



Urban Tree Connection, Photo: Brad Larrison, Temple University

ADDRESSING HUNGER & FOOD INSECURITY

Community Capacity Building of Philadelphia's Nonprofit Organizations

Mahbubur R. Meenar, Ph.D
Center for Sustainable Communities
Temple University

This brief report presents the result of an online survey that was conducted in 2012 as part of a research study titled “Food Justice in Post-Industrial US Cities: The Role of Nonprofit Organizations (NPOs)”. The study examined NPO interventions in addressing the issues of community food insecurity and vulnerability within the context of the City of Philadelphia. Its primary purpose was to analyze NPOs and their food-related programs and events that are tied with community development and community capacity building efforts, i.e., providing healthy food access, supporting local food systems, promoting food justice, developing organizational networks, building

community capacity, and offering education, training, and jobs. The survey was focused on private NPOs, such as community-based or grassroots organizations (with or without formal 501(c)(3) status) and community development corporations, that offered or participated in any food-related programs and served constituencies of varied scales, such as a neighborhood, city, or region. Smaller grassroots organizations that were known for single food-centric programs such as community gardens were also included in this study. Other NPOs such as educational or religious institutions and foundations were excluded.

SELECTION OF STUDY SAMPLES

Since a complete list of NPOs that had food-focused or food-related programs in Philadelphia was not readily available, the study had to rely on a number of sources. As the first step, a list of members of the DVRPC food systems stakeholder committee was collected. Included in this list were about 40 member organizations that had any type of food-related program in Philadelphia. Then the names of other NPOs and contact information, if

available, were collected from three online sources, i.e., GuideStar (www.guidestar.org), the Urban Institute's National Center for Charitable Statistics or NCCS (www.nccsdataweb.urban.org), and PACDC (www.pacdc.org). Following these resources and a 10-month long data verification process (from September 2011 to June 2012), a list of 153 NPOs was finalized as study samples.

METHODOLOGY

Following literature reviews, the variables used in this analysis were grouped into four categories:

- (i) Human capital related variables – including the enhancement of individual ability (Chaskin, 2001) and cultivation of transferable knowledge and skills (Goodman et al., 1998), such as food-related educational and training programs, internship and voluntary work programs, and events;
- (ii) Physical and financial capital related variables – including community economic development (Ferguson & Dickinson, 1999; Phillips & Pittman, 2009), such as creating or retaining jobs through food-related programs, assisting local businesses, and producing food in vacant lands;
- (iii) Social capital related variables – including equity and empowerment (Coleman, 1988; Twombly et al., 2000; Labonte et al., 2002) and citizenship (Fallov, 2010), such as vulnerable population engagement and community engagement; and
- (iv) Organizational capital related variables (Chaskin, 2001; Labonte et al., 2002) – including inter-organizational network.

Primary data were collected through an online survey conducted in fall of 2012. The survey pertained to the organizations themselves and it did not ask any personal questions of the individual respondents. The survey was distributed to the administrators, management staff, or other representatives of 153 NPOs. Six emails bounced back because of invalid email addresses. Ultimately, the survey reached out to 147 NPOs.

The 28-question survey had the following major sections: basic information about the NPOs, programs and events, organizational relationships, local economy, and communication. The survey was active for two months, starting from October 14, 2012. The survey yielded responses from representatives of 116 NPOs (a response rate of 79%). About 56% of the respondents were administrators or managers. The rest were staff, board members, directors, founders, members, or volunteers.



RESULTS

ABOUT THE NPOs

About 71% of NPOs that participated in this survey had official 501(c)(3) status. About 92% of NPOs had their offices in Philadelphia, the rest were located outside the city but had programs in the city. Most of these organizations (43%) were established in the 2000s, 15% were established during the 1990s, 19% were during the 1980s, 15% were during the 1970s, and the rest were before 1969. In the last group, two NPOs were established in the 19th century. The annual operating budget of the participant NPOs varied greatly. There were a few grassroots organizations without any operating budget, but at the same time 4% NPOs

had a budget above 10 million U.S. dollars, 27% had 1 to 10 million, 22% had 100,000 to under 1 million, 14% had 10,000 to under 100,000, and 6% had below 10,000 dollars. About 27% survey participants did not respond to this question.

In terms of the numbers of full-time and part-time staff, the organizations varied greatly. The largest organization reported 200 full-time staff but no part-time. On the other hand, 17% organizations reported that they had no full-time staff and only 1 to 4 part-time. They mostly relied on voluntary services. A few organizations that were involved in urban agricultural production mentioned that they hired full-time employees only during the growing season. About 27% of organizations had 1 to 5 full-time staff and up to 12 part-time. The majority (39%) reported that they had 6 to 30 full-time staff and up to 20 part-time. The remaining organizations had 70 or more (up to 200) full-time staff and up to 70 part-timers.

Almost every organization included more than one focus area in their mission. The areas were food distribution (49%), community economic development (47%), community capacity building (45%), food education and training (42%), food production (36%), food justice (35%), food security (27%), food advocacy (25%), and food policy (25%). Other focus areas included meals for seniors, sustainable food system, and food waste management.

About 52% of the NPOs were literally community-based and they reported designated service areas. Examples include the Village of Arts and Humanities, New Kensington CDC, and People's

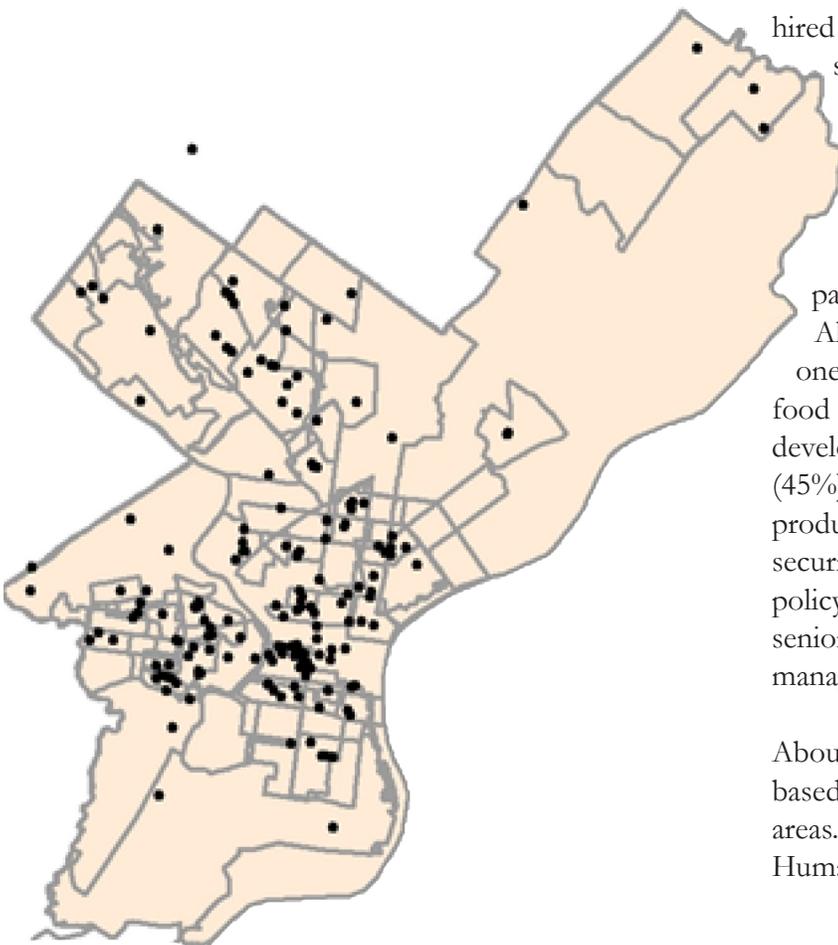


Figure 1. NPO service areas. The map shows the point locations of 153 NPOs being studied in this research, as well as service area boundaries of 80 NPOs.



Emergency Center. Among the rest, many NPOs were either issue-based (not place-based) or had city-wide service areas. A few NPOs, including Philabundance, Fair Food, The Common Market, and The Food Trust, considered Philadelphia metropolitan region as their service areas. Another category of NPOs, such as The SHARE Food Program or Teens 4 Good (aka, The Federation of Neighborhood Centers), had community-based programs, but their programs were

distributed in a number of neighborhoods. Figure 1 shows 80 NPOs that had specific community-based service areas, following zip codes, neighborhoods, or other types of boundaries, and ranging from 0.08 to 66 square miles, with a mean value of four square miles for a service area.



HUMAN CAPTIAL RELATED VARIABLES

PROGRAMS

Philadelphia NPOs offer or organize various types of food-focused programs throughout the year. Each of the 48% of NPOs that participated in this survey offered educational and training programs about 10 times in one year. These programs attracted a wide range of people, ranging from just 5 to 300. Table 1 provides details on the other categories. Not included in this table was an organization (outlier) that offered such programs 150 times in a year that drew a total 4,000 participants.

Table 1: Educational and Training Programs in a Year

NPOs (%)	Times Offered	No. of Participants (Range)
48.28%	10 and under	5 to 300
27.58%	11 to 25	85 to 500
24.14%	26 and above (highest reported 69)	100 to 800

In general, the numbers of internship or voluntary programs offered were half the numbers of educational or training programs. About 67% of NPOs offered internships or voluntary work programs up to 10 times a year. A range of one to 30 participants enrolled in these programs, although one program had 80 participants. See Table 2 for other categories.

Table 2: Internships and Voluntary Work Programs in a Year

NPOs (%)	Times Offered	No. of Participants (Range)
66.67%	10 and under	1 to 30 (one program had 80 participants)
9.52%	11 to 25	4 to 35 (one program had 150 participants)
23.81%	26 and above (highest reported 52 times)	5 to 100 (one program had 4,000 participants)

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Many Philadelphia NPOs host or arrange food-focused events throughout the year. The next few questions were about events such as block parties, potlucks, work parties, fundraising events, lectures or discussions, movie or music events, tours, and workshops (i.e., cooking, food preservation, drip irrigation, and green roof). About 76% NPOs offered 10 or fewer numbers of events in



Table 3: Events in One Year

NPOs (%)	Times Offered	No of Participants (Range)
75.82%	10 and under	5 to 20,000 (75% of the events had under 100 participants)
14.29%	11 to 25	8 to 300
9.89%	26 to 100	10 to 150

one year. These events were of various scales, attracting a wide range of participants, from only 5 to 20,000 people. However, about 75% of these events had fewer than 100 participants. Only two NPOs reported that their events attracted the highest numbers of visitors – 10,000 and 20,000 visitors respectively. Table 3 provides a detail breakdown of these categories.



PHYSICAL & FINANCIAL CAPITAL RELATED VARIABLES

JOBS

About 71% of the NPOs that participated in this survey reported that their food-related projects created or retained 1 to 10 jobs during the last 12 months. About 19% NPOs reported 11 to 25 jobs. The rest of the NPOs created or retained 26 or more jobs. These numbers included part-time jobs, but not seasonal, farming jobs.

ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL BUSINESSES

About 72% of NPOs that responded to the survey assisted other organizations or local businesses, which included monetary, labor, or other forms of assistance. The following quotes provide some examples of such assistance:

Landscape maintenance, produce and plant material procurement, construction labor and consulting, and technical assistance to 7 local businesses.

Food, funds, expertise, logistics support, counsel and advice.

We assisted ... a non-profit in the process of securing grant funding for a garden project involving their senior facility.

We provide support to 32 partner sites across the city, including orchard design, planting materials, event organizing, and training in orchard care. We also provided technical support for 5 orchards not planted by us.

Providing fresh produce to corner stores near gardens.

We work with about 4 different [agencies] to provide food and nutrition talks for their consumers at their location.

Roughly 20 businesses along Lancaster Avenue – financial literacy, storefront improvements, technical assistance.



FOOD PRODUCTION IN VACANT LANDS

Even though only 36% of the NPOs that participated in this survey mentioned food production as one of their missions, 71% of the respondents had some kind of food production or urban agriculture (UA) programs. About 45% NPOs claimed that their UA program participants primarily came from their own constituencies. About 59% of organizations revamped vacant land for food production in their service areas. Most organizations managed a wide range of 1 to 30 city parcels, located either in a single or multiple neighborhoods. One organization representative said they maintained 2,000 properties equivalent to 10 million square feet of land. The nature of land ownership varied as well.

About 31% of the NPOs that responded to this survey owned lands for running UA programs or activities. About 17% had a lease from the city and 48% had an agreement with private property owners. In many cases, NPOs practiced UA projects on a number of vacant lots, either adjacent or separated, but the lots had different types of owners – city agencies or private owners. About 21% of NPOs that participated in this survey practiced guerrilla gardening, a practice of gardening on an abandoned site or an area not cared for by anyone, without any legal right to use it. Either they did not know the property owners or did not think about leasing. Table 4 gives more details on the nature of land ownerships. In addition, two quotes from the survey responses are provided, referring to the issues with leasing from the city.

Table 4: Land Ownership

Land Tenure Situation	% of NPOs
Own land	31%
Leased from the city	17%
Applied for lease with the city	3%
Have an agreement with private property owner	48%
Do not know the property owner	14%
Not thinking about leasing	7%
Have experienced land tenure problems	7%
Other	34%

All ... orchards (32 sites and counting) are planted in partnership with community groups who either own the land (60%) or have a long term lease for usage (40%, mostly city-owned properties).

The city generally does not “lease” properties--it creates Urban Garden Agreements. These are not leases, but rather loose acknowledgements from the city that they know you are using the land & have permission. There are no protections against someone else coming in & buying up the space from underneath you.



SOCIAL CAPITAL RELATED VARIABLES

ENGAGING VULNERABLE POPULATION

There was a question about the percentage of NPO programs that were targeted toward vulnerable/disadvantaged populations (i.e., older adults, lower-income, minority, refugees, ethnic groups, and minority religious groups). About 28% of NPOs who answered this question mentioned that their programs were open for all. “We do not target specific group of populations, our programs are all-inclusive” was one comment. About 33% of the NPOs that participated in this survey reported that at least ¾ of their programs, if not all, were targeted toward vulnerable or disadvantaged populations. About 16% of NPOs said that about ½

to ¾ of their programs had a similar agenda. Detailed data are available in Figure 2. A follow-up question concerned the financial accessibility of the food-related events hosted by NPOs. About 76% of NPOs said their events were free and 10% said their events were donation based. Only 15% charged a fee, ranging from \$5 to \$65 per event. About 58% of organizations that had any produce-selling programs accepted either one or more types of government assistance cards (i.e., EBT, WIC). It was in this way they engaged lower-income families or individuals and contributed to the overall economic development of their service areas

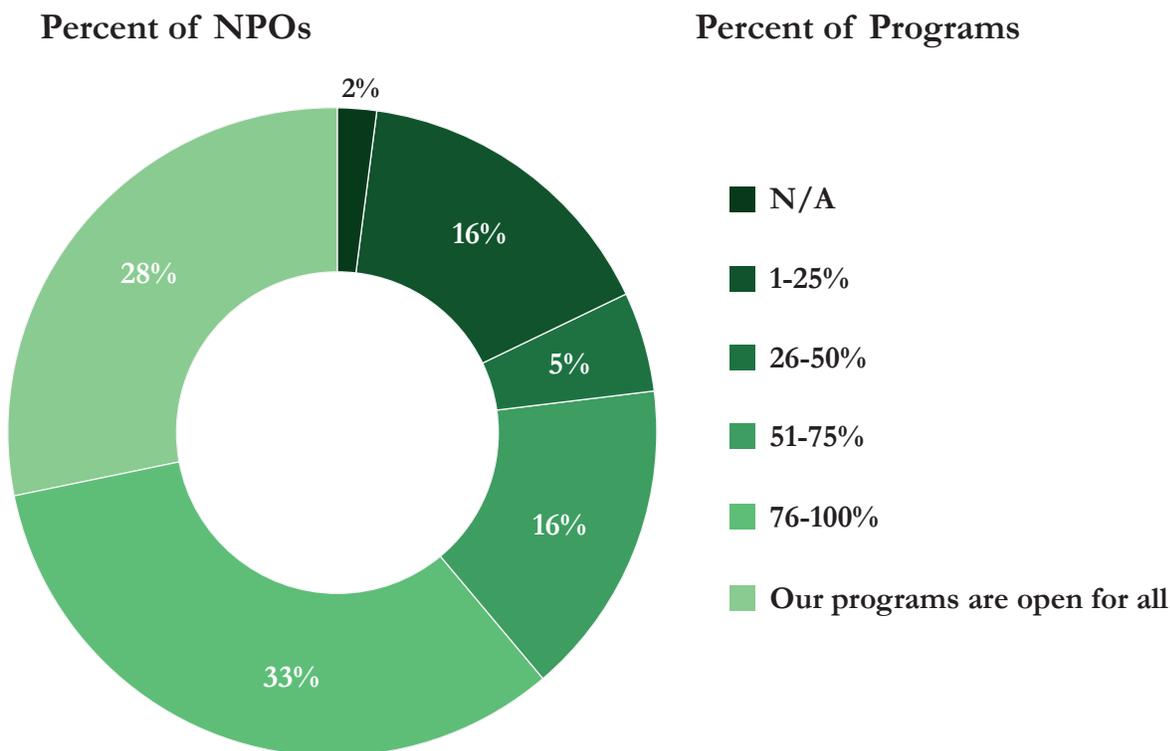


Figure 2. Programs targeted toward vulnerable populations

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

When asked about the approximate ratio of attendees in programs or events that came from the NPO service areas, about 10% of the respondents said they got 50% attendees from their service areas, the rest came from other parts of the city or even the suburbs. About 77% of NPOs reported that their events and programs primarily attracted local residents. About 75% to 100%

of the attendees attended from their own constituencies. About 13% of NPO correspondents said that they did not know the location of their participants, and that they never asked for this information.



In response to a question about community engagement, “How often does your organization host meetings with community members or stakeholders to plan activities and events?”, about 31% NPOs reported that they hosted such meetings at least once a month. Another 31% said once in six months. Approximately 14% of these NPOs said that they never had such meetings or never communicated with their constituents in this way. The following graph (see Figure 3) shows the details. Under the “other” category, comments included – “We

meet with farmers’ market partners for about 10 of our markets, once or twice a year”, “We regularly solicit feedback from community members and former clients”, “Each time we have an event”, and “Sometimes, but not regularly, not enough”. About 95% of the community meetings had an attendance ranging from 5 to 50 people, depending on the size of the NPOs, the type of programs, and the size of their service areas. Only two respondents claimed that they were able to attract up to 100 community participants in such meetings.

Percent of NPOs hosting meetings with community members

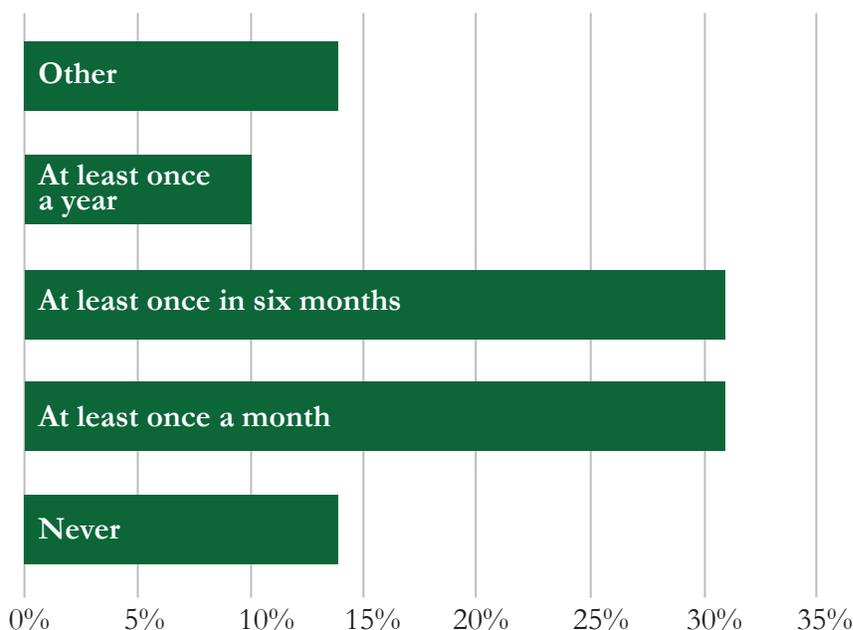


Figure 3. Frequency of community engagement according to NPOs

The next question was asked about the ways in which NPOs communicated with their constituents. Among the NPOs that used digital communication, 94% of them used it highly or the most frequently. Only 6% had a low use. Among the NPOs that used in-person communication, 71% of them used it highly. These two categories were not mutually exclusive and few NPOs reported high use of both types of communications. However, there were NPOs that used digital communication more frequently than in-person communication. NPOs also used print media, local newspapers, and other categories such as “events,” “word of mouth,” and “community education workshops.” Details of this finding along with an explanation of the communication types are provided in Table 5

There were a few additional questions about digital communication. Most NPOs that used digital communication used email listservs as the primary media. The number of listserv members varied from merely 10 to 25,000. About 93% of these NPOs had either a designated website or a blog site. In terms of social media, 91% of them used Facebook; some used Twitter, YouTube and other platforms. In social media, they posted various types of contents and also welcomed contributions from their users or fans. Tables 6 and 7 provide the details.



Table 5: Methods of Communication with Constituents

Communication Type	Percent of NPOs - High Use	Percent of NPOs - Medium Use	Percent of NPOs - Low Use
Digital Communication*	94%	0%	6%
Print Media**	41%	34%	25%
In-Person Communication***	71%	18%	12%
Through Local Newspapers	7%	33%	60%
Other	50%	25%	25%

* Email, social media announcement or message, text message, website announcement, etc.

** Letter, leaflet, newsletter, brochure, poster, etc.

*** Door-to-door outreach, social gathering, phone call, etc.

Note. Percentage calculated out of total responses in one particular category, not all responses in all categories. Total percentage rates differ, because not all NPOs answered in each category and few NPOs reported high use of both types of communications.

Table 7: Types of Content People Usually Shared through NPO Social Media Platforms

Content	NPO (%)
Program feedback	50%
Post-event feedback	60%
Commentary	57%
Educational posts	33%
Politically motivated messages	3%
Local and national policy tidbits	27%
Information sharing	70%
Other	7%

Table 6: Types of Content NPOs Usually Shared through Social Media

Content	NPO (%)
Event and program announcement	97%
Post-event story	70%
Commentary	48%
Educational posts	64%
Politically motivated messages	12%
Local and national policy tidbits	48%
Information sharing	82%
Other	12%

The final question about digital community engagement was “Do users’ comments posted on your website, blog, or social network sites influence the organization’s activities?” Only 38% said yes and they provided some examples:

Winter [h]arvest feedback on food quality, reliability of service; suggestions for vendors at farmers’ markets.

We may alter a product bundle or use a suggested recipe in a promotion that came from a customer.

Product/ recipe selection, dietary preferences; Questions asked or issues raised are addressed.



ORGANIZATIONAL CAPITAL RELATED VARIABLES

INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORK

An organizational network is comprised of relationships or partnerships among organizations. The NPO representatives disclosed their nature of relationships or partnerships with other NPOs. The majority (81%) said that they were related to other NPOs because they received funding, such as direct funds, transfer of funds, and sub-contracts. The same percentage of NPOs partnered with other NPOs to execute a program or policy. About 67% of NPOs prepared grant proposals in collaboration with other NPOs. More details on the types of partnerships are provided in Table 8.

Table 8: Types of Inter-Organizational Partnerships

Types of Partnerships	% of NPOs
Received funding (grants, donations, sponsorships, etc)	81%
Provided funding (grants, donations, sponsorships, etc)	28%
Wrote grant proposals together	67%
Executed a program or policy together	81%
Other	8%

Some small-scale NPOs or grassroots organizations did not report any NPO partners. There are a few organizations that make short-term financial partnerships with other NPOs. These partnerships often are manifested in the form of donations and tools or volunteer exchanges. On the other hand, there are a few organizations that are mostly partnered with big for-profit companies for financial or food donations. Regardless of these factors, it is evident from this survey that most NPOs are partnered with not only other NPOs, but also with the government and for-profit organizations.

The following quotes by NPO representatives reflect the nature of organizational network and the insecurity or inconsistency in an established network.

Yes, [we are a] small organization. We care about food access issues and we are trying our best to bring some positive changes in the neighborhood landscape with the help of volunteers and community participants. Yes, partnerships are good, but as long as there is a common focus on the issues [of our own neighborhood]. We tried to participate in bigger forums and what not... they discuss issues from city or regional perspectives. It's all good, but we wanna be focused on our neighborhood for now. Yes, we don't get much visibility, attention, or news coverage, and that is okay as long as we are able to function.

It's great to be a part of a big, visible network, but we need to make sure smaller NPOs can survive without the help or dependency from bigger [NPOs]. In recent times we have seen that [some] long-term [programs] are being discontinued due to lack of funding or the change in administration in a foundation. What if an [NPO] is being unplugged from the system? What would happen to the [organizational] network? If two or three actors are thrown out of an established network, will the [network] safety net work? The [network] graph of NPOs is not monolithic – there will be rises and falls.



CHALLENGES FACED BY NPOS

NPOs participated in this study generally faced a number of challenges. Most NPOs commented that the key challenges that they faced were related to financial matters. Other challenges were related to operational, organizational, land ownership, and leasing issues. A few quotes are included below.

[The challenges are] economic, organizational, operational”, “staff capacity, program evaluation”, “crime”, “outreach to diverse populations”, “collaborating with the right community partners to ensure long-term success”, “land use , obtaining permission, water access [for urban agriculture]”, “political roadblocks or bad policy”, “clarity of mission and criteria for eligibility [for grant applications].

[The challenge is] getting the message out about our programs; some operational limitations due to budget; with larger budget we would put more into educating the public on the value of buying local.

[The challenge is] engaging neighbors/volunteers in regular program decision-making and organizational development.

[The main challenge is] organizational - we are a group of volunteers, so delegation of tasks, accountability, roles, & responsibilities are hard to tie down, & often the burden of “unattractive” but necessary activities for progress fall on too few people.

[The key challenge is] the lack of organized urban agriculture constituency in Philadelphia, resource scarcity influencing organization’s unwillingness to collaborate, unwillingness of City Administration to fully recognize the value of urban agriculture in Philadelphia.

REFLECTIONS

As found in the survey, almost half of the NPOs had community economic development and/or community capacity building as part of their missions. More than half of these NPOs were literally community-based, with designated service areas. Generally, NPOs offered programs and events targeted toward people from their surrounding neighborhoods, as well as people from all over the city. However, it was difficult for the NPOs to keep track of their participants’ locations. Many NPOs could not answer the questions on participation because of a lack of data. There were NPOs in the city whose programs and events attracted more people outside of their immediate service areas.

Although various “indirect” benefits of food-related programs and events were found, the “direct” contribution of these programs to the economic development was somewhat limited. Most jobs created through these programs were not permanent, not full-time, not well-paid, and did not offer any fringe benefits. The economic development aspect of food-

related research will be one of the key research agendas in the near future. Not much data on this topic were available, and the response rate for this question in this survey was also among the lowest.

Most NPOs appreciated feedback on their programs and events from neighborhood stakeholders or residents, but they did not necessarily involve them or incorporate this feedback into their decision-making process. Community meetings targeted toward the participation and engagement of local residents were not offered on a regular basis. NPOs usually received feedback through social media, email, or other tools only after the events or programs were over. Although soliciting comments or ideas before a program or event could be more useful or effective, many NPOs claimed that they could not attract many participants even though they offered such community meetings. On the other hand, in the event that feedback was provided by the residents and stakeholders, only a few NPOs were able to incorporate those comments in the planning

process of future events. Lack of clarity or usefulness of the suggestions was a key concern.

In terms of civic engagement tools, a significant 94% of NPOs heavily used digital tools to communicate with their members. It was surprising to see that digital methods were used at a higher level than in-person communication methods. Community development and community capacity building efforts typically are conceived to be people-oriented tasks where in-person communication tools would be heavily used. This might be a good approach to attract the major clientele group of these programs and events, the majority of whom were young and tech-savvy people. However, considering the fact that a good portion of the NPOs' programs were targeted toward the disadvantaged population, the question of the impact of any digital divide would arise.

The responses on organizational network showed that 38 NPOs, including many small-scale NPOs or

grassroots organizations, had no partners at all. Some NPOs had only short-term financial partnerships with other NPOs. These partnerships were often manifested in the form of donations, tools, or volunteer exchanges. On the other hand, there were a few organizations that were mostly partnered with large, for-profit companies for financial or food donations.

Some participants suggested that NPOs did not necessarily consider any specific geographic boundaries when they chose a partner. In terms of partnerships, most of them looked for common interests or agendas, financial standing, and political connections. This tendency led to a particular pattern in the city – the most visible NPOs were the ones that made partnerships with larger NPOs, were featured in the media, and were invited into the policy-making process. On the contrary, many smaller NPOs, although working hard on the ground and in their own neighborhoods, sometimes did not get similar attention.

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Questions or comments may be sent to meenar@temple.edu

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