

For Us By Us:

Community Response & Driven Solutions to Strengthen Boston's Food Ecosystem

Ounce of Prevention Conference
MA Department of Public Health
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neighborhood
food
action
collaborative



Who we are



Ric Henry
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Leah Arteaga
Community Leader,
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Member & Advocate,
Neighborhood Food
Action Collaborative



Mariana Cohen
Co-Founder &
Deputy Director,
Vital CxNs



Sarah Primeau
Program Director,
Health Leads

Community Agreements

✓ Be Present & Accountable

Listen — feel no pressure to speak yet resist the temptation to only witness the dialogue.

✓ Be Brave, Be Inclusive

- **Acknowledge the risk** speakers take, and value the privilege to learn from one another.
- **Our Values**, cultural identities, and personal experiences matter.
- **Conflict** is always possible, and conflict is OK.

✓ Take Space & Make Space

Call attention to the **unheard voices** of people, ensuring that **all individuals** have space to participate fully.

✓ Address Racially Biased Systems and Norms

- Call out **Power Dynamics** in the room — be intentional of how you exercise your privilege.
- Remember, **we all have bias**. Biases are learned and can be unlearned.
- **Practice the ability to recognize** personal biases, emotions, and triggers, considering how they might impact actions.

✓ Be Open to Anti-Racist Dialogue

- Remember that Black, Brown, and Indigenous people's experiences with racism are **vast and vary**.
- Try to avoid becoming **defensive or emotional** when Black, Brown or Indigenous people speak from lived experiences with racism.

Agenda

- **Background: Food Insecurity Challenges & Solutions**
- **The Neighborhood Food Action Collaborative (NFAC):**
 - **Overview, Goals & Impact**
 - **The Model & Key Components**
 - **Lessons Learned**
- **Fireside chat with NFAC Members**

The Challenge: Food Insecurity

Thousands of families across Massachusetts are forced to navigate a **fragmented**, **inequitable**, and **under-resourced** food distribution system just to put food on the table.



Lack of information

about where, how
& if you are
eligible to access
food assistance



Difficult to access

healthy,
nutritious &
culturally-
relevant
meals/items

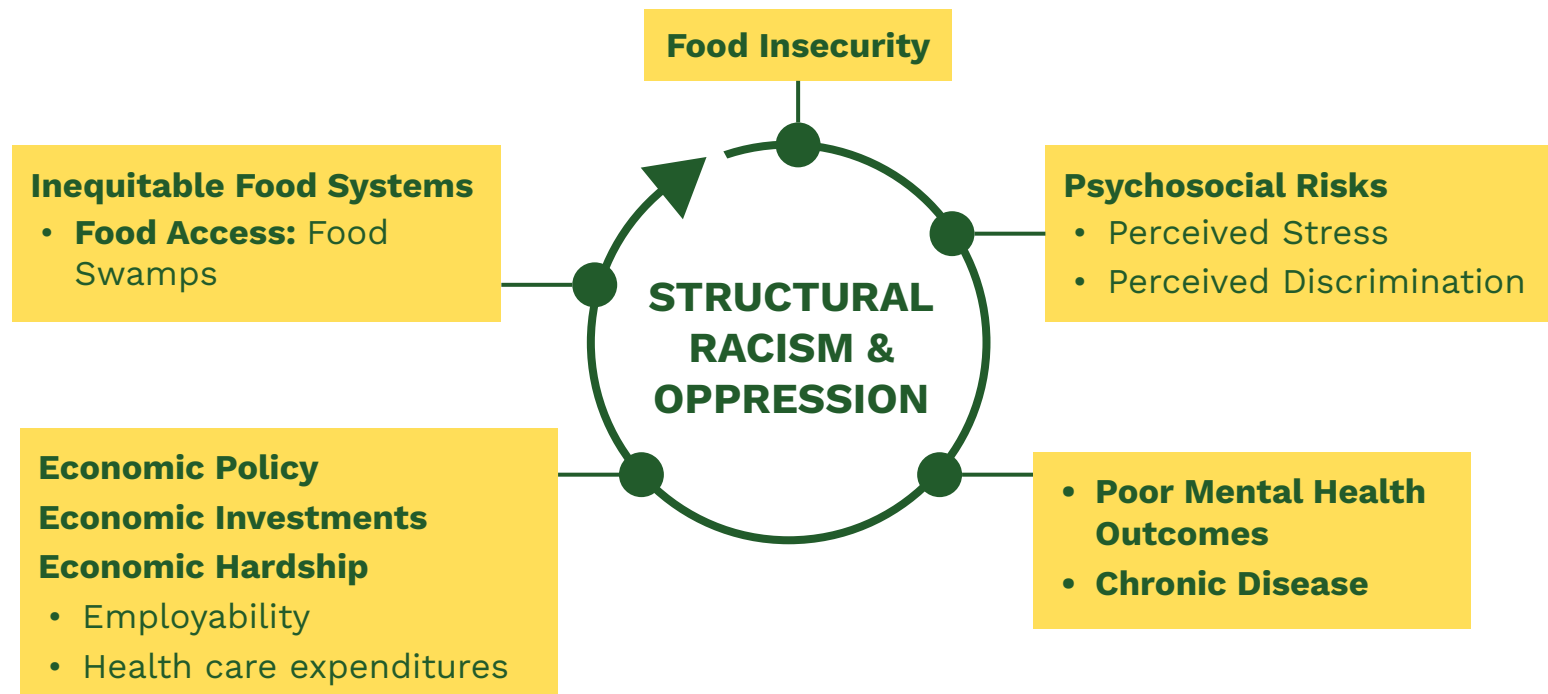


**Complex and
disjointed** food
access efforts
& assistance
application
processes



Programmatic
& policy
improvements
**lack community
input**

Root cause of health inequities

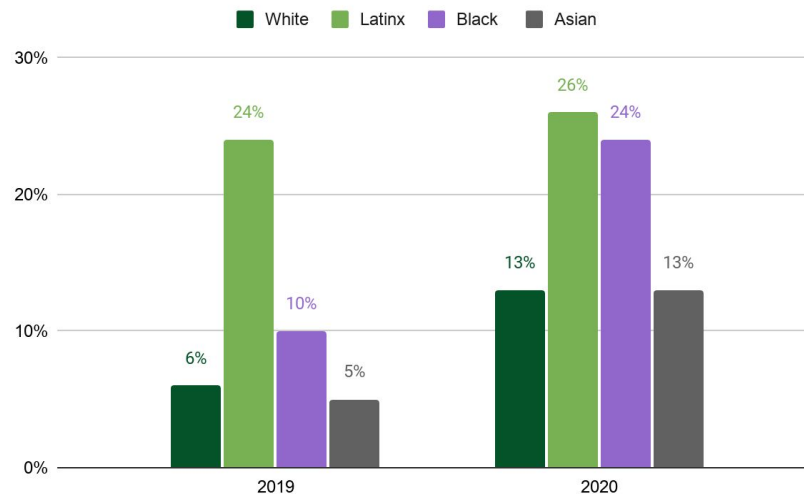


COVID-19 exacerbated food insecurity in Boston

The COVID-19 exacerbated food insecurity among the most vulnerable communities in Boston.

In 2020 rates of food insecurity increased for MA residents of all races/ethnicities — however, Latinx and Black MA residents experienced food insecurity at double the rate of white MA residents.

Share of the population 18+ indicating low or very low food security by race/ethnicity, Massachusetts



Source: bostonindicators.org

Boston communities identified the gaps and mapped the solutions

The Boston Mayor's Office of Food Justice and Health Leads conducted focus groups and interviews with over 100 Boston organizations and community members to identify and address the barriers to food access and learn how Boston families are impacted by food insecurity.



**MAXIMIZING
RESOURCES** via
**COMMUNITY
COORDINATION**,
strengthening
established programs,
creating new
partnerships and
consistent funding.

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The Solution: Community-centered Response

The Neighborhood Food Action Collaborative (NFAC) is a community-centered, cross-sector collaborative with **a mission to create solutions for a more robust, accessible, and equitable food ecosystem in Boston.**

The Neighborhood Food Action Collaborative (NFAC)

- 30+ community-based organizations, health systems, mutual aid groups, government
- 50+ community members
- 2 bi-weekly meetings



NFAC Goals



**Center
community
voice in decision
making &
solution design**



**Improve
cross-sector
coordination,
communication,
& collaboration**



**Develop a
pipeline of
Community
Leaders**

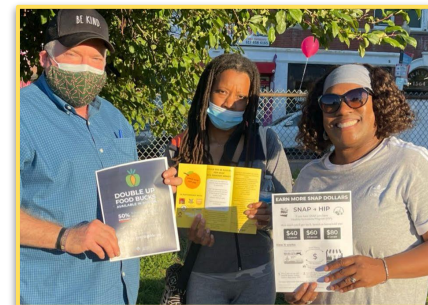


**Inform
Advocacy &
Policy
solutions**

BIPOC & low-income community
members in NFAC service area have
access to healthy food with
dignity

NFAC impact

- Fostered community and created a platform for community voice
- Food resource guide developed in 3 languages, **downloaded 2,600 times in 2022**
- 5 weekly food distribution events that **serve over 700 families weekly**
 - **Rescued and distributed 18,000 pounds** of food the day after Thanksgiving. Total food rescues/year = 102,000 lbs
- 2 community leaders are awarded for their service and leadership
- 13 community members hired to provide SNAP education and enrollment support > **completed 330 applications for community members to enroll in SNAP benefits**
- Inform policy and advocacy by testifying in front of congress and providing recommendations via on-the-ground learnings
- **Raised \$20k from community fundraiser** and **\$120k in grant support** in 2022



Key Consideration: Community Engagement Continuum

	COMMUNITY-LED	SHARED LEADERSHIP	COLLABORATE	INVOLVE	CONSULT	INFORM
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-led Community holds power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-led Shared Power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-led Shared power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led by client HL or Client holds power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led by client HL or Client holds power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led by client HL or Client holds power
Purpose	Support and follow the community's lead	Relationship with general agreement decision-making	Partner and share decision-making power	Ensure needs and interests and considered	Gather and incorporate feedback	Provide information
	Two-way communication	Two-way communication	Two-way communication	One-way or Two-way communication possible	One-way communication	One-way communication
	Problems and solutions are developed and addressed by the community	Problems and solutions are defined by the community	Advance solutions to complex problems	Advance solutions to complex problems	To inform the development of the client's project	Address immediate needs or issues

NFAC Model: a replicable approach

- ***Community Anchored & Investment***
- ***Cross-Sector Membership & Coalition Building***
- ***Participatory Governance***
- ***Backbone Organizational Support***

NFAC Model: a replicable approach

Community-Anchored & Investment

- The power of lived experience
 - Solutions designed by those who understand the challenges and barriers firsthand creates more meaningful, impactful, and sustainable systemic change
- Centering community voice
 - Transform power by shifting the relationships between those who hold power to design and those impacted by these designs
- Investment in community residents
 - Capacity building & skills development with paid leadership opportunities



"There has always been a need for more inclusion and support for families in Hyde Park & Roslindale who are facing food insecurity and want to be a part of the solution. This group makes everyone feel respected and included – our voices are heard."

– Sophia Michel,
NFAC member &
Roslindale resident
(pictured bottom right)

NFAC: a replicable approach

Cross-Sector Membership & Coalition Building

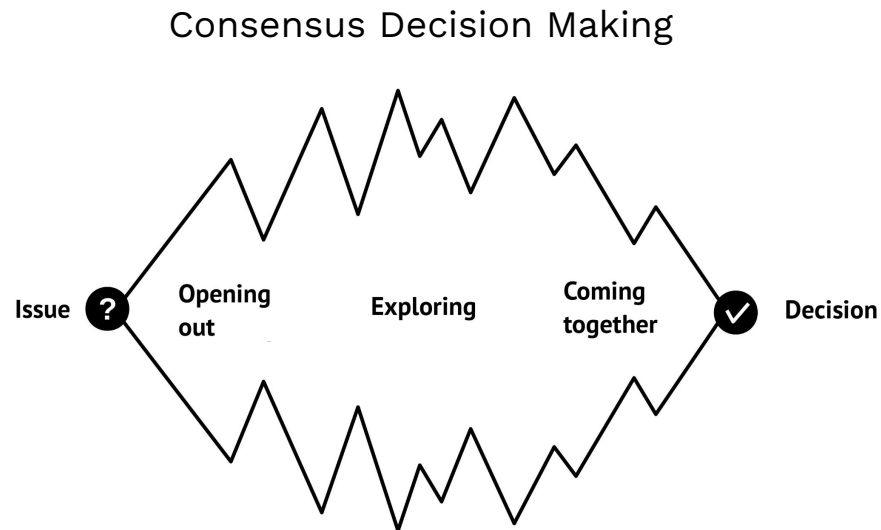
- Engagement and buy-in from cross-sector organizations and institutions
 - Diversified membership while keeping community at the center
- Mutually beneficial relationships
- Consistent convenings
- Open and collaborative agenda setting



NFAC: a replicable approach

Participatory Governance

- Establishing shared power
 - Setting up governance as an opportunity to examine assumptions and make the implicit explicit
- Community members and stakeholders need to determine:
 - Why are we here?
 - Who is here and what are our roles?
 - How are decisions made?
 - Principles of working together
- Community Leaders
 - Ensures community ownership, buy-in and sustainability



NFAC Model: a replicable approach

Backbone Organizational Support

- Seeding & Ceding Power
 - Requires a commitment by backbone organization/partners
 - Backbone organization has to cede some control and invest in community
- Meeting facilitation & coordination
- Funding, budgeting & sustainability
- Project management & support
- Supervision of community leaders
- Partnership building



Fireside Chat with NFAC Members

- Ricardo Henry, NFAC Community Leader
- Leah Arteaga, NFAC Community Leader
- Sophia Michel, NFAC Member and Peer Advocate



Lessons Learned

- Time, Consistency & Capacity
 - Strategies that address and mitigate power dynamics requires thoughtful engagement & intentionality
- Competing Priorities - Flexibility
- Community Readiness
 - Assess degree to which a community is ready to take action on an issue
- Compensation
 - Acknowledges & recognizes the value of community members' expertise and time
 - Removes a financial barrier that may otherwise prevent participation from historically underrepresented groups
- Celebration & Recognition
- Readiness to move upstream
 - Level-set on the purpose of equity work



Resources and Tools

- Community Agreements (slide 3)
- [NFAC Food Resource Guide](#)
- [Health Leads Community Engagement Continuum](#)
- Clear Impact: [Results Based Accountability](#)
- Governance: Consensus Decision Making
<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus>
- [Boston Mayor's Food Access Agenda 2021-2023](#)



Thank you!

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