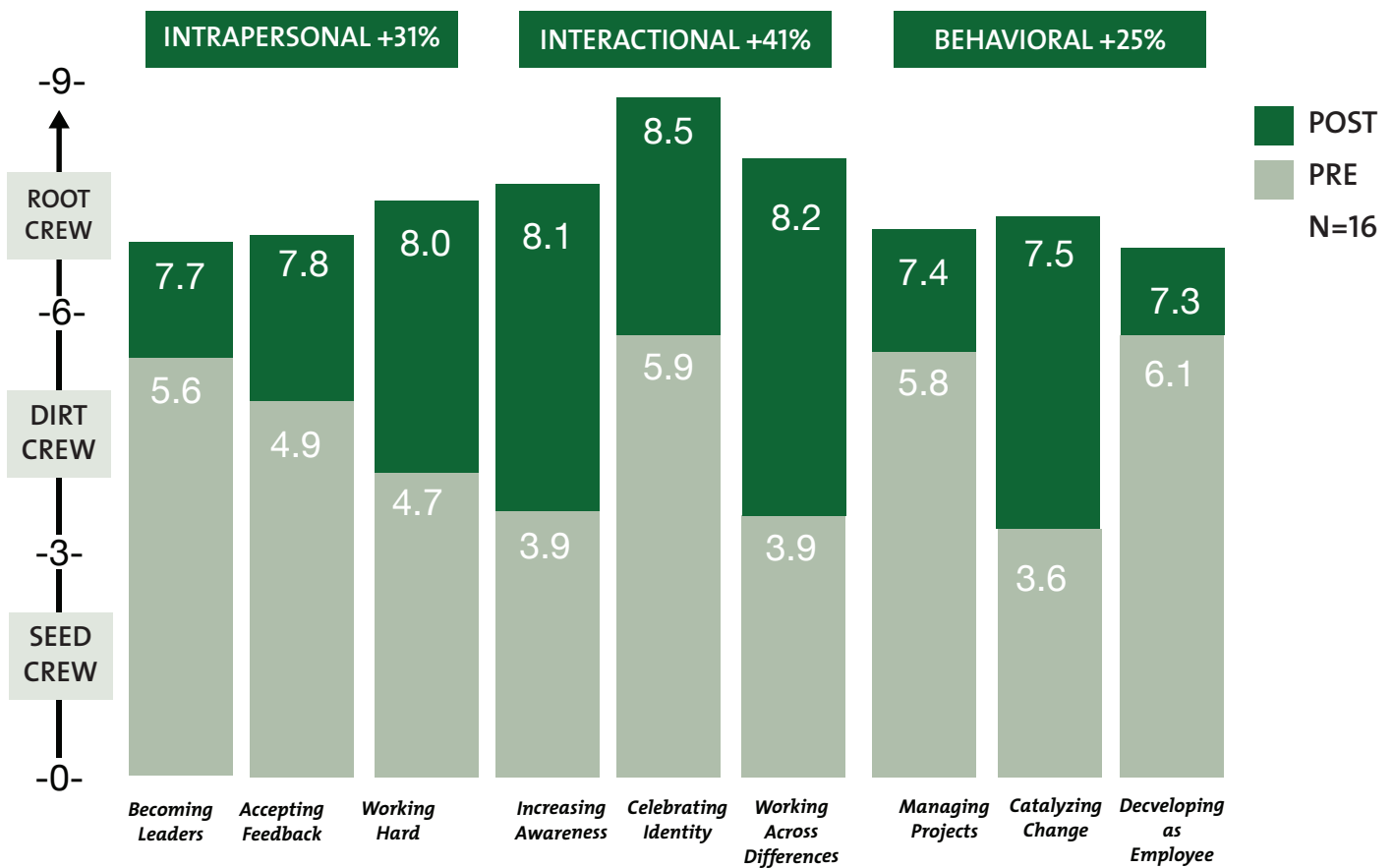


# 2020-2021 DETAILED RESULTS

Root Crew members were observed by supervisors throughout their year of engagement. A “pre” assessment was conducted in October 2020 to capture baseline data for 16 Root Crew members, assessing performance on The Food Project’s nine practices. A “post” assessment was then conducted in May 2021. The average ratings are shown below from pre to post, with percentage increases for each of the three empowerment domains:



## EMPOWERMENT GAINS 2020-2021 FOR 16 ROOT CREW MEMBERS



Root Crew members achieved very strong results, especially given the challenges they had to confront during the coronavirus pandemic.

As shown, and consistent with the empowerment framework logic, the average **Root Crew baseline mastery in the Fall 2020 was near level 6 for four of the nine practices, and ranged from 3.6 to 4.9 for the other five.**

Most of the 16 youth had participated in the summer 2019 as Seed Crew members. They advanced in Fall 2019 to Dirt Crew status, and reached Root Crew status one year later, in Fall 2020. Due to the pandemic, there was no 2020 summer program for new Root Crew members. However, participants continued to meet virtually and in safe, outdoor and greenhouse settings to advance their practices. Had they benefited from a summer session and live interaction throughout the year, it can be assumed that their “pre” levels of achievement would have been higher.



# TEN ADDITIONAL PRACTICES

To complement the empowerment assessments, supervisors also observed the mastery of Root Crew members on 10 additional practices. A 3-point maximum scale was used:

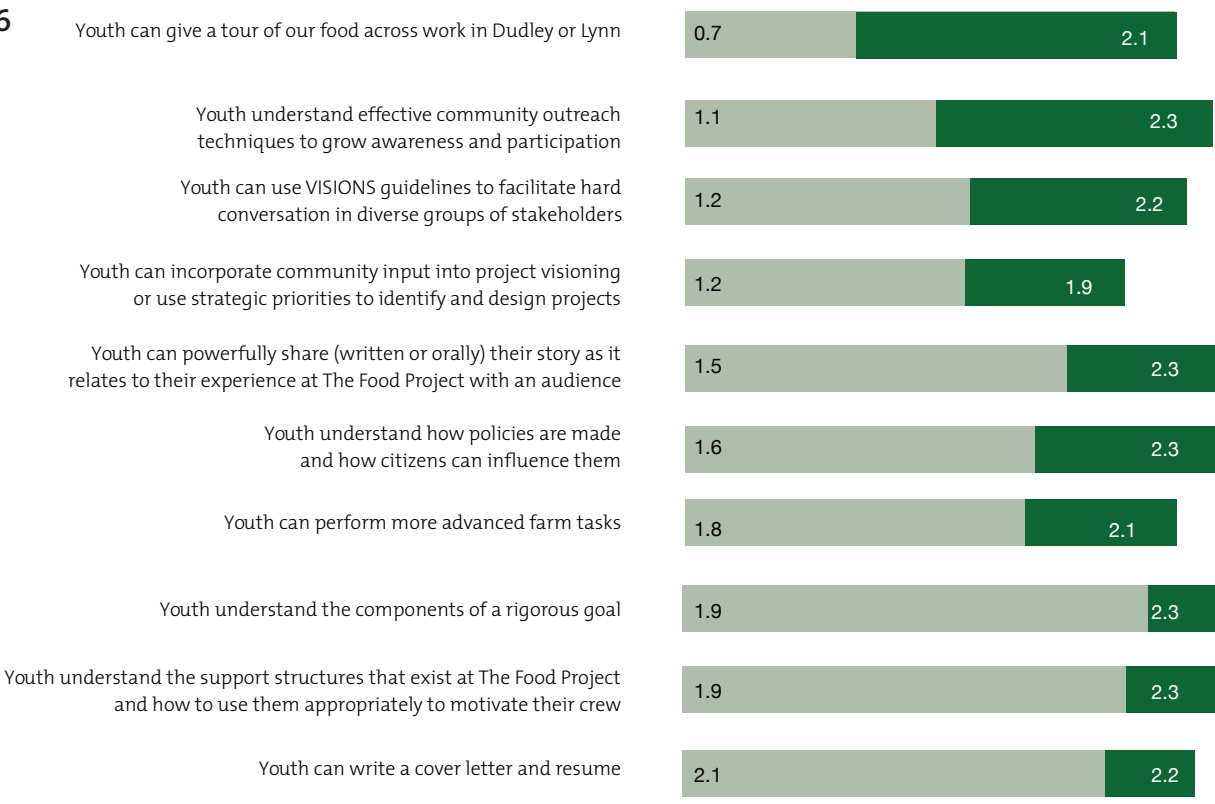


Root Crew members achieved a **22 percent** increase in ten complementary skills.

PRE POST

## 22% OVERALL ADVANCE PRE-TO-POST

N=16



The top three items showed the most significant gains that crew supervisors observed youth achieving during the year, all particular to The Food Project’s mission for Root Crew members: (1) ability to give a tour of The Food Project’s food access work, (2) understanding effective community outreach techniques, and (3) using VISIONS guidelines to facilitate hard discussions.

At the other end of the spectrum, youth entered Root Crew having already achieved high abilities to: (1) write a cover letter and resume, (2) motivate their crew using TFP support structures, and (3) understand components of a rigorous goal. Gains during the year were less significant for these practices, based on strong abilities previously developed at The Food Project, prior to Root Crew advancement.

*“Working on the farm in person this year was particularly meaningful, as well as our round table talks where I feel I really connected to the crew.”*

I REALLY CONNECTED TO THE CREW  
-James W., 17, North Shore



# YOUTH SELF-REFLECTION



At the conclusion of the program year in late-May, the Root Crew participants were invited to self-reflect on the year and specifically on nine Root Crew practices tracked by their supervisors. This rating scale was again applied:



**N=16**



The nine practices become progressively more challenging as shown from top to bottom. It is impressive to see that even for the practices about which Root Crew members felt least confident, they indicated that they can “do it on their own.” The next level of capacity “to influence others” can be expected to require ongoing apprenticeship and experience in the field.

Of interest, the Root Crew members’ lower-rated practices correlated with supervisor observations more so than the practices Root Crew members self-rated higher at year end. This suggests that the most challenging practices for members to master were evident to both themselves and observers.



*“It was impactful for me to facilitate community forums ... and really listen to community members about their hardships.”*

-Antonio L., 17, Greater Boston

IT WAS IMPACTFUL



*“I have learned a lot this year as a peer leader. I was really nervous at first and made mistakes, but as time went on and I received feedback, I grew into the person that I wanted to be as a peer leader.”*

-Myha N., 16, Greater Boston

I GREW INTO THE PERSON I WANTED TO BE



*“I feel that I have been able to incorporate my TFP learning into my academic, social, and family life. Knowledge of the food system and my personal identity have been super helpful in current events discussions reaching all aspects of my life.”*

-Grace K., 16, North Shore




KNOWLEDGE OF THE FOOD SYSTEM



# APPENDIX

## THE FOOD PROJECT EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK



<b>COMPONENTS</b>	<b>INTRAPERSONAL:</b> Youth feel confident in themselves and in their ability to make a difference	<b>INTERACTIONAL:</b> Youth have a critical awareness that connects them to the communities they work with	<b>BEHAVIORAL:</b> Youth can effectively educate, motivate and lead others to create food systems change.
 <p><b>ROOT CREW</b> (Levels 7-9)</p>	<p><b>Becoming Leaders:</b> Youth can manage specialized agricultural tasks, including distribution, with little adult guidance or oversight</p> <p><b>Accepting Feedback:</b> Youth can set rigorous goals for themselves and their work</p> <p><b>Working Hard:</b> Youth can support others to push beyond their comfort zone</p>	<p><b>Increasing Awareness:</b> Youth can describe the alternatives to conventional forms of food production/distribution modeled by TFP</p> <p><b>Celebrating Identity:</b> Youth can proudly claim their identity and story</p> <p><b>Working Across Difference:</b> Youth can facilitate community dialogue across difference</p>	<p><b>Managing Projects:</b> Youth can manage community projects, from planning to implementation</p> <p><b>Catalyzing Change:</b> Youth can organize for food system change at a local, state, and national level</p> <p><b>Developing as Employees:</b> Youth are prepared for future opportunities</p>
 <p><b>DIRT CREW</b> (Levels 4-6)</p>	<p><b>Becoming Leaders:</b> Youth can lead peers and adults in farm tasks</p> <p><b>Accepting Feedback:</b> Youth can use personal goals to produce high quality feedback for themselves, their peers, and their crew</p> <p><b>Working Hard:</b> Youth can push through emotional discomfort to connect with others</p>	<p><b>Increasing Awareness:</b> Youth can describe how levels of oppression have impacted food access in the communities where we live and work</p> <p><b>Celebrating Identity:</b> Youth understand the significance of their social location</p> <p><b>Working Across Difference:</b> Youth can effectively participate in cross-cultural dialogue and sharing</p>	<p><b>Managing Projects:</b> Youth can facilitate gardener support</p> <p><b>Catalyzing Change:</b> Youth can encourage others to get involved in food systems change</p> <p><b>Developing as Employees:</b> Youth can professionally represent The Food Project</p>
 <p><b>SEED CREW</b> (Levels 0-3)</p>	<p><b>Becoming Leaders:</b> Youth can take initiative in work</p> <p><b>Accepting Feedback:</b> Youth can accept and incorporate critical feedback from teammates and supervisors to improve performance</p> <p><b>Working Hard:</b> Youth can push through discomfort to accomplish the goal of the team</p>	<p><b>Increasing Awareness:</b> Youth can list and describe the levels of oppression</p> <p><b>Celebrating Identity:</b> Youth can share about their identity with their peers</p> <p><b>Working Across Difference:</b> Youth can build relationships with people from different backgrounds/identities</p>	<p><b>Managing Projects:</b> Youth can notice the value of the work we do</p> <p><b>Catalyzing Change:</b> Youth understands how they can be involved in food systems change</p> <p><b>Developing as Employees:</b> Youth can apply for and maintain a job</p>

