



THE FOOD PROJECT'S

ALUMNI STUDY

2020-2021

KEY FINDINGS



INTRODUCTION

IN ITS 30 YEARS OF OPERATION, THE FOOD PROJECT (TFP) HAS EMPLOYED OVER 1,800 YOUTH IN ITS THREE-TIERED YOUTH PROGRAM. THROUGH PARTICIPATION, WE BELIEVE THAT YOUTH BECOME EMPOWERED LEADERS CAPABLE OF LEADING AND ENGAGING OTHERS IN CREATING PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE.

The goal of this study was to measure this ultimate outcome amongst The Food Project's alumni and to understand if and how TFP influenced their engagement in social change. We used a mixed methods study design to get a snapshot of the lives of our alumni as well as understand how their TFP experience supported their accomplishments.



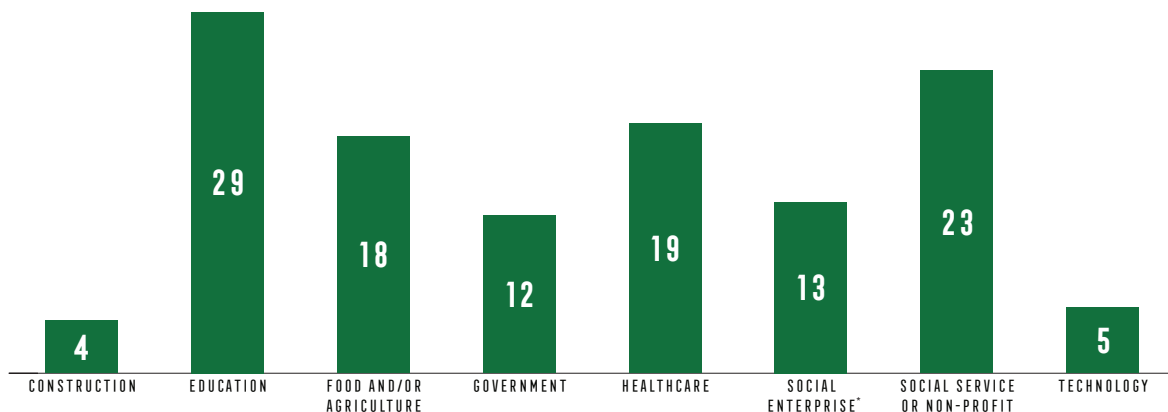
We focused on alumni over the age of 23 who had participated at The Food Project more than once. We distributed a survey to the **573** alumni in our base population and received 102 responses, hearing from roughly **18%** of eligible alumni. From those who completed the survey, we selected a convenience sample of **20** alumni with whom to conduct in-depth interviews. Both the survey and interview samples represented the demographics of the base population. ¹

BASE POPULATION				SURVEY SAMPLE			INTERVIEWEE POOL		
573				102			20		
RACE	POC	342	56.69%	POC	52	50.98%	POC	10	50%
	WHITE	231	40.31%	WHITE	50	49.02%	WHITE	10	50%
GENDER	FEMALE	303	52.88%	FEMALE	56	54.90%	FEMALE	9	45%
	MALE	268	46.77%	MALE	42	41.18%	MALE	10	50%
	NB	2	0.35%	NB	4	3.92%	NB	1	5%
COHORT	A	89	15.53%	A	15	14.71%	A	3	15%
	B	340	59.33%	B	54	52.94%	B	12	60%
	CX	144	25.13%	CX	33	32.35%	CX	5	25%

FROM THE SURVEY, WE FOUND THAT **72%** OF ALUMNI WERE FORMALLY LEADING SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH THEIR CAREERS AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION.

Based on statistics from the Bureau of Labor, alumni's interest in careers in social change industries is unique relative to popular careers among the general public. ²

MOST COMMON CAREER INDUSTRY AMONG ALUMNI



*SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IS DEFINED AS "A FOR-PROFIT BUSINESS THAT SEEKS TO ADDRESS A SOCIAL OR ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM."

Among the alumni interviewed whose careers met the criteria for formally leading social change, **76%** said that their career paths had been influenced by their experience at The Food Project.

"I think that The Food Project helped to build a very strong foundation in terms of that appreciation for food and also how hard it is to grow food and also the appreciation for the quality of food that you can get growing it yourself. And I mean yeah The Food Project totally put me on this path. There's no other way to say it." - POC, male, B

In our survey, almost **40%** of alumni reported that they are involved in community groups outside of work. Many reported serving in leadership roles as treasurers, board members, etc. Among alumni interviewed, **76%** of those who said they were involved in community work, inside or outside of their profession, said that there was a tie to their TFP experience.

"I think for as long as I remember at this point, I've been really involved in youth leadership opportunities. And I think it does come directly from TFP, but I really enjoy hanging out, hearing from, and helping young people do well." - POC, female, CX



PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL ACTION CATEGORIES



Additionally, on average, the alumni surveyed reported participating in **6.3** of the nine kinds of civic engagement we used to measure informal participation in social change. Options included voting, growing your own food, participating in political advocacy, donating money, etc.

RESULTS FROM OUR INTERVIEWS ALSO PROVIDE A CLEAR PICTURE OF HOW THE FOOD PROJECT PREPARES ITS ALUMNI TO BE SOCIAL CHANGE AGENTS IN THEIR CAREERS AND COMMUNITIES:

PREPARED TO APPLY FOR AND MAINTAIN A JOB

In our interviews with alumni, **40%** shared how TFP strengthened their ability to apply for a job and **60%** expressed that their experience at The Food Project increased their understanding of basic workplace behaviors, like arriving on time.

"The experience of being at The Food Project and having to continually apply to proceed through the internship program was definitely very helpful in building resume-making skills and just getting ready to apply for jobs." - white, male, CX

As evidence of the professional preparation offered at The Food Project, **96%** of alumni who completed our survey reported that they were currently employed or in school. Additionally, **100%** reported having graduated from high school and **88.2%** reported having at least a Bachelor's Degree.



PREPARED TO LEAD

In the interviews, **80%** of alumni expressed the confidence they gained at TFP in their leadership style or in their voice as a leader.

"I think The Food Project really gave me a place to develop my voice and be more confident in it. So when I show up in these spaces, I'm making sure that I'm heard and not overlooked." - POC, female, B

Alumni cited three kinds of opportunities provided by The Food Project that increased their leadership skills: receiving feedback on their leadership, leading their peers in higher level positions, and presenting to external groups about their work.

"Being able to lead big groups... I think that's really what allowed me to do what I do and just have the confidence, because it's like, OK, I have the confidence to speak in front of all of these people. I'm good. There's really nothing I need to worry about." - white, female, B

PREPARED TO MAKE DIFFERENCE

"It's made me a lot more confident in what I can talk about. I think before The Food Project, I was confident, but the confidence would just come from sheer confidence, not from the knowledge. And so, participating in these workshops [made me realize] the world in 2011 needed to change." - POC, male, CX

"We were actually working at hunger relief organizations and we were actually growing food for people and you could see that happening. So I think all of that sort of prepares you to do the work because you're already doing it... I mean, actually doing it, but in a guided way kind of then leads you to actually do it in a less guided way in the future." - white, female, B

Among alumni interviewed, **85%** discussed how their TFP experience increased their awareness of the issues affecting their communities. For some alumni, their awareness motivated them to make a difference and for others it made them feel more confident to speak up.

Additionally, **60%** of the alumni interviewed talked about how participating in social change projects, and advocacy projects in particular, at TFP influenced their comfort to get involved in social change as adults.





PREPARED TO WORK ON DIVERSE TEAMS

Among alumni interviewed, **90%** mentioned the value of being exposed to people from diverse backgrounds. The experience made alumni more compassionate as adults and increased their understanding of their own identities. As evidence of this, **90%** of survey respondents agreed that they are more able to build relationships with people different from them as a result of participating in The Food Project.

As a feature of working in diverse teams, TFP youth are taught how to have hard conversations with colleagues. Among the alumni interviewed, **75%** discussed the importance of that training to their adult relationships and **65%** talked about how they used those tools for personal reflection in their adult lives.

PREPARED AS CONSUMERS

Alumni talked abundantly about learning on the land and growing as people while growing food. **60%** of alumni interviewed expressed that the experience increased their awareness of where their food comes from and many continue to grow their own food or have tried to in the past.

As a result of learning about the food system, alumni interviewed reported eating **more vegetables** and **less “junk” food**. As evidence of this impact, **78%** of survey respondents reported an increase in vegetable consumption as a result of participation in The Food Project.

Beyond eating healthier, alumni interviewed talked about being more conscious about the impact of their decisions as consumers.

“I lived in a city- in New Orleans- that was 55 percent Black. My students were predominantly Black and Hispanic. I think because of the experiences that I had at The Food Project, I was really able to step into those roles and be really thoughtful about my approach as a privileged, straight, white guy in those conversations.” - white, male, B

“It definitely laid some groundwork for how to have difficult conversations.” - white, female, A

“It was quite fascinating really. It was fascinating, to, again, watch it go from a seed to fully grown. Just to see all the work as far as the weeding and the cultivating that goes into it. It was pretty cool just to watch it come to life.” - POC, male, A

“I try not to have a lot of junk food and I try to go on the balance. I maintain the balance and make the decision of doing good food versus like a lot of that.” - POC, male, B

“We have a compost now and it’s figuring things out, like how to utilize all of this or as much of that food as we can just because now I know how much work went into making it.” - POC, male, C

CONCLUSION

The results from our quantitative survey confirm that many of our alumni who participated more than once at The Food Project are leading and engaging others in creating personal and social change through their careers, community participation, and informal actions.

Through our qualitative interviews, we learned that, for many alumni, their motivation to make a difference came from their time at The Food Project. We also learned how The Food Project prepares our alumni to lead and engage in social change, to apply for and maintain jobs, to work on diverse teams, and to make good choices as consumers. These findings align well with the results from the quantitative survey that indicate that participation prepares alumni to work across differences and increases alumni's vegetable consumption.

“IT’S NOT LIKE A SPECIFIC THING OR ACTIVITY, AND MORE A BROADER CONCEPT, AND THAT’S THAT YOU CAN BE A PART OF SOMETHING THAT IS LARGER THAN YOURSELF AND DEVELOP CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS AND FRIENDSHIP THROUGH IT, BUT YOU CAN ALSO HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON YOUR COMMUNITY AND BEYOND. JUST THE FACT THAT THAT IS TRUE SHIFTED MY WORLDVIEW AND MADE ME REALLY HOPEFUL FOR AND EXCITED ABOUT GOING INTO THE FIELD I ENDED UP GOING INTO. SO I THINK THAT’S THE LARGEST IMPACT. THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FROM THE FOOD PROJECT.” - WHITE, FEMALE, B



¹ Cohort is a metric we defined for the purpose of the study that trifurcates the sample into three subsections based on the decade in which they began employment. Individuals in Cohort A began employment in the 1990s, Cohort B in the 2000s, and Cohort CX in the 2010s.
² Bureau of Labor Statistics Data. Data.bls.gov. <https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000>. Published 2021. Accessed September 22, 2021.