

THE FOOD PROJECT'S STRATEGIC PLAN

SEEDING AN EQUITABLE TOMORROW

2021-2026



The Food Project



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YOUTH. FOOD. COMMUNITY.



YOUTH. FOOD. COMMUNITY. These three simple words underscore The Food Project's powerful, collaborative, community-based approach to youth development and food justice. An approach that has inspired and supported the creation of dozens of similar organizations across the country.

Our power lies in the synergy between the three key components of our model: *youth development, sustainable urban and suburban farming, and community food access*. We believe that access to fresh, healthy, affordable food is a human right and that, given the tools, today's youth will become tomorrow's food justice leaders.

Over the past thirty years, we've welcomed more than 1,800 teenagers from across eastern Massachusetts to our urban and suburban farms as part of our year-round youth development programs. Throughout our programs, teens glean lessons from hands-on work and personal and group reflection, experiencing growth that defies expectations.

By growing together with peers of diverse racial and gender identities from a wide range of urban and suburban communities, youth build relationships that broaden their perspectives and build shared values in the service of a more just and compassionate world. They become leaders and advocates, often working alongside adults in their communities to build a healthier, more equitable local food system.

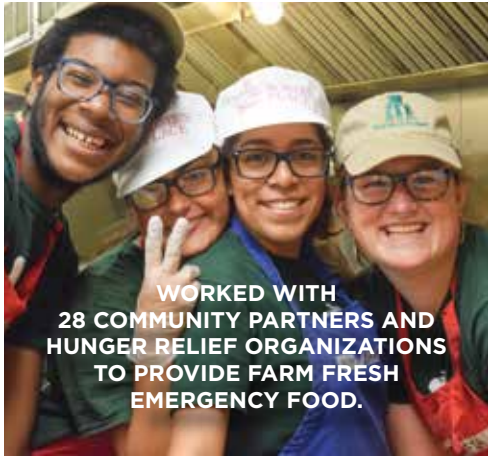
Much of our work takes place in the vibrant, multicultural communities of Dudley (in Boston), and Lynn (on the North Shore). In each, we collaborate with public sector and nonprofit partners and residents. Our approach to partnership involves mutual respect and learning, understanding the unique strengths and capacities of each community, and creating opportunities for the residents and stakeholders to guide priorities. And our youth are helping every step of the way, from packing boxes of food for donation and staffing our table at affordable farmers markets to building gardens for local residents and supporting community-led groups in meeting their food justice agendas.

VISION

We envision a world where youth are active leaders, diverse communities feel connected to the land and each other, and everyone has access to fresh, local, healthy affordable food.

MISSION

Create a thoughtful and productive community of youth and adults from diverse backgrounds who work together to build a just and sustainable food system.



YOUTH

Empower and equip youth leaders.

Youth are the center of The Food Project's mission and work. Every year we hire 120 youth from cities and suburbs, to participate in our Seed, Dirt, and Root Crews. Our model brings them together using the common ground of food and farming to work across race, class, gender identity and all manner of differences.

FOOD

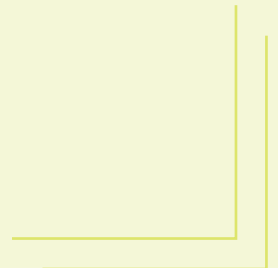
Grow and distribute fresh, healthy, affordable food in cities and suburbs.

Access to fresh, healthy food is a right, not a privilege. We grow a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables on our 6 urban and suburban farms and distribute that food in the communities where we farm. Our produce is sold through affordable farmers' markets that accept state and federal food subsidies and community supported agriculture shares, and donated through our strong network of community partners.

COMMUNITY

Inspire and support others to create change in their own communities.

In all of our programs, we seek to create powerful change that is rooted in community. We work to uplift the assets of the community, help remove barriers, and support the priorities established in partnership with residents, community groups, other nonprofits, municipalities, and local businesses.





Today, The Food Project and its partners—youth, community residents, and organizations alike—are hard at work addressing the inequities laid bare by the events of 2020. We are motivated by the understanding that important work

lies ahead and that, together, we must reimagine communities that are more equitable, more sustainable, and more resilient. By working in partnership with youth, community members, and the land, we believe that a better future is ours to create.



SEEDING AN EQUITABLE TOMORROW

OUR GOALS

1

EXTEND LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS

by providing more opportunities for youth to build critical skills and demonstrate their leadership across the organization's work.

2

ADVANCE FOOD JUSTICE

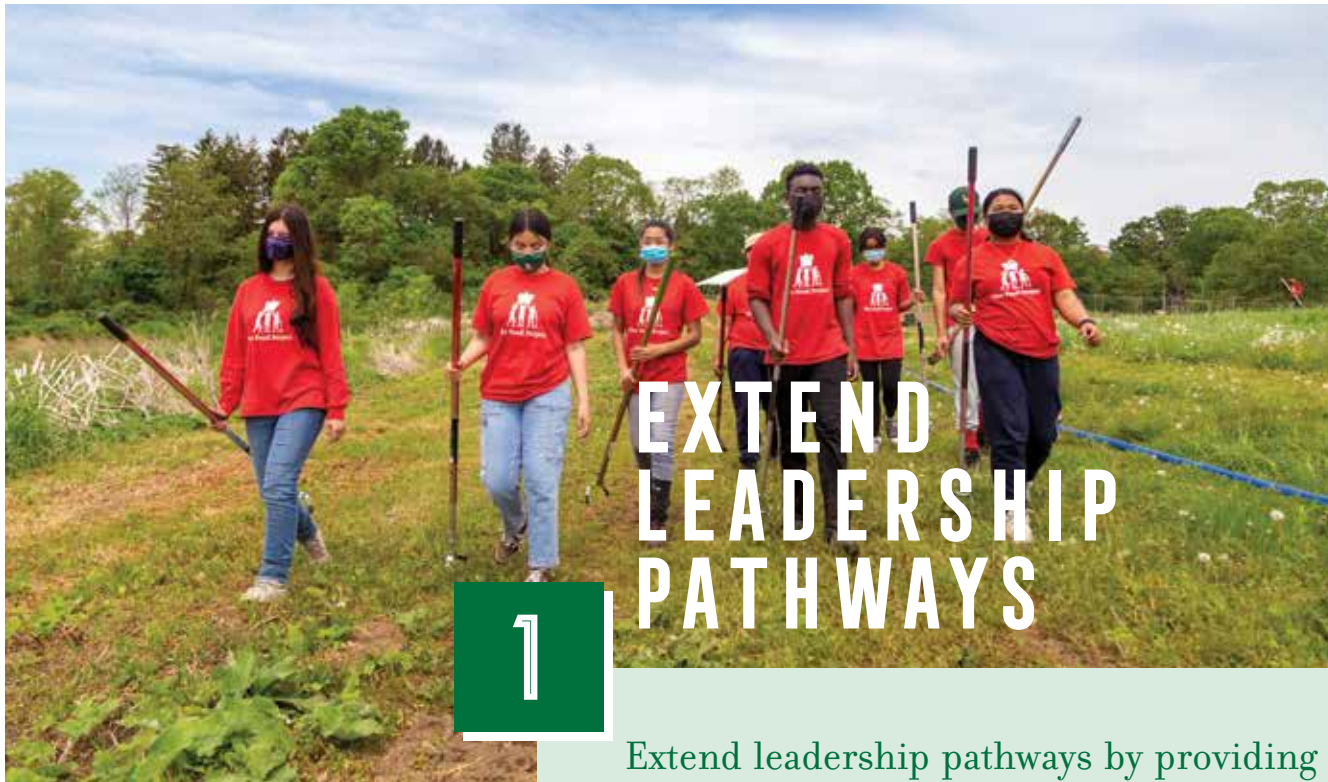
by building on our community partnerships to increase access to fresh, healthy, affordable food.

3

INVEST IN COMMUNITY HEALTH

by using the power of food to create a transformative space where residents can grow, cook, share, and advocate for healthy food.





EXTEND LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS

1

Extend leadership pathways by providing more opportunities for youth to build critical skills and demonstrate their leadership throughout the organization's work.

We are guided by the belief that young people possess a deep capacity for community leadership and mutual empowerment. Our youth crews create a uniquely powerful platform for growth and leadership. Young people come together from the city and the suburbs, using the common ground of food and farming to bridge race, class, and cultural differences. They share a common desire to do something that matters, and The Food Project gives them that opportunity.

In Seed Crew, teens experience a summer like no other—fun, rigorous, and meaningful in equal measure, yielding new relationships and a profound sense of accomplishment. Carrying these experiences with them, teens progress through the academic-year Dirt Crew and the year-round Root Crew, and increase their contributions to food justice by deepening their knowledge, skills, and empowerment.





THE PLAN

In the next five years, The Food Project will create opportunities for youth to grow their leadership capacity through expanded programs, longer engagement, and deeper connections to alumni. We will:

- Expand program enrollment and increase retention throughout the three core programs, while also diversifying hands-on learning opportunities.
- Launch new Internship and Fellowship programs in which teens will learn specific skills and grow into roles with greater autonomy and responsibility.
- Provide new opportunities for alumni to stay engaged through collaboration, mentorship, and more.

THE IMPACT

- Engage 25% more young people, increasing from 120 to 150 per year.
- Increase average tenure from 2 years to 3 years.
- Create 12-14 new Internship positions and 4-6 new Fellowship positions .

2

ADVANCE FOOD JUSTICE

Advance food justice by building on our community partnerships to increase access to fresh, healthy, affordable food.

We take a holistic approach to food systems change that considers both immediate needs and root causes. Over the past 30 years, we've worked to prioritize win-win solutions that meet the needs of low-income residents and food producers alike, distributing and donating millions of servings of fresh produce; helping to develop, pilot, and scale programs to promote and incentivize the use of federal nutrition benefits at farmers' markets; and building over 1,400 raised-bed gardens with an estimated annual productive capacity of nearly 250,000 servings. Even with these successes, we recognize that the challenges we face are immense and progress is hard-won. The unprecedented spike in food insecurity at the height of the pandemic—when one in five families with children didn't have enough to eat—drove home just how close many of our neighbors live to that reality. Even as conditions have improved, we cannot rest until true equity and security are established for all.





THE PLAN

Support community members in growing their own food by increasing the scale and depth of the Build-a-Garden Project, building more beds and providing expanded resources.

Grow more culturally connected food for communities facing food access disparities and distribute at least 50% of it through donations to community partners and sales at affordable prices.

Advocate for new and existing policies that combat food insecurity, including the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), healthy corner stores initiatives, produce prescription programs, and efforts to close the SNAP Gap.

THE IMPACT

- Build and/or repair 150 raised bed gardens per year, a 50% increase.
- Distribute 100,000+ pounds of fresh, healthy, affordable food annually through donations and sales at affordable prices and to those using federal and state benefits.
- Launch 1-2 new community-driven programs to increase food access.

3

INVEST IN COMMUNITY HEALTH

Invest in community health by using the power of food to create a transformative space where residents can grow, cook, share, and advocate for healthy food.

We believe in the power of food to connect people to their communities, to the land, and to each other. Because food sustains all of us, physically, mentally, and spiritually, access to healthy food is a human right, not a privilege. And access alone is not enough. People must be empowered with agency and choice around the foods they eat and the food system of which they are a part.

In 1995, The Food Project and a group of local residents worked together to clear a vacant lot in the Dudley neighborhood of trash and debris—the beginnings of our first urban farm. Twenty-six years later, we are still working hand in hand with our neighbors in Dudley and Lynn to elevate the assets and needs of community members and partner organizations, while getting down in the dirt, operating urban farms, and cultivating the components of a healthy food system. We have made great progress, and there is so much more to be done. At the height of the pandemic in 2020, surveys by partner agency DSNi found more than half of respondents experiencing food insecurity. Clearly, investments that build community health through nourishing food are needed.



THE PLAN

The Food Project aims to harness the power of food to cultivate health, belonging, and equity. We will partner with residents and community organizations to explore the options for and potentially build a community space centered on food, which could include:

- Indoor and outdoor growing space and technical support.
- A commercial kitchen with space for classes, preparation of community meals, and sharing of knowledge and experience.
- A year-round, affordable market, produce prescription programs, and community meals.
- Space and support to take action on issues through social justice groups, peer advocacy, and community organizing.

THE IMPACT

Research indicates that a community food center can improve physical and mental health, diet, and social connection. One model, developed by CFC Canada, demonstrates strong positive outcomes:

- 92% say the community food center provides an important source of healthy food.
- 76% say that their mental and physical health has improved.
- 92% say they feel that they belong to a community.
- 57% are more engaged in issues affecting their lives and their community.



MULTIPLY OUR IMPACT

BY SHARING OUR MODELS AND INNOVATIONS.

For the past 20 years, we've chosen to multiply our impact by sharing our model with like-minded organizations and individuals across the country, allowing each to adapt it to the strengths of their own communities and the challenges that their neighbors are facing. Going forward, The Food Project's focus remains on deepening our impact locally and sharing what we learn broadly.

OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

WE WILL



Offer a fresh, dynamic, engaging Food Project Institute to 150+ individuals from 50+ organizations.

Introduce specialized training modules that go deeper on specific topics, such as nonprofit-municipal partnership and program evaluation.

Engage 50+ Institute alumni in ongoing communities of practice.

STRENGTHEN OUR COMMITMENT

TO ENSURING THAT JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION PERMEATE ALL THAT WE DO.

The Food Project was founded upon the principles of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Our programs demonstrate that bringing people from diverse backgrounds together to work towards a shared vision can be transformational. At The Food Project, young people build relationships across typical dividing lines such as race, socio-economic status, and gender. They work together on the farms and in the community, learning about the systemic and historical roots of inequity in the food system. The centrality of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) in the youth programs serves as a beacon for the organization, guiding its approach to community partnerships and its staff culture.

Today, The Food Project's staff and board of trustees are more reflective of the diversity of its communities than ever before. Sixty percent of our Executive Leadership Team are BIPOC, as are nearly half of our staff and trustees. Alumni

from youth programs serve at every level of the organization's staff and board. And still, three decades in, we recognize that our JEDI journey is far from complete, and we are renewing our commitment to this critical work.

WE WILL



Conduct regular organizational audits to hold ourselves accountable to living out our commitment to JEDI, and identify next steps to further progress.

Deepen our knowledge of JEDI principles by learning from peer organizations and holding space for meaningful dialogue within the organization.



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