

EAT4Health Initiative

To fill gaps in the food policy advocacy ecosystem to make it more:

- Inclusive of communities of low-income people and people of color;
- Responsive to grassroots needs and ideas; and
- Effective in terms of protecting the environment, promoting good health, and rebuilding strong local economies.



Community-Based Organization Role

Use EAT4Health program funds as operating support for ongoing community food security and food justice work.

Research national advocacy partners and negotiate terms of partnership agreement, including financial incentives.

Supervise a representative (a Fellow) to learn from national advocacy organizations and to participate in opportunities offered by the initiative.

Fellow Role

Spend time in Washington, DC, to increase understanding of the national policy landscape in order to develop national advocacy goals that align with local organizing efforts.

Work with a national advocacy organization peer or multiple staff to broadcast policy goals to policymakers and influencers.

Engage strategically with the "ecosystem" of national advocacy organizations.

Develop relationships through which they and their communities can influence thought leaders and policymakers.

National Advocacy Organization Role

Serve as a host site for the Fellows and increase capacity to engage community organizations through relationships with the Fellows.

Increase capacity of Fellows to engage with national policymakers through mentoring and by providing experiences that enhance advocacy knowledge and skills.



Dedication to Charity



This publication is dedicated to the brilliant intelligence, deep commitment, generous compassion, and energetic service of the late Charity Louise Darlene Mahouna Hicks, a fierce and exemplary EAT4Health policy Fellow from September 2012 to July 2014. We are grateful for the lasting impression she has made on each of us. Charity advocated for a healthy, vibrant, affordable, sustainable, and justice-centered local and regional food system. She believed that federal investments guided by strong equity criteria and targeted at financing a more localized and regionalized food system in the Detroit area via food hubs, small family farmers, urban agriculture, and food enterprises could create jobs, improve nutrition, reduce diet related disease, help remediate brownfields and generally build community.



“Federal policy must be formed, implemented, and evaluated based on how well it eradicates poverty and alleviates systemic economic disparities.”

~Charity Hicks



Community Sciences
438 N. Frederick Ave, Suite 315
Gaithersburg, MD 20877

P: 301.519.0722 F: 301.519.0724

www.CommunityScience.com



Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168

P: 212.684.6577 F: 212.689.6549

www.noyes.org

Overview

This report focuses on lessons learned by the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation from the innovative three-year, multi-funder initiative Everybody at the Table for Health (EAT4Health). EAT4Health sought to counterbalance the predominance of national advocates far removed from on-the-ground problems by:

1. *Lifting up the voices and agency of people directly impacted by structural racism and other forms of inequity;*
2. *Building the capacity of grassroots leaders and organizations to advocate for food policies that will have positive impact on their communities; and*
3. *Connecting national advocates to grassroots leaders and organizations.*

In practice, the initiative encountered the complicated exigencies of real life, including the tragic death of one of the Fellows, as well as organizational limitations, community tensions, and racial biases that threatened the efforts of the initiative's participants. EAT4Health succeeded in growing the advocacy capacity of all four grassroots leaders, but the benefits to the grassroots organizations and national advocacy groups varied.

Evaluation Methods

The initiative was evaluated by Community Science through interviews with grassroots leaders ("Fellows" [n=3]), leadership of the community-based organizations of which the Fellows were a part (n=4)², and their partners in national advocacy organizations (n=3)³. Data from Fellows' annual reports and community-based organization annual capacity assessments, in-person and phone conferences, and observations of Noyes Foundation program staff were also incorporated. Data were coded and analyzed to derive themes and key findings.

1. *Developed collaboratively by EAT4Health Fellows, Noyes Foundation program staff, and representatives from the Building Equity and Alignment (BEA) Initiative (see www.bea4impact.org).*

2. *One of the Fellows participated in the evaluation as the Fellow as well as the community-based organization representative.*

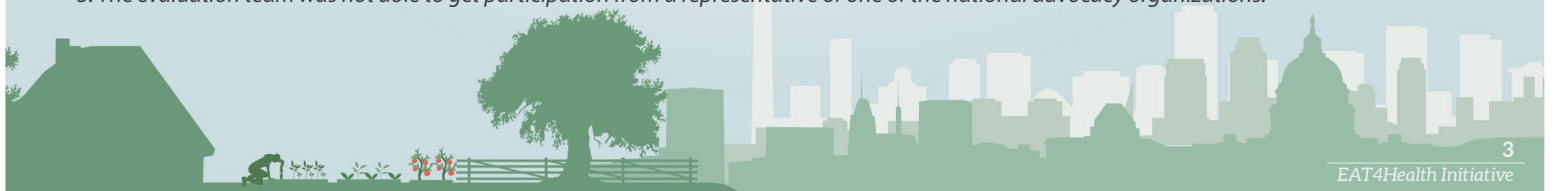
3. *The evaluation team was not able to get participation from a representative of one of the national advocacy organizations.*

This report discusses the necessity of recognizing and addressing grassroots groups' adaptations to the policy and funding environment, and supporting their efforts to move beyond adaptive responses to proactively create structural equity for their constituents who have historically been excluded in decisions that affect their lives. The intention of this report is to inform grassroots leaders and organizations of the lessons learned from this initiative and suggest strategies to incorporate them into their advocacy work at the local and national levels.



The Food Justice movement is important to the process of broadening the environmental frame because of the way FOOD connects NATURE to the ECONOMY through the agency of WORKERS.

~EAT4Health and BEA Initiative Convergence Statement¹



Case Study | CATA

Community-Based Organization

Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas (CATA, Farmworker Support Center)

CATA was founded by migrant farmworkers in southern New Jersey in 1979. Its membership is governed by and comprised of farmworkers and community members to support the mission of empowering and educating farmworkers through leadership development and capacity building, so they are able to make informed decisions for their living and working conditions.

Fellow

Nelson Carrasquillo

Nelson Carrasquillo is CATA's general coordinator. He joined CATA in 1992 and has 20 years of experience as a farmworker representative to the Farmworker Health and Safety Institute board, Latino Advisory Board for the New Jersey Department of Family and Children, the United Methodist Concern for Workers Task Force, the Urban Rural Mission, United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Small Farms Commission, Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Pesticides Dialogue Committee, EPA, Food and Drug Administration, and USDA Food Quality Protection Act Task.

National Advocacy Organization

Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS)

The UCS's mission is to "put rigorous, independent science to work to solve our planet's most pressing problems. Joining with citizens across the country, we combine technical analysis and effective advocacy to create innovative, practical solutions for a healthy, safe, and sustainable future" (www.ucsusa.org). The UCS began as a collaboration between students and faculty members at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1969 and has grown into an alliance of more than 400,000 citizens and scientists. UCS's Food & Agriculture initiative focuses on and works toward promoting a sustainable food system, including supporting regional food systems and reducing the use of pesticides.

Highlight of EAT4Health Participation

CATA inserted the perspective of migrant farmworkers into the national dialogue about food justice among federal, state, and nonprofit leaders, and focused its efforts on impacting the food system through a comprehensive campaign at the intersection of immigration, workers' rights, and food justice. CATA developed the farmworker community's leadership capacity so they could engage the broader community in advocacy efforts to impact the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the regulations known as the Worker Protection Standard (WPS). Farmworkers not only informed consumers and supporters about the issues but also educated legislators and regulators, including a WPS training for EPA staff by a former farmworker.



Case Study | CATA

Challenge

In the context of workers' rights, farmworkers are among the most vulnerable. Many farmworkers have insecure immigration status and their lack of protections as workers exacerbates this vulnerability. Addressing immigration reform and workers' rights is integral to food justice efforts; the political stalemate on immigration issues made CATA's policy agenda to improve conditions for farmworkers that much more difficult to achieve.

With roots in the system of slavery, agribusiness' modern system for the exploitation of farmworkers is supported by immigration policies that render migrant workers vulnerable. In the first year of the initiative, given President Barack Obama's stated commitment to immigration reform, it was feasible for CATA to focus its advocacy efforts on comprehensive immigration reform to benefit farmworkers and all immigrants. However, it became apparent that immigration reform was not going to happen and that a shift in advocacy objective and strategy was therefore necessary. CATA refocused its efforts to build farmworker capacity to influence EPA and make concrete changes in the WPS to protect workers' rights.



“Over two million farmworkers would directly benefit from a transition away from reliance on toxic pesticides. While many of them are undocumented and not able to be vocal advocates, those that are working with the appropriate papers are tomorrow's organic advocates. Engaging workers in the environmental movement necessitates embracing their need for power in the workplace, for the right to organize for better pay and working conditions.”

~EAT4Health and BEA Initiative Convergence Statement

Strategies

Keeping the big picture of equity for farmworkers in mind allowed the Fellow, CATA, and UCS to pivot their advocacy strategy. With immigration reform no longer viable, the team asked itself what new approaches would be most effective. Strategies used included:

- » Strengthening the capacity of the farmworker community and engaging the larger community to improve the regulatory mechanisms already in place.
- » Framing the WPS campaign as part of a broader Food Justice Campaign in which members provided a narrative connecting the issue of worker protections to consumer concerns around safety and to issues of environmental protection and climate change.
- » Mobilizing supporters to submit statements during EPA's open comment period for the WPS, connecting worker safety to community and consumer safety, and promoting food justice for all.
- » Building new alliances and joining coalitions of food, farming, health, and environmental justice organizations in order to strengthen the larger food justice movement by identifying common goals, including: the Agricultural Justice Project, the Domestic Fair Trade Association, the Food Chain Workers Alliance, Earth Justice, the Migrant Clinicians Network, and Beyond Pesticides. Additionally, CATA was active in national movement spaces, including Good Food For All and Building Equity and Alignment Initiative.
- » Traveling to Washington, DC, along with other allied organizations and meeting with legislators and regulatory agencies to educate them on the issues and promote policies to protect workers.
- » Inviting EPA staff members to a training on the WPS led by a former farmworker and safety expert to help regulators better understand the farmworker reality and the obstacles farmworkers must overcome in order to protect themselves from harm.
- » Raising not only policymakers' awareness of workers' exposure to pesticides, but also the awareness of consumers and trade organizations so that the connection between worker safety and consumer safety is understood and upheld as a fundamental part of domestic fair trade.



Case Study | EMEAC

Community-Based Organization

East Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC)

EMEAC was created in the 1960s in response to environmental concerns in southeast Michigan. Today, EMEAC's mission is to empower the Detroit community to protect, preserve, and value the land, air, and water. EMEAC's work is intersectional because EMEAC members have been forced to take on multiple systems of oppression in their everyday lives.

Fellow

Charity Hicks

The late Charity Hicks was the policy director at EMEAC. She was a native Detroit native raised on the city's lower east side off of the Detroit River. Ms. Hicks had an extensive background in policy advocacy and community service including as the lead author of the City of Detroit's Food Security Policy and the articles establishing the Detroit Food Policy Council.

National Advocacy Organization

National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC)

The National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) represents family farm and rural groups whose members face the challenge of the deepening economic recession in rural communities. Founded in 1986, this nonprofit serves as a national link for grassroots organizations working on family farm issues (credit, trade, and farm and food policy) and represents 24 grassroots organizations in 32 states.

Highlight of EAT4Health Participation

EMEAC enhanced the capacity and ability to draw connections between advocacy work on land, water, food, environment, and climate, and increased its ability to respond to community crisis by serving as a resource for food justice and policy.



Case Study | EMEAC

Challenge

To build the capacity of individual staff and the organization at the same time that the organization was shifting its focus and priorities.

Throughout the EAT4Health Initiative, EMEAC was challenged to integrate Charity Hicks's work with that of other staff, as Ms. Hicks was able to move her advocacy work forward with only intermittent interaction. Unfortunately, Ms. Hicks tragically died as the result of an accident in the second year of the initiative before that integration could take hold. All this took place in the midst of major developmental changes within the organization, including shifting from a regional focus to a "hyper-local" focus, and the establishment of a new, more diversified organizational leadership structure.

Strategies

Keeping in mind limits to staff capacity, EMEAC innovated ways to participate in national and global movement efforts while intensifying its focus on organizational development and local needs. Strategies used included:

- » Developing networks that directly connect EMEAC with key national organizations and coalitions, allowing it to participate in national advocacy efforts while focusing more directly on the local region.
- » Leveraging relationships with other grassroots organizations to learn about models and practices that have been successful.
- » Instituting regular meetings among organization leadership and staff for reflection and information sharing.
- » Renegotiating terms of the EAT4Health funding agreement with the Noyes Foundation to adjust to the sudden and drastic changes after the passing of the Fellow, allowing the organization to continue to participate in and benefit from the initiative.
- » With the Fellow gone, recognizing the need to shift away from the initiative's focus on policy and advocacy, and instead use program funds to develop and fill two new leadership staff positions to engage in grassroots organizing.



Case Study | SWU

Community-Based Organization

Southwest Workers' Union (SWU)

SWU was created in 1988 in Hondo, Texas, and is currently based in San Antonio, Texas. SWU is comprised of low-income workers and families, and youth organizing for worker rights, environmental justice, and community empowerment.

Fellow

Diana Lopez

Diana Lopez began at SWU as a high school intern and became the executive director in 2014. Ms. Lopez was recognized with the 2009 Brower Youth Award from Earth Island Institute and the Urban Renewal Award for her community organizing and for promoting food sovereignty.

National Advocacy Organization

Rural Coalition (RC)

Since 1978, the Rural Coalition has worked to 1) develop and implement progressive policies responsive to rural needs, and 2) develop the capacities of rural organizations and people to work effectively to sustain institutional and systemic change.

Highlight of EAT4Health Participation

SWU increased its participation in regional and national food justice and food policy events, and helped inform the debate around the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. It met with state representatives and distributed a food policy brief, Food Insecurity and the Working Poor, which they authored with assistance from the Rural Coalition.



Case Study | SWU

Challenge

Tension between local and national advocacy focus and development of new leadership in the organization.

The leadership of SWU shifted during the EAT4Health Initiative, and the Fellow, Diana Lopez, became executive director of the organization. This transition contributed to confusion with regard to expectations of the Fellow and the national advocacy organization. The national advocacy organization was also going through a transition at the time. The confusion and transitions, while challenging, invigorated the Fellow to grow her own leadership and the advocacy capacity of the community-based organization at the same time.

Strategies

With the challenge of staff transitions and leadership changes, strategies used included:

- » Receiving advice and mentoring from more experienced EAT4Health Fellows.
- » Eliciting additional support and involvement from the organization's staff and board members.
- » Working to improve communications with the national advocacy organization and set realistic expectations and boundaries.
- » Learning to reflect on and balance local and national priorities while also pushing the advocacy agenda of the organization forward.
- » Using local policy wins to increase overall credibility of the organization.
- » Creating infrastructure to build knowledge collectively throughout the organization to ease transition and advancement of organizational leaders.



Case Study | FPCC

Community-Based Organization

First People's Conservation Council (FPCC)

Established in 2012, the First People's Conservation Council (FPCC) of Louisiana is an association that was formed to provide a forum for four Native American tribes and their respective tribal communities located in coastal Louisiana to identify and solve natural resource issues on their tribal lands. The association now consists of six tribes. The member tribes include: the Pointe au Chien Indian Tribe, Grand Bayou-Atakapa-Istak Tribe, Isle de Jean Charles Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw, the Grand Caillou/Dulac Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw, the Bayou Lafourche Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw, and the Avoyel-Taensa Tribe.

Fellow

Dana Parfait

Dana Parfait is an enrolled member of the Grand Caillou/Dulac Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Confederation of Muskogee. The Confederation is an alliance of three Native American communities located in the most southeastern part of Louisiana, all from the same ancestry, that spread to different communities over time, but that came together to seek state and federal recognition, advance research, document their historical legacy, and share resources for local development.

National Advocacy Organization

Creation Justice Ministries (CJM)

Creation Justice Ministries spun off of the National Council of Churches in the second year of the initiative. CJM works to protect and restore God's creation by providing opportunities for churches to work together, equipping congregations and religious leaders, and empowering the faith community to raise its Christian voice in the public arena on eco-justice concerns.

Highlight of EAT4Health Participation

Since none of the tribes of FPCC are federally recognized and only a portion of the communities is state recognized, it is very difficult to receive assistance from outside sources, foundations, or the government. The Eat4Health grant afforded the opportunity to be able to do projects in the communities and to bring the tribes' voices to the EPA, Senators and Representatives, and movement meetings happening throughout the United States (for example, the Roots and Remedies convening).



Case Study | FPCC

Challenge

Readiness of community organization to engage in capacity-building work.

The EAT4Health grant was initially awarded to a collaborative of four Native communities and one African American organization. The Fellow started the initiative as one of two Fellows. The second Fellow was added by the collaborative's fiscal sponsor to better represent the communities' racial and ethnic diversity. Over time, it became clear that the capacity-building aspect of the EAT4Health grant did not work for the collaborative because it assumed prior experience working together. Building trust among the five communities required engaging both Fellows effectively, which required more resources than the initiative had to allocate. The challenges presented by the resource constraints for the collaborative and misunderstanding regarding the use and control of the grant funds contributed to intergroup tensions and difficulty with reaching consensus on important decisions. During this developmental phase, there also were other challenges that affected the second Fellow's ability to maximize what the initiative had to offer her. Consequently, the second Fellow withdrew participation in the latter part of the second year, and the organization she had been associated with dropped out of the initiative. The EAT4Health Initiative decided that the grant would be shifted to the FPCC with the expectation that transferring the grant from a fiscal sponsor to a single and indigenous organization would make capacity building easier and more effective.

The EAT4Health Initiative engaged an expert in group processes to assist the collaborative with the above issues. While greater clarity around roles and the nature of the initiative was achieved, the process delayed the Fellowship award for the primary Fellow. She accepted other full-time employment and was able to serve as the Fellow, only in a part-time capacity for the final year of the initiative.

Strategies

With the challenge of shifting organizational structures and the need to build basic organizational capacity in mind, strategies included:

- » Magnifying the impact of the individual Fellow by recognizing the highly personal nature of the work and encouraging the Fellow to model leadership for others in the Native American community, including her son, who would eventually be chief of their tribe. This resulted in the Fellow having notable interactions with policymakers that resonated because of her ability to tell a powerful and authentic personal story.
- » Receiving support from consultants and other EAT4Health Fellows.
- » Placing national advocacy work on the back burner while focusing on local issues and building local capacity.
- » Forming relationships that would grow and be maintained by present and future FPCC members and leaders.
- » Highlighting the importance of organizational readiness to engage in national advocacy capacity-building work as a consideration for both the funder and the community organization.



“Eat4Health provided guidance and the opportunity to partner with an already known organization and have our voices heard. With that came the ability to become more powerful than we had ever thought we could be.”

~FPCC Fellow



Lessons Learned | Challenges

In addition to the challenges and strategies above, the following lessons were shared by two or more of the EAT4Health groups.



Pushback in response to calling out structural racism

Individuals and organizations that openly discuss structural racism or oppression can face difficulty establishing or maintaining partnerships, or gaining traction in a policy environment. An EAT4Health participant who has been involved in this work for decades talked about how the environmental racism movement could only gain speed once it was rebranded as “environmental justice.”

“For example, we’ve worked with [a national environmental justice organization] and everybody thinks that people that have a philosophy of protecting the earth and the food supply would also have a mentality of protecting human life and treating people with respect—they let us present at their conferences, but don’t push it to the degree where their members might feel uncomfortable ... We have a lot of sympathy from folks but not as much action from folks that we would like to see.”

- EAT4Health Participant



Disparities in funding small and grassroots organizations working in communities of color

Only 9 percent of funding dollars goes to organizations that primarily work with ethnic or racial minorities; from that, 16 percent goes to organizations working with Black communities, 15 percent goes to Hispanic communities, and 5 percent goes to Native American communities (Foundation Center, 2016). An independent study by the Greenlining Institute (2006) found that only 3.6 percent of grant dollars go to minority-led nonprofits.

“Native American organizations get about less than 1 percent of the national funding that happens, or some small percentage like that, but as an organization they barely ever get funded. I think that more foundations should take a look at that and definitely fund more grassroots organizations or small communities.”

~EAT4Health Participant



Lack of funding for systems change

Most funding opportunities focus on direct services and education or awareness raising, rather than systemic change. EAT4Health participants talked about the role of the “Missionary Complex” (Baldwin, 1964) in grantmaking—the idea that Black communities need to be “saved” by predominantly White outsiders rather than given the opportunity to build up from the inside. There is a lot of work masquerading as food justice carried out with a paternalistic “if they only knew” ideology (Guthman, 2008), where it is assumed that change can be made only by educating disempowered communities. This ignores the role of structural racism in inequities in food access and the need for systemic change to address those inequities.

“As an analysis: It’s more likely for communities that are impoverished to receive direct service benefits ... But any kind of policy that would be creating community resistance, or resilience, is the one that is kind of shaved off or completely taken away ... It’s often continuing the poverty cycle, because you’re never increasing their capacity to grow—you’re continuing to just barely survive.”

- EAT4Health Participant



Power imbalance between national and local grassroots organizations

The EAT4Health funding model provided an opportunity to “tip the scale” by giving small annual project grants directly to each community-based organization and allowing them to negotiate a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for use of the funds with a national advocacy organization, on their terms. There was limited intervention on the part of the funder to ensure this process went smoothly beyond making suggestions regarding the MOU and providing letters of interest written by national advocacy organizations for the community-based organizations to review. The funder also invited the national advocacy organizations to participate in the first convening of the Fellows during a “dating” phase when the community-based organizations were determining the national advocacy organization with which to partner. However, once the MOUs were executed, little opportunity was provided for the national advocacy organizations to interact with the funder or one another to discuss challenges and how to improve the way they work with community-based and grassroots organizations. For example, one national advocacy organization was unable to sign on to its grassroots partner’s advocacy campaign because of an internal policy. Since there was no process in place for the Fellow to communicate with the national partner how frustrating this situation was or for the national advocacy organization to discuss the matter with the funder, the issue was not resolved. In another instance, the national advocacy organization failed to make adequate and timely arrangements to temporarily replace an advocacy peer who went on leave. In a third case, a highly productive relationship between the national advocacy organization and Fellow ended when the national advocacy organization’s leadership changed halfway through the initiative; the new leader and Fellow had to take time to reestablish a relationship.

“In hindsight, the Foundation could have required that all the MOUs between the community-based and national advocacy organization partners contain a bullet point about all the national advocacy organization peers, Fellows and Foundation staff, speaking on a semi-annual basis. Structuring some collective conversations from the very beginning would have provided a space to troubleshoot and also to raise up effective practices.”

-EAT4Health Program Staff



Lessons Learned | Strategies

The following lessons on strategies were shared by two or more of the EAT4Health groups.

Build organizational capacity for national advocacy work through:

- » Exploring and adapting best practices for organizing staff, volunteers, and constituents by sharing successful models and practices from other grassroots organizations, especially for mobilizing their own constituents' energies towards national campaigns and to gain the attention of potential allies.
- » Advancing policy goals through strategic relationships (with advocates, policymakers, agency officials, media representatives, community leaders, etc.), which means that work plans must explicitly include networking and partnership formation and maintenance. Also, actions and progress should be reported in staff meetings and to appropriate leadership to foster accountability, reflection, and adaptation.
- » Spending time learning the advocacy ecosystem by getting to know which organizations and leaders focus on which constituencies and issues and how they all work together.
- » Building credibility of the organization to talk about issues at the national level by leveraging local policy successes, and vice versa.
- » Using data and evaluation to support advocacy work to continuously improve models and methods.
- » Continually reassessing organizational readiness and adaptability as conditions —internal and external to the organization—change and unexpected challenges and opportunities arise.

Build staff knowledge and experience in policy, planning, and strategy through:

- » Using support and technical assistance available from: funders; intermediaries focused on policy and advocacy (for example, Racial Equity Toolkit to Assess Policies, Initiatives, Programs, and Budgets downloaded from <http://bit.ly/1kj2qSX> or PolicyLink's Getting Equity Advocacy Results [GEAR] accessed at <http://bit.ly/1TAFjWq>); and advocacy networks and coalitions.
- » Planning time for reflection and processing within the organization, providing opportunities for sharing of knowledge developed by staff through community organizing, trainings, and professional development experiences.
- » Participating in leadership development and training opportunities that support individual capacity for national advocacy work—in EAT4Health, the Praxis Project provided a strong curriculum in understanding policymaking and advocacy, including conducting a power analysis, providing a tour of the Capitol, and inviting policy experts to speak with the Fellows.



Connect local and national advocacy work through:

- » Maintaining flexibility and adaptability in working with various issues, partners, and initiatives.
- » Utilizing bidirectional communication—that is, from grassroots to national as well as from national to grassroots—through collaboration and networking with other local and national advocacy organizations, coalitions, and networks.
- » Spending time analyzing the advocacy landscape by examining policies that shape conditions in communities, exploring new opportunities, and recognizing when opportunities have been lost and when strategies need to change. Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats – as well as of the power structure related to the issue are helpful to conduct to understand the advocacy landscape.
- » Seeking mentorship from national advocacy partners, especially on policy and guidance for navigating the national political environment.
- » Having a regular physical presence in Washington, DC, to actively maintain visibility and relationships with policymakers.
- » Deepening the understanding of national advocacy peers by offering opportunities for them to visit local communities to see policy impacts on the ground and hear from impacted people.
- » Connecting with other related issues and networks (for example, a food justice organization aligning with environmental justice groups) to broaden impact.
- » Aligning strategies across levels of influence, from hyper-local to national.

Manage expectations and clear communication in an unpredictable policy environment:

- » Expecting your relationships to shift and change due to natural transitions in organizations and in people's lives, and sometimes, external pressures such as elections and budget cuts.
- » Being prepared to navigate these changes by communicating frequently and effectively with the organization's leadership, staff, volunteers, and constituents.
- » Making clear to all partners that communication is a two-way street and the responsibility for communication should not lie with just one organization or partner, especially when it comes to communicating any changes in relationships, expectations, and strategies
- » Continually reassessing relationships, documenting observations, and discussing adaptations and changes not only with your partners, but also funders, technical assistance providers, and evaluators, especially when funding or other requirements might cause conflict, displace, or jeopardize local and community priorities. The individuals involved from these organizations may also change during the grant period, which further underscores the importance of frequent communication and management of expectations.
- » Engaging with external evaluators (if applicable) to ensure accurate documentation of advocacy experiences and policy results, including sharing ideas about the best methods for capturing contextual factors that might have shaped the outcomes.



Conclusion

The information in this report highlights the lessons learned from the EAT4Health Initiative by the Fellows and community-based organizations. The greatest impacts were on the capacity of the individual Fellows, who all experienced improvements in individual leadership and advocacy skills. However, impacts on the community-based organizations varied, depending on the internal and external characteristics of the organization (leadership, staffing, organizational structure, relationship to constituents, and the political and policy climate). This emphasizes the importance of balancing individual leadership development with local organizational development, as well as the local advocacy agenda with national advocacy priorities.

Another important finding was the initiative's mixed impact on power dynamics between national and grassroots organizations. Such challenges are to be expected; some strategies to deal with them are described in this report (e.g., setting clear boundaries) and were successfully implemented. However, it is important to note that all partners felt the model used in this initiative did not provide enough structure or assistance to the national advocacy organizations in how to manage their relationships with community-based organizations to foster more equity. It is also important to note that the initiative gave the community-based organizations the option of not renewing their contracts with their national partners. In one case, the community-based organization opted to use the final year project grant to formalize a new set of relationships with the City's food policy council and with state-level advocates. While giving the community-based organization a small grant to negotiate its own terms of relations with a national advocacy organization was meaningful, in future efforts, more energy should be spent to nurture that relationship and provide guidance to the advocacy organizations.

Recommendations

Grassroots community-based organizations fighting for food sovereignty and justice are most likely to benefit from, and succeed in, engaging in national advocacy to improve food policy with sufficient funding as well as with these three assets:

- » A constituency to whom they are accountable. Without a clear constituency, the goal of the advocacy agenda may be off mark and therefore fail to motivate sustained constituent engagement.
- » Basic organizational capacity for decisionmaking. Without strong internal organizational structure, national advocacy work can bog down decisionmaking capacity.
- » Flexible national allies interested in local context and able to let local partners adapt advocacy strategies in order to simultaneously advance local and national goals. Without flexible and responsive partners, national campaigns can become a one-way energy sink.



“EAT4Health confirmed that frontline community organizations can bring powerful voices to national advocacy efforts, but only when the groups are strongly rooted with time tested processes for decision-making and communication. Now, the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation can apply these lessons as we build upon and refine our grant making strategies. If you are interesting in learning and sharing more about this topic, please reach out to us, we’d love to know what you think.”

***~Kolu Zigbi, Program Director
Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation
kolu@noyes.org***





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