



Centering Community Leadership and Power for an Equitable, Sustainable, & Just Food System

Collective Recommendations &
Guiding Practices & Principles

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Two brown hands cup a glowing green heart with foliage growing around it. A tree grows out of the top of the heart, with orange roots that are in the shape of the heart's tube.



FOREWORD

Communities hold solutions for resilient, equitable, and just food systems. The leadership, wisdom, and capacity to seed sustainable local food systems, powered by the community, exists. Yet far too often, structural racism and the resulting policies, practices, and distribution of resources that reinforce white supremacy and uphold power imbalances in research and praxis that systematically undermines community leadership.

The recommendations, principles, and strategies outlined in this document were developed collaboratively by a national cohort of community food systems fellows over a one-year period.

This roadmap includes strategies for recognizing and addressing systemic and structural barriers to equitable food systems, as well as ways to uplift and scale already-existing community wisdom, traditions, and innovations as solutions that can further advance resilient, just, community-powered food systems.

These recommendations are an offering from our collective, which we hope will stimulate discussion, reflection, and meaningful action.

We invite you to strongly consider the collective recommendations, guiding principles and practices being shared through this roadmap; the diverse perspectives, worldviews, and cultural, social, and traditional sources of knowledge that yielded it; and the importance of continuing to center those who experience marginalization as generators and curators of knowledge and solutions.

Introduction and Background

What would it look like if our food system centered community power, healing, and resiliency?

Harnessing the leadership of those most impacted by food inequity is essential to achieving successful policy and practice changes to transform the systems of knowledge production that guide resource distribution. Community-driven and grassroots models that foster autonomous food systems that are culturally relevant, have high-quality foods, prevent and mitigate trauma caused by food apartheid, and promote collective healing and resilience exist and can be scaled.



“Community-powered food systems” refers to a transformative restructuring of the interlocking mechanisms of the food system that operationalizes the values of democratic decision-making, shared power and ownership, and equitable distribution of the health, economic, and social benefits of that system. This directly builds on the guiding principles of cooperatives.

The Community Food Systems Fellowship is a year-long fellowship for local community food systems leaders who are committed to food justice, equity, and centering community leadership in their work to develop resilient and equitable local food systems.

First launched by Vital Village Networks (VVN) in 2021, the program pairs peer learning and capacity building with participatory co-design principles.

The Fellowship was developed in strategic partnership with a National Advisory Board of 19 local and national food systems advocates, experts, and practitioners.

The goal of the fellowship is to foster a sustainable ecosystem for food systems leaders in support of their community-led food systems efforts to shift local power and decision-making structures into the hands of local communities — particularly those of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. To support this goal, over the course of 2022, 14 fellows worked in partnership with community-based organizations on local food systems participatory research and community engagement projects, while also taking part in peer learning and collaboration to develop a shared vision and roadmap for community powered food systems. This was accomplished by engaging the fellows in human-centered design labs, monthly meetings to promote learning, resource and wisdom exchange, and individual monthly technical assistance meetings. Meetings were facilitated by VVN staff, fellows, and a group of content, field, and practice partners who offered additional thought partnership and served as guest lecturers/facilitators throughout the fellowship.

Ultimately, this roadmap for community-powered food systems is intended to serve as a resource and call to action for creating equitable food systems, by drawing on the deep knowledge, wisdom, and experiences of committed grassroots leaders participating in the fellowship and their diverse organizations, networks, collectives, and communities. While we honor the fact that every community is unique, with its own cultural history and knowledge system, we hope this roadmap can be used as a guide for your community in this work.

SECTION 2

will provide a brief overview of our community co-design approach and the virtual design lab, structure, and process.

SECTION 3

will provide a brief overview of our community co-design approach and the virtual design lab, structuring a summary of collective recommendations and guiding principles from fellows that offers a range of approaches, strategies, and pathways toward community-powered food systems that center healing, resiliency, and parent and caregiver leadership, re, and process.

SECTION 4

provides brief profiles of each of the 2022 fellows.

SECTION 5

offers closing words of wisdom and inspiration and working definitions utilized through the fellowship that local coalitions and community leaders can adapt for their own use.

Centering Community Leadership through a Co-Design Process

Systems of oppression, inequality, and inequity are by design. Therefore, they can be redesigned.

– Creative Reaction Lab

At the core of Vital Village Networks' Community Food Systems Fellowship is the steadfast belief that those most impacted by inequities have access to specific knowledge systems that brings them closest to the solutions. Thus, they must be at the center of co-creating knowledge, solutions, and systems transformation. To honor this goal, we utilized a co-design process that was coupled with participatory research strategies.

Co-design is a participatory approach to developing innovations cooperatively among diverse community partners. The goal of a co-design process is to honor the dignity of all residents and expand community leadership at every stage of the process – from visioning and planning, to decision-making, implementation, and dissemination. It also acknowledges and takes steps to address power imbalances in design efforts. In this case, community fellows were “designing with” the fellowship program team.

Drawing upon participatory research strategies as well as equity-centered, human-centered design frameworks developed by Agncy, Creative Reaction Lab, and the National Equity Project, fellows participated in a three-part design lab in May 2022 to co-design a roadmap seeking to answer the key question:

How can we build a community-powered food system that centers healing, resiliency, and parent and caregiver leadership?

How can we build a community-powered food system that centers healing, resiliency, and parent and caregiver leadership?

Throughout these interactive virtual sessions, fellows drew upon their rich and diverse experiences, their on-the-ground food systems expertise, and their visions and hopes for a more just and equitable food system.

The fellowship team also partnered with a human-centered design practitioner, Samantha Zucker, to co-design and facilitate the sessions, which utilized visioning, ideation, and consensus-building facilitation approaches.

During subsequent meetings, feedback sessions, and group decision-making processes through Fall 2022, fellows proposed and voted on a final structure and final format for the roadmap. This final structure included a set of collective recommendations, guiding principles, and practices offering a range of approaches, strategies, and pathways toward a community-powered food system.



A Call to Action:

Collective Recommendations and Guiding Principles and Practices

Ojibwe people ask, 'Who are the people who set the pace?' Our elders, children, those living with disability and illness. I look to [them] for direction [by] centering first those most impacted by the food system.

-Kaitlyn Walsh

Gitigaan Program, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior
Chippewa, 2022 Community Food Systems Fellow

Through a co-design process, our collaborative group drew upon our wisdom, diverse experiences, perspectives, and learnings to develop a set of eight collective recommendations, guiding principles, and practices that point to a way forward.

By centering those most impacted in the food system, these recommendations generate new perspectives by elevating community wisdom and Indigenous knowledge.

These recommendations serve as important areas of collective action and collaboration that can drive more equitable change and transformation in the food system nationally, moving those most impacted by inequity from margin to center.



- ⊗ Dismantle systemic white supremacist frameworks
- ⊗ Honor the complexity of and embrace self-determination in defining community
- ⊗ Center healing and community well-being through holistic and regenerative practices
- ⊗ Protect and preserve the agency of Black, Indigenous, and people of color food system workers and farmers through just distribution of resources, opportunities, and fair compensation for labor
- ⊗ Center self-determination to honor existing community assets and nurture cooperative practices toward long-term solutions
- ⊗ Build historically rooted food system knowledge, awareness, and capacity
- ⊗ Expand food sovereignty by creating pathways for land access, ownership, and repatriation to Black and Indigenous communities and communities of color
- ⊗ Nurture intergenerational, culturally relevant, and accessible practices for growing and distributing food

Recommendation

Dismantle Systemic White Supremacist Frameworks

Our current commodity-driven capitalist food system was created by design. Colonialism and white supremacist, patriarchal, heteronormative, and ableist frameworks have led to systemic violence, extraction, and illness in our food, health, and other important community systems. Communities of color have borne the disproportionate burden of these harms and have had limited access to power and decision-making structures and leadership roles.

We must not only acknowledge this living history and the racist policies, practices, and structures that have upheld and reinforced it. We must also actively and relentlessly sustain ongoing work that seeks to systematically undo these practices, through liberatory strategies and collective actions that center those most impacted by food systems inequities and long-time grassroots community leaders. In the place of our current system, we seek to uplift and steward different ways of being, moving away from scarcity and profit-driven models, toward community-led models that honor Indigenous traditions and community-led approaches that have always centered people, land, agency, sustainability, and abundance.

Guiding Principles and Practices

- ④ Support and invest in the leadership of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people and other people of color across all levels of the food system.
- ④ Lead local food-system efforts using an intersectional lens that recognizes diverse and multiple identities and perspectives, including but not limited to experiences informed by race/ ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, health and ability, immigration status, and language.
- ④ Identify and acknowledge white supremacist frameworks and language in the food system and seek to uncover and dismantle ideologies rooted in racism and other intersectional forms of oppression.
- ④ Seek to address structural racism as a root cause of inequity across multiple community systems, such as food, health care, housing, transportation, and economic systems.

Reflection

How does this recommendation connect to your vision of a community-powered food system?

How does this recommendation show up in your community?

What is one way you'd like to apply this in your work?

What does it look like for you to approach this work with an intersectional lens?

Recommendation:

Honor the Complexity of and Embrace Self-Determination in Defining Community

The word “community” is often referenced in food systems work. This fellowship journey brought together leaders with various experiences that work in a diverse range of contexts and it was apparent that this word could not be easily defined from one person to another. For some of us, community is geographic. For others, community means our loved ones. And for others, community is based on our identities.

Being unable to determine one specific definition for “community” is frustrating at times, particularly when it leads to misunderstanding or overuse. Yet, is there power in this word eluding a singular definition? Working against a hegemonic power structure like white supremacy, perhaps community can be seen as a life force and a shapeshifter, whose meaning is fluid and changes.

Community is up to you to determine. We believe this is part of what makes community so powerful in the fight for a food sovereign world.

Guiding Principles and Practices:

- ① Center self-determination in processes to develop shared language or a working definition of community.
- ① Welcome personal agency by embracing diverse and evolving definitions of community.
- ① Invest in spaces and resources that center healing and build capacity for community members to support one another to navigate intersections across identity, trauma, and resilience. This includes addressing harm and impact of white supremacist and oppressive practices on communities of color.
- ① Honor different models for different communities.



Reflection

How does this recommendation connect to your vision of a community-powered food system?

How does this recommendation show up in your community?

What is one way you'd like ?

What is one way you'd like to apply this in your work?

Moving to Action

Below are several questions you can use to stimulate a shared understanding of the importance and value of self-determination and differences in defining community:

- ④ How do you define community?
- ④ Take time to deeply listen to another person's definition of community.
- ④ What do they consider that you do not?

How do the ideas of “community-driven” and “community-led” change when embracing both definitions?

Recommendation

Center Healing and Community Well-Being Through Holistic and Regenerative Practices

When we're allowed to be, humans are naturally community-based. We work cooperatively when we can. We let our emotions of empathy and love guide us. We all deserve lives full of nourishment, grace, and peace. In order to foster healing, growth, and regeneration in our communities, we have to convene brave spaces that are intentionally developed. A holistic approach to the food system recognizes the connecting links that facilitate healthy, self-determined communities—access to land, resources, equity, opportunities, food—as well as programs such as SNAP and other forms of assistance that build on these links. Healing through the food system reflects many interconnected elements: meeting people where they are and sharing love and joy, critical acts of transferring power, and recognizing and/or undoing generational trauma and the oppressive systems that inform and impede our access to land and food. Regenerative practices extend this approach and center on allowing space for the natural “ebb and flow” of community-led processes by respecting the balance between resting and doing. They also seek to undo generational trauma through both community conversations and the reallocation and redistribution of land, power, and resources. Where do healing and regeneration overlap? In our bodies cells die and reform over and over again. That natural process of healing and refreshing can also be applied in our food systems work.



Guiding Principles and Practices

- ④ Practice holistic and iterative solution visioning.
- ④ Elevate and support opportunities for intersectional collaboration.
- ④ Empower residents and local leaders by honoring their dignity and autonomy.
- ④ Expand pathways for community involvement in local food system visioning and planning through nourishing events that center people, connections, and food.



Reflection

How does this recommendation connect to your vision of a community-powered food system?

How does this recommendation show up in your community?

What is one way you'd like to apply this in your work?

Moving to Action

Below are questions you can use to develop and sustain wellness practices in your work:

What is an example of a practice that has supported your healing?

Name a “bright spot” or area where wellness and healing is being supported by your collective, or a time or event where wellness and/or healing was well supported by your group/team/collective.

What 1-3 actions could your group take to build upon this wellness “bright spot”?



A parent bends down to up a green vegetable. They have brown skin and a dress and matching head scarf that are both turquoise with black swirls on them. They smile at the baby on their back, who has a matching outfit on. The background of the image has an aura effect around the pair - going from shades of pinks, oranges, yellows to green.



Recommendation

Protect and Preserve the Agency of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Food-System Workers and Farmers through Just Distribution of Resources, Opportunities, and Fair Compensation for Labor

Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) food system workers—from farmers and growers, to workers who process, transport, cook, and serve food—are the foundation of our local and national food system. Enabling workers of color to implement food systems of their own design shifts power and decision-making to those who are most directly impacted by food system inequities.

This approach ensures that food system planning efforts are aligned with and respond directly to local needs, harness existing community assets and leadership, and support long-term, sustainable solutions.

Additional support is needed to protect and honor the dignity of critical yet politically and economically vulnerable members of the food system, such as migrant farmworkers and immigrant workers in food processing, restaurants, and retail.

Local and federal agencies and funding sources have served as historically harmful yet still important resources for workers and farmers of color. There is an important opportunity to allocate local and federal spending in ways that can offset historical and current injustices, such as funded pathways for (aspiring) Black, Indigenous, and people of color farmers that are free from micromanagement and expand their agency and self-determination.

Harmful colonial agricultural practices should be removed from the landscape. Investment and support should be directed to regenerative practices, enabling and funding Indigenous sciences and practices such as the rematriation of food crops, building on a global movement led by Indigenous women and two-spirit people to reclaim and restore relationships between people and ancestral lands, that can lead to sustainable systems changes.

Guiding Principles and Practices

- ③ Allocate sustained local and federal funding to enable Black, Indigenous, and people of color food systems workers to implement foodways of their own design that reflect cultural, social, and economic culinary practices and traditions of a specific community, geography, or historical period, in
- ③ Provide additional support and protections for migrant/immigrant farmworkers.
- ③ Incentivize Indigenous science implementation in agricultural and food systems work.

Reflection

How does this recommendation connect to your vision of a community-powered food system?

How does this recommendation show up in your community?

What is one way you'd like to apply this in your work?

Moving to Action

Below are questions you can use to develop models for equitable funding that may be a foundation for determining sources of funding and conversations and engagement with potential funders:

What types or sources of funding are you seeking to support changes in your local food system?

When you envision an equitable funding structure, what does that look like? What are key questions for the funder? What are key questions for your organization? What alternatives to philanthropic and federal funding arise?

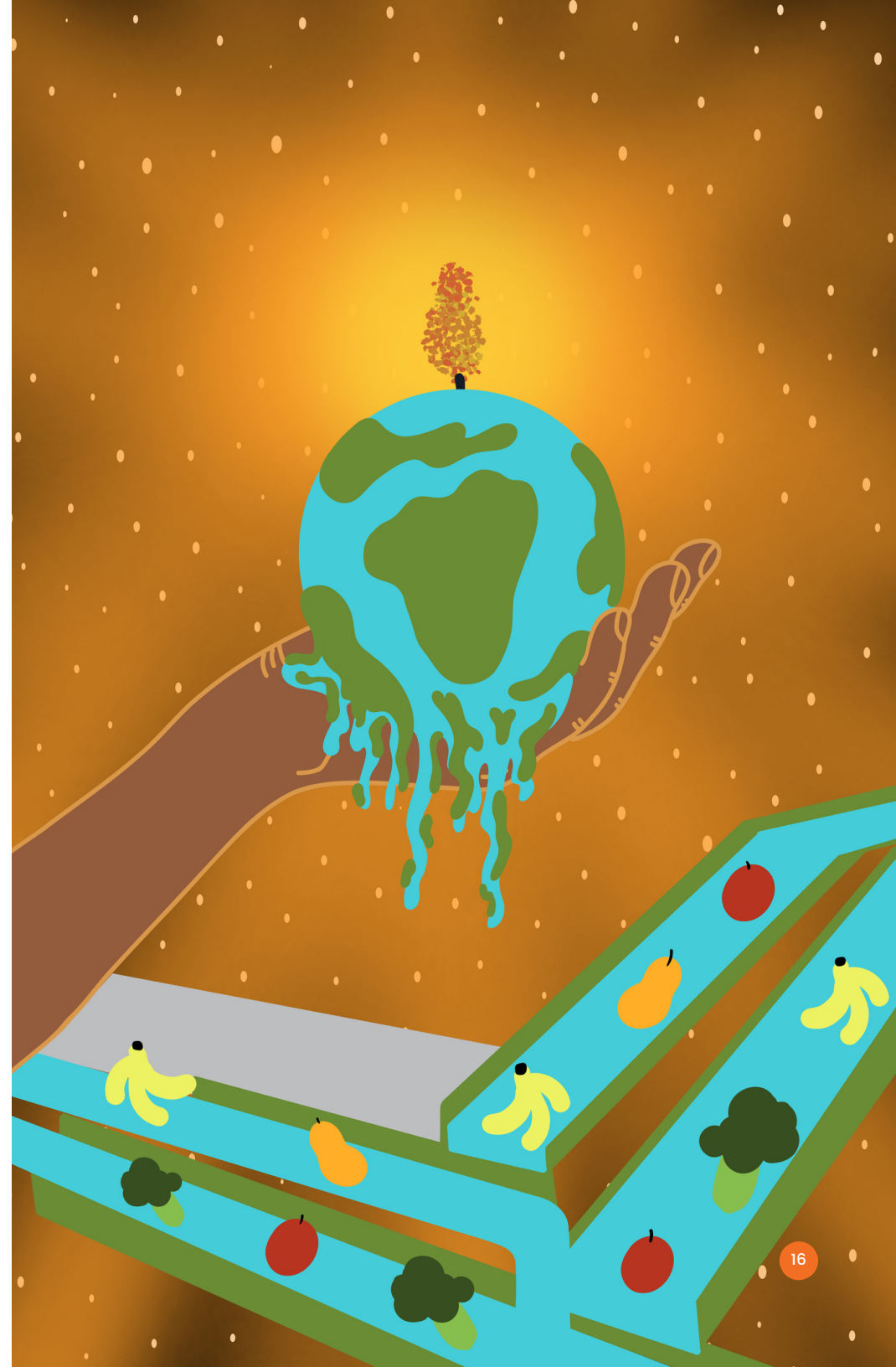


Recommendation

Center Self-Determination to Honor Existing Community Assets and Nurture Cooperative Practices Toward Long-Term Solutions

Our sovereignty, our ability to make decisions, is our center, and in the end that is the foundation for our self-determination. At the core of this effort is active and daily resistance, through large and small acts, against the legacy of racism and European settler colonialism that pervades how our community systems operate, including the food system. Historically and still-present colonial and oppressive practices continue to be employed to inflict violence, trauma, and harm onto Indigenous peoples, Black and Brown people, and other communities of color, preventing communities from implementing food systems of their own design and from fully owning and benefiting from the fruits of their labor and contributions.

The practice of honoring existing community assets—financial assets, people power, and other types of inherent resources—and the long history and examples of alternative political economic models of community ownership, such as cooperatives, are important starting points. By returning to Indigenous practices such as these, we can make tangible steps toward a food-sovereign world.



Guiding Principles and Practices

- ④ Elevate grassroots, mutual aid community models that focus on “neighbors feeding neighbors.”
- ④ Identify and celebrate the assets and knowledge of local community members.
- ④ Utilize equity assessment tools such as equity stakeholder mapping to support organizations and groups in reviewing equity dimensions of key stakeholders and partners engaged in their work.
- ④ Expand resources and pathways for BIPOC communities to launch and sustain cooperative businesses and other alternative solidarity economic models.
- ④ Shift power and build health and wealth for BIPOC communities and other historically disinvested communities through economic opportunities in the food system.

Reflection

How does this recommendation connect to your vision of a community-powered food system?

How does this recommendation show up in your community?

What is one way you'd like to apply this in your work?

What is a strength of your community that you're proud of?

Recommendation

Build Historically Rooted Food System Knowledge, Awareness, and Capacity

The history of how the US food system as we know it was formalized is painful and fraught, and informs present conditions of inequity and ongoing injustice within food systems. Bringing people into spaces of conversation and connection around this important history, our current reality, and the roles we each play in maintaining or undoing the current structure is a powerful approach to expanding knowledge and awareness of how the food system operates and opportunities for transforming it.

This approach also fosters a deep understanding of the interconnected nature of the food system and a sense of belonging—to one another, the land, more than human relatives, and our food system. Drawing on the teachings of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, popular education and other participatory approaches propose a path forward that dismantles the traditional educational hierarchy of teacher-versus-student, builds critical consciousness, and values all of us—particularly communities facing long-standing oppression—as lifelong learners and co-creators of knowledge.

Guiding Principles and Practices

- ① Prioritize inclusive and accessible educational practices that center the needs and preferences of Black and Indigenous communities and other communities of color.
- ① Implement and invest in language justice practices that decentralize English as the dominant language and support diverse linguistic communities to access resources and participate fully in food-system planning efforts.
- ① Create learning opportunities that highlight connections and interdependence in the food system across people, land, space, more than humans, and the food we eat.
- ① Utilize liberatory education frameworks through a multi-generational approach to build awareness and restore connections between residents and their local food system.

A melting earth that has a tree with orange and red leaves growing out of it is held up by a brown hand. Behind the image is a galaxy, which is lit up by the tree through shades of orange, gold, and yellow. On the bottom of the image there is a production line that is drawn to look like a small river, with various fruits and vegetables pouring out.



Reflection

How does this recommendation connect to your vision of a community-powered food system?

How does this recommendation show up in your community?

What is one way you'd like to apply this in your work?

What approaches have you already taken to build connection and awareness about where our food comes from? What has worked well and what would you like to try?



Recommendation

Expand Food Sovereignty by Creating Pathways for Land Access, Ownership, and Repatriation to Black and Indigenous Communities and Communities of Color

The people who own and access land, whether urban or rural, do not represent the vast majority of communities who grow, harvest, and share food from our lands, nor do they reflect the original Indigenous stewards and owners of the lands on Turtle Island. The people who have no or limited access to land—with which to grow food, launch a local business, and feed their community—are often the same people who are most impacted by food system inequities and excluded from shaping decisions and policies. Removing barriers that make it difficult for BIPOC communities to access, nurture, and steward land, especially public land, is critical for expanding food sovereignty. Public lands, managed and maintained by public agencies, represent spaces that are collectively owned by US citizens and meant to serve a public purpose.

A comprehensive set of policy reforms, legislative advocacy, and investment of resources—building on long-standing Indigenous land management practices—can support sustainable stewardship of the land and pathways that support movement towards food sovereignty. This includes supporting land reparations and land transfer efforts that seek to return ownership to Indigenous communities, original stewards of land, and community-rooted entities.

Guiding Principles and Practices

- ④ Expand pathways and offer flexible financing for farmers and growers of color, and trusted community-rooted organizations, to transition from leasing to land ownership.
- ④ Remove barriers and create incentives for residents to utilize vacant or unused public lands for community feeding, farming and other growing initiatives, including public housing, education, and other facilities.
- ④ Audit and assess city and county policies and ordinances related to land zoning, access, and ownership.
- ④ Advocate for community and public control and decision-making power over public lands, resources, and government agencies, and uplift Indigenous practices for land management.
- ④ Support Indigenous- and community-of-color-led land repatriation and redistribution efforts that return ownership and stewardship of public and tribal lands, including pathways such as land transfers to Indigenous peoples and tribes, land taxes, and community-rooted land trusts and cooperatives.

Reflection

How does this recommendation connect to your vision of a community-powered food system?

How does this recommendation connect to your vision of a community-powered food system?

What is one way you'd like ?

What types of policy or resources would help remove barriers for you or your organization to explore ways to own land?



On the left side of the image, the face of a person with deep brown skin adorned with white makeup, gold jewelry, and green and blue eye makeup. Their eyes are closed and mouth agape to take a bite of a pear that sits in their hand on the lower right side of the image. The pear is printed to look like the earth and there are cream stairs with shadow figures where a bite has been taken out. The pear slightly lights up the black and white galaxy with yellow.



Recommendation

Nurture Intergenerational, Culturally Relevant, and Accessible Practices for Growing and Distributing Food

Indigenous peoples' approaches to caring for the land, soil and one another have always centered on community care, relationships, and reciprocity. Developing resilient food systems requires humility and a willingness to listen to and learn about and how to honor these approaches.

Honoring intergenerational exchange of knowledge through stories and oral histories can help us learn about and sustain powerful practices for growing, harvesting, and sharing food that nourishes, heals, and brings joy.

Creating space for both self-determination and accessibility within food systems efforts is possible. Removing physical, financial, and social barriers- that prevent people from accessing high-quality, healthy, culturally-relevant, and affordable food must be done in a way that centers the dignity and needs of community members, particularly community members with disabilities and chronic illness.

It is also important to honor a wide range of cultural and language traditions, diverse foodways, and unique

connections with food and land. Being able to see oneself in your food, culture, and community opens up the door for deeper connections with one another, and our shared histories, and reinforces where food comes from and how it is procured, which is tied to liberation.

This personal connection plants seeds for collective visioning and action toward a food system that is community-powered and owned.



Guiding Principles and Practices

- ④ Gather together to grow, harvest, eat and share food in ways that intentionally open space for elders, youth, and people with disabilities to fully participate.
- ④ Nurture learning and practice within and across communities. Acknowledge, welcome, and prioritize community-embedded experts in skills sharing. Invite people from specific communities to teach skills and approaches and to share culturally specific knowledge and practices that can be reintroduced, adapted, or restored.
- ④ Allow space for community members to develop shared definitions, and include diverse methods and tools—visual, auditory, written, multi-lingual, and other adaptations—to support full participation. The process of developing definitions that are culturally relevant and accessible takes time.
- ④ Survey community accessibility needs for participation in local food systems efforts, while “moving at the speed of slow” (Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha) to ensure there is room for everyone to participate.

Reflection

How does this recommendation connect to your vision of a community-powered food system?

How does this recommendation show up in your community?

What is one way you'd like to apply this in your work?

What does culturally relevant and accessible food mean for you?

Moving to Action

We offer several questions that you can use to stimulate discussion among your collective around the welcoming of intergenerational exchange.

Is creating opportunities for intergenerational learning a priority for our collective? Why or why not?

What opportunities may arise from creating opportunities for intergenerational learning?

What are barriers to multiple generations engaging around food work?

What are accessible solutions to address these barriers?

What is one strategy that we can use to widen space for multiple generations of community members to join in the next month? In the next 6 months? In the next year?



About the 2022 Community Food Systems Fellows

Over the course of a year, the 2022 Community Food Systems fellows gathered together and shared their stories, challenges, successes, and learnings to develop this collective offering of recommendations and strategies. At the beginning of the year, they developed a set of community agreements to foster a welcoming and inclusive space. They held space for one another to unpack critical questions, exchange strategies, and share feedback and ideas to move the work forward. Learn more about the 2022 fellows and the powerful work they are leading to build equitable and resilient food systems.

As CEO of Black Women in Charge, Inc., she first orchestrated the use of body cams by the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department, championed the federal Justice in Policing Bill, and lobbied for an updated use-of-force policy along with 9 other General Orders.

As the organization grows its Lobbying & Legislation Department, International Partnerships Department, and Public Health & Research Department, she develops sustainable programming, health equity strategy, and the legislative reform process for various initiatives including food access and disparity, infant and mother mortality, Black men's mental health, critical race theory, health communications, technological inequity, and the adultification of Black children in the education system.

She manages operations for the organization's 3 flagship programs: Black Female Software Engineering Pipeline, Future Focused Mentorship Program, and Grocery Prescription Program. Partners include the USDA, Black healthcare professionals across the country, The White House Office of Public Engagement, Eli Lilly Pharmaceuticals, Indiana State Health Department, Boston Medical Center, Indianapolis Public Schools, Urban League, and so many more.



Yasmine Anderson

(she/her/s)

CEO, BLACK WOMEN IN CHARGE, INC.

As an aspiring health network executive, Yasmine recently graduated with a degree in Biology, implementing her studies into the public health of marginalized communities through policy reform, research, and operational strategy.



Mary Ann Buggs

(she/her/s)

ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR, FAITH FOOD FRIDAYS

Mary Ann Buggs is an enrolled member of the Caddo Nation and is also of Cheyenne and Arapaho descent. Mary Ann attended Seattle University and San Jose State University, majoring in business administration/marketing with a minor in journalism. Her professional career has centered on marketing communications at a number of tech firms, including Hewlett-Packard, as well as PR and writing via her own consulting firm, Cheyenne Communications.

Today, Mary Ann and husband Benjamin run a nonprofit food pantry called Faith Food Fridays in their home city of Vallejo, CA that serves more than 800 families weekly with free groceries and other necessities and services. She also runs the Vallejo Food Justice Project, a community-powered group dedicated to improving the local food system, that began as a result of her Vital Village fellowship participation.

Mary Ann is currently the Chairperson for the Emergency Food and Shelter Program and a board member of the 7 Generations Intertribal Council in Vallejo. Mary Ann previously served as co-chair on the Racial Equity and Hunger National Learning Network and was a former board member of the Indian Health Center of Silicon Valley. Mary Ann and Benjamin have 5 children and 14 grandchildren. She enjoys time with family, gardening, and traveling, especially to attend Pow Wows to dance in the Southern Traditional style.



Tailor Coble

(she/her)

FOOD ACCESS AND EDUCATION COORDINATOR,
FRESHFARM

Having grown up in the culturally and economically diverse city of Washington DC, Tailor's passions and professional interests are deeply rooted in justice, policy reform, and equitable community development. Tailor's interest in food justice, sovereignty, and education developed during her time at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, where she studied urban planning and sustainable agriculture. Her experiences toiling on farms and teaching in urban gardens inspired her to move back home and get involved in the farm-to-school movement in the city that helped make her who she is.

After returning to DC, Tailor interned at USDA and worked part-time for a local policy-based nonprofit, DC Greens, before landing a dream opportunity as a FoodPrints teacher, providing food- and garden-based education with FRESHFARM. Tailor provided engaging, hands-on experiences with food and nature for elementary school students, teachers, and parents for 3 years before moving into her current position. As Food Access and Education Coordinator, she bridges the gap between food access and food education by creating accessible resources and collaborating with community partners to tailor programs to meet their ever-changing needs. When she isn't disrupting the current food system, Tailor loves hosting dinner parties, exploring nature, and reading.



Pampi

(they/them)

CULTURE WORKER, NEIGHBORHOOD GROW PLAN

A 20+ year newcomer-settler of Turtle Island (currently in residency on Pennacook / Sokoki territory), Pampi is a darker-skinned, nonbinary, second-genx casteD-Bengali culture worker who plays at the intersection of healing and popular education.

In community they develop community-centered art that releases creative potential and drives collective change-making.

They lean on poetry, dance theater, and gardening to help message the intersectional shifts in thinking we must embrace to center liberation.



Pantaleon Florez III

(he/him)

FARMER, MASEUALKUALLI FARMS

Pantaleon is a no-till-, no-fossil-fuel-cultivating fruit and herb farmer, educator, and agricultural researcher based in Lawrence, Kansas. His farm is called Maseualkualli Farms, which means “The Peoples’ Farms” in Nahuatl. Cultivation on the farm focuses on Mexica/Chichimecan crops such as pipiche, papalotl, yauhtli, izote, jicama, and nopalli. He is also breeding and locally adapting maize, beans, squash, peas, and peanuts from his great grandparents’ homelands of Guanajuato, Mexico.

His research on utilizing ancestral Mexica cultivation methodologies for maize was published through the USDA’s Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE Publication: FNC19-1161). His current work focuses on building equity in agriculture, developing new food systems to end food apartheid in the US, and establishing food as a public work via the Peoples’ Century Farm project. More information can be found at MaseFarm.Org.



Julie A. Garreau

(she/hers)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CHEYENNE RIVER YOUTH PROJECT

Julie is the executive director of the nonprofit Cheyenne River Youth Project on South Dakota’s Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation. Over the last three decades, Julie has guided CRYP’s development from a one-room youth center to a campus that includes “The Main” youth center, Čhokáta Wičhóni teen center, Waniyetu Wowapi Lakota Youth Arts & Culture Institute, Winyan Toka Win Garden, and three social enterprises — the Keya Cafe & Coffee Shop, the Keya Gift Shop, and the seasonal Leading Lady Farmers Market.

A 2016–18 Bush Fellow, Julie also served as a 2012 Bush Foundation Native Nations Rebuilder Fellow, earned a Bush Prize for Innovation, and received both the Spirit of Dakota Award and the Presidential Points of Light Award.

In 2019, she received the Americans for the Arts’ Arts Education Award, and the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development’s prestigious Tim Wapato Public Advocate of the Year Award.



Tevin Gray

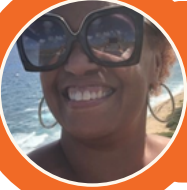
(he/him)

OWNER/OPERATOR, KEEPERS OF THE GARDEN CCTX

Tevin was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and grew up in various states throughout his life. From Maryland to Indiana and now Texas, Tevin has always had a passion for nature and exploring the inner workings of all living things. Moving around allowed him to explore the flora and fauna of various places and make friends that enjoyed all types of outdoor activities.

Currently, Tevin works at Corpus Christi Montessori School, running an outdoor classroom where he is able to provide a unique teaching environment. The students have multiple on-site gardens where they harvest food weekly and then learn about how to cook, preserve, or even sell the produce to the local farmers’ market.

Tevin also runs Keepers of the Garden CCTX, an urban garden teaching sustainable life skills while providing fruits and vegetables to the local community! He loves making bow-drill fires, practicing survival skills, cooking a nice meal, and exploring new places.



Erica Hall

(she/her)

BOARD CHAIR/VICE CHAIR, FLORIDA FOOD POLICY COUNCIL/SUNCOAST SIERRA CLUB

Erica Hall, M.S. CED, MBA, ARM, has a multi-disciplinary background as a community economic development practitioner; community organizer; environmental justice advocate; board member; justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) facilitator/trainer/consultant; and senior legal professional with interests in intersectional environmentalism exploring the connection between sustainability, resiliency, food waste, climate change, food insecurity, the built form and placemaking, economic resilience, racial/social justice and equity, housing diversity, and affordability.

Erica is currently the Board Chair/Executive Director of the Florida Food Policy Council, a statewide food policy council working to explore and address gaps in the food system in Florida. Erica is also Executive Committee Vice-Chair of the Suncoast Sierra Club, and a member of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Food Security Advisory Committee. Erica is active in the US Green Building Council (USGBC), American Planning Association, and other environmental and neighborhood revitalization groups working in urban agriculture, food advocacy and policy, community

engagement, nonprofit management, board development, environmental justice, neighborhood revitalization, historic preservation, and community economic development at the federal, state, and local levels in NYC, Los Angeles, Washington DC, Atlanta, and now throughout the state of Florida.



Jackie Leung

(she/they)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MICRONESIAN ISLANDER COMMUNITY & ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, LINFIELD UNIVERSITY

As a public health advocate with a background in policy and advocacy, Jackie utilizes an equity lens with a policy perspective. She serves on boards and commissions, including maternal and child health, hunger, food insecurity, health equity, prenatal health, and Medicaid accessibility.

While working toward her Ph.D. in public health & minors in ethnic studies and food and culture in social justice at Oregon State University, Jackie utilizes her law degree (from Willamette University) to help people navigate complex systems where citizenship status can present barriers.



Steph Niaupari

(they/them/elle)

FOUNDER, PLANTITA POWER

Steph is an organizer, storyteller, strategist, and master gardener. In 2019, they founded Plantita Power, a national food and body liberation movement that eliminates barriers to food access for QTBIPOC individuals. Steph founded Plantita Power after feeling misgendered and limited in local urban gardening spaces. Their mission is to heal these communities by bridging resources, centering language justice, and providing tools to grow gardens in all types of spaces.

As an Ecuatorian-Yorker, they live between two worlds, four languages, and the intersections of many communities. In their work, they bring over 8 years of extensive gender equity and public policy expertise with an intimate knowledge of people across class and cultural lines. They have been the recipient of the Liisa Kauppinen Award for Excellence in Policy Development and Research and a Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Fellowship, and were named We Are Family Foundation 2020's Youth to the Front "Frontliner."

Currently, as the Equality Outreach Manager at Grindr, they build global relationships to elevate the work of LGBTQ+ advocates to users on issues that matter to them the most: safety, sexual health, advocacy, and more.



Ashley Rouse

(she/her)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE EDIBLE SCHOOLYARD PROJECT

Ashley has been a local food advocate and farm to school leader for a little over 15 years. Prior to joining The Edible Schoolyard Project, she was the director of Project Learning Garden & Project Giving Gardens at Captain Planet Foundation.

She was also the Out of School Time sector director for HealthMPowers, where she created a "farm to after-school" program in partnership with Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro Atlanta. She has been a partner to Captain Planet Foundation since 2010 with the launch of the school garden program in Cobb County.

She taught 7th grade life science and engineering, and founded a rooftop garden with students at Maynard Jackson High School that quickly grew into a garden to cafeteria pilot. She enjoys practicing yoga and meditation in her spare time.



Nakia Hillary Sims

(she/her)

BLACK GIRL BUBBLE TEA, NATIONAL PUBLIC HOUSING MUSEUM, TAYLOR STREET FARMS

Nakia is an advocate, motivated to ensure that everyone has access to safe affordable housing. Her father’s death from a heart attack at the age of 46 sparked her interests in the intersectionality of race, food, health, generational wealth, and housing. To bridge gaps between the Black and Asian communities she started Black Girl Bubble Tea with her two daughters. Youth are empowered to be anti-racist and learn about culture, all while drinking healthy versions of bubble tea. She started Hillary Consulting Services providing public policy and compliance services. Her work as a Texas House of Representatives Business and Industry Committee Clerk and as a Mickey Leland Congressional Intern allowed her to keep a pulse on policy and regulatory changes. She is helping develop the National Public Housing Museum (NPHM) online cooperative store and a garlic garden at Taylor Street Farms.

She received her BS from the University of Houston and her Juris Doctorate from the University of Texas School of Law. During her study abroad in Australia she enjoyed hiking while camping at Kakadu National Park. Nakia is a motivational speaker using her lived expertise with a non-visible disability to fight stigmas while advancing opportunities.



Kaitlyn Walsh

(she/her)

SEEDS OUR RELATIVES

Kaitlyn is an Ojibwe seedkeeper helping establish grassroots collective Seeds Our Relatives in her ancestral homelands. She learned to grow food and seeds alongside her relatives at Gitigaaning, the place of the gardens, the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa’s farm. Her great uncle Awsawdumiban (Leland Debe) was instrumental in founding the Gitigaan Program at Nagajiwanaang and helped start countless gardens and orchards on the reservation. As a tribal employee 2020–2023, Kaitlyn ran the Gitigaan Program, helped lay the groundwork for the tribe’s new Agricultural Division, established a dome-shaped greenhouse, grew produce for tribal programs, equipped the seed room at Na’enimonigamig, and tended a seed garden in partnership with an Ojibwe language immersion program. She has been a producer in the Bimaaji’idiwin Producer Training Program since 2020. She is grateful to her grandma, late great uncle, mentors and elders, as well as the Upper Midwest Indigenous Seedkeepers Network, for helping her find her way with ancestral seeds. Kaitlyn is a direct descendant of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.



Michelle Week

(she/her/s)

FARMER, GOOD RAIN FARM

Farmer Michelle founded and runs ʔast sʔit (hast squeit), which translates to Good Rain Farm in the traditional language of the sngaytskstx (Sinixt). Michelle is of Sinixt— also known as Arrow Lakes —ancestry, a First Nations People of Okanagan country of British Columbia and north-central Washington.

She is a first-generation female farmer stewarding the land, decolonizing diets, connecting with her ancestry’s cultural traditions and feeding people to help restore her community’s food sovereignty.

She’s an enthusiastic member of the next generation of farmers and excited to create a cooperative business that helps build and support the cooperative and solidarity economies for a more just and healthy future for her community.

Beyond operating Good Rain Farm, Michelle engages in all levels of education and advocacy, sitting on several local, regional, and national committees that focus on supporting, networking, and resourcing the foundation of our food system: farmers and the lands they steward.

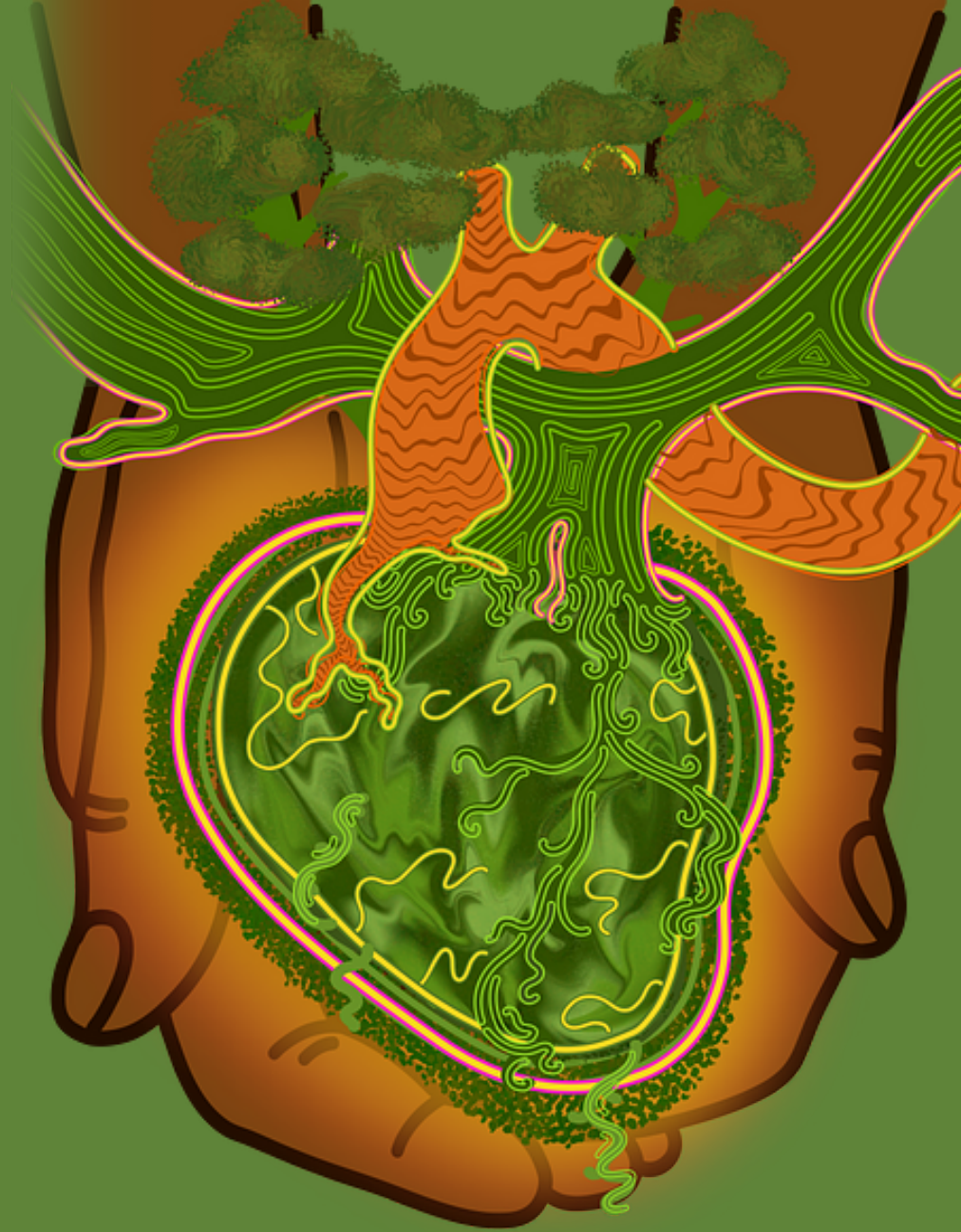


Conclusion

The journey forward to redesign our food system toward liberation, healing, and sovereignty is not an easy one; nor is it one taken alone. Social transformation requires not only steadfast commitment and perseverance of individual actors and leaders, but that of a collective—our shared actions, lessons learned, and a community of care that nurtures each other and the lands on which we are humbled to serve as stewards.

This roadmap offers strategies to create conditions that welcome community agency and leadership in guiding resilient and just food systems, as well as practices to uncover and address systemic policies that maintain white supremacy.

We invite you to join us, to be part of this ongoing movement. We welcome your stories, wisdom, and vision toward a community-powered food system. We hope this call to action sparks inspiration, dialogue, and transformative action.



Working Definitions

⦿ **Ableism**

A set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities and often rest on the assumption that disabled people need to be ‘fixed’ in one form or another. Ableism is intertwined in our culture, due to many limiting beliefs about what disability does or does not mean, how able-bodied people learn to treat people with disabilities, and how disabled folks are often not included at the table for key decisions.” [1]

⦿ **BIPOC**

When using this term, we are referring to Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.

⦿ **Co-design**

A participatory approach where community stakeholders cooperatively develop social innovations. It acknowledges historical processes and structural inequalities, and recognizes differential power, access to resources, and participation.

⦿ **Community-powered food system**

A food system that centers the needs, decision-making, and ownership of the people within a community, prioritizing specific groups and peoples most impacted by food system inequities in shaping solutions. We recognize the importance of self-determination and agency in this concept, and uplift the right of the people in a community to define what community power in the food system means to them.

⦿ **Equity-centered and human-centered design frameworks**

A growing field that offers a unique, creative problem-solving process based on equity, humility, integrating history and healing practices, addressing power dynamics, and co-creating with the community. This design process focuses on a community’s culture and needs so that its members can gain tools to dismantle systemic oppression and create a future with equity for all. [2] The Creative Reaction Lab offers one model and approach that informed the Community Food Systems Fellowship process.

[1] From the Center for Disability Rights: <https://cdmns.org/blog/uncategorized/ableism/>

[2] From the Creative Reaction Lab: <https://crxlab.org/shop/p/field-guide-equity-centered-community-design>

⌚ **Food apartheid**

Coined by the farmer and food activist Karen Washington, this concept “asks us to look at the root causes of inequity in our food system on the basis of race, class, and geography. Let’s face it: healthy, fresh food is accessible in wealthy neighborhoods while unhealthy food abounds in poor neighborhoods. ‘Food apartheid’ underscores that this is the result of decades of discriminatory planning and policy decisions. It begs the question: What are the social inequities that you see, and what are you doing to address them?” [3]

⌚ **Food sovereignty**

First developed by La Via Campesina, this growing movement refers to the right of the people to own and define their own food system. The Declaration of Nyéléni describes it as the “right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture system. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.” [4]

⌚ **Food system**

The web of interconnected relationships, structures, processes, and policies that creates the landscape for how folks connect to food—including food policies, the growth of food, food supply chains, mutual aid networks, institutions, marketplaces, restaurants, and more.

⌚ **Foodways**

The cultural, social, and economic practices that impact how folks relate and connect to food.

⌚ **Heteronormative**

The concept that heterosexuality is the preferred and normal way of being.

[3] You can learn more about Karen Washington here: <https://www.karenthefarmer.com/about>

[4] Food Sovereignty, US Food Sovereignty Alliance: <http://usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/what-is-food-sovereignty/>

② Landback

LANDBACK is a multigenerational movement rooted in the long legacy of organizing and sacrifice to get Indigenous Lands back into Indigenous hands, with current battles being fought all across Turtle Island, to the north and the South. Beyond just a campaign, LANDBACK is a “political framework that allows us to deepen our relationships across the field of organizing movements working towards true collective liberation. It allows us to envision a world where Black, Indigenous & People of Color (POC) liberation co-exists.”^[5]

② Land reparations

A restorative process that includes a range of actions that seek equitable distribution of land, including the return of land, land reclamation, rent paid for land, or taxes paid to Black and Indigenous communities,^[6] and other people of color, in order to acknowledge the violent history of colonization, racism, and theft of land that—within the context of the United States—were perpetrated by European settlers and continue to be perpetuated the state.

② More than human

Based in Indigenous knowledge systems, this references the other animals, plants, and land in which we share kinship with.

② Participatory research

An approach to research that directly involves collaboration with those affected by the issue being studied, with the purpose of yielding change or action.

② Rematriation

Rematriation refers to a movement led by Indigenous women and two-spirit people to reclaim and restore the right to food and the sacred relationships between Indigenous people and ancestral land, honoring matrilineal societies, and in opposition of patriarchal violence and dynamics. Efforts such as land rematriation focuses on restoring indigenous spiritual relationships with Indigenous food systems.^{[7],[8]}

[5] Definition from NDN. Learn more here: <https://landback.org>

[6] Land Reparations and Indigenous Solidarity Toolkit, Resource Generation: <https://resourcegeneration.org/land-reparations-indigenous-solidarity-action-guide/>

[7] Definitions by the Sogorea Te' Land Trust. Learn more here at https://sogoreate-landtrust.org_/what-is-rematriation.

[8] Definitions by Wabanaki REACH. Learn more here: https://www.wabanakireach.org/the_art_of_rematriation

④ Settler colonialism

This term refers to when “the colonizer comes to stay, and as such, the distinction between the colony and the imperial nation is lost.” A structure built on genocide, settler colonialism “is enacted through practices like the creation of reserves, residential schools, enfranchisement, and abduction into state custody as well as practices like the extraction of natural resources through mining, pipelines, and more.” This includes the imposition of the colonizers’ own cultural values, religions, laws, and enactment of policies that do not favor Indigenous Peoples, and lead to land seizure and control of access to resources and trade.^[8]

Settler colonialism involves the “total appropriation of Indigenous life and land rather than the selective appropriation for profit, as is the case in other forms of colonialism. It is also distinct from other forms of colonialism because the colonizer comes with the intention of making a new home on the land, and as such insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain.”^[9]

④ Stewardship

Taking care of something with care, intention, and value of well-being. This is most often used in relationship to land stewardship, which involves taking care of the earth.



^[9] Definition by Shreya Shah from the Indigenous Foundation.
Learn more here: <https://www.theindigenousfoundation.org/articles/what-is-settler-colonialism>

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