



Healthy Food for Denver's Kids Year 1 Final Report

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CHANGEMATRIX

**HEALTHY
FOOD FOR
DENVER'S** Kids



DENVER
PUBLIC HEALTH &
ENVIRONMENT



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A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a blue and white striped shirt, holding a baby in her arms. She is looking down at a young girl in a blue and white floral dress who is holding a smartphone. They are in a kitchen with a brick wall, a window with a black frame, and a silver pendant light hanging above them. There are various kitchen items like a bowl, a cutting board, and a red bell pepper on the counter in the foreground.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background

Through the 2018 Denver [Ballot Measure 302](#), the Healthy Food for Denver's Kids (HFDK) Initiative increased taxes to establish a fund for healthy food and food-based education for Denver's youth. The ballot measure was approved by 59% of Denver voters on November 6, 2018, and went into effect in January 2019. The 0.08% increase in the sales and use tax within the City and County of Denver is expected to generate approximately \$11 million annually and will sunset after 10 years. Funds will be collected from January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2028, and distributed by December 31, 2029 (Denver Department of Public Health & Environment [DDPHE], 2021).

The HFDK Initiative seeks to build an equitable¹ and strategic approach to increasing access to healthy food and food-based education for children and youth ages 18 and under, with the following goals:

1. Increase the number and diet quality of healthy meals and snacks received by children and youth in the City and County of Denver;
2. Increase the number of children and youth receiving nutrition, food skills, and sustainable and just food systems education in the City and County of Denver; and
3. Reduce overall food insecurity² in households with children and the number of children and youth experiencing hunger in the City and County of Denver.

Overview of the HFDK Strategy

HFDK's long-term vision is that all Denver kids have reliable access to *healthy, nutritious food and food education that helps them grow, learn, and thrive for life*. To implement this vision, HFDK's work is structured around the following 1) grantmaking and 2) capacity building and partnerships strategies (DDPHE, 2021):

1. HFDK Grantmaking Strategy
 - Invest in Equitable Healthy Food Access
 - Provide food and meals to kids of all ages, especially in priority neighborhoods
 - Invest in Equitable Food Education
 - Support schools and community organizations providing nutrition, cooking, gardening, and food system education
 - Support organizations providing on-the-job training for youth leaders in the food system
2. Capacity Building and Partnerships
 - Build capacity of organizations to be efficient, effective, and innovative
 - Advance best practices in equity, diversity, and inclusion in all programs and partnerships
 - Facilitate partnerships and collaboration among organizations, including connecting food access

¹ HFDK defines equity/equitable as follows: The effort to provide different levels of support based on an individual's or group's needs in order to achieve fairness in outcomes. Working to achieve equity acknowledges unequal starting places and the need to correct the imbalance. 'Health equity' or 'equity in health' implies that ideally, everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential and that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential.

² HFDK defines food security as follows: Food Secure/Food Security - a household-level economic and social condition of access to adequate food. According to the USDA: food security means access by all people/household members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum: the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods. Assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).

and food assistance organizations with local food production organizations

- Maximize nutrition assistance program participation through outreach, enrollment, improved quality, and technical assistance
- Share data and learnings to improve HFDK programs and inform broader public awareness

Role of the HFDK Commission

In 2019, the HFDK Commission was established to advise and review the distribution, effectiveness, and impact of Initiative funds. The HFDK Commission is appointed by the Mayor of Denver through the Denver Office of Boards and Commissions and is administered by DDPHE. Commission members serve terms of three years and represent a wide range of systems knowledge in food, gardening, youth development, non-profit administration, public health, grant-making, and business development. Commissioners meet regularly to set funding priority areas, advise on the allocation of funds through a public application process, issue funds for healthy food and related education, and ensure funds are best used for their intended purposes. HFDK also commits to centering equity, diversity, and inclusion in all Commission activities and outcomes (DDPHE, 2021).



Description of HFDK Grantees

Since its launch, HFDK has distributed nearly \$18 million to more than 80 organizations through competitive grants to agencies of local government, public schools in Denver, and non-profits with an emphasis on those organizations serving low-income youth (DDPHE, 2021). HFDK funded 25 organizations in the first cohort (August 2020-July 2021) – collectively referred to as Year 1 grantees – which included 16 nonprofits, eight schools or affiliates of Denver Public Schools (DPS), and one city agency. The list of grantees can be found in Appendix A.

Of these grantees, 52% of the cohort supported both food access and education, 24% provided food education only, 16% focused on food access only, and 8% had capital infrastructure projects. Projects included healthy meals and snacks (daily, summer, and weekend); no-cost grocery programs; meal/food delivery; mobile food markets; high school food pantries; school gardens; hydroponic classrooms; a large-scale greenhouse; urban farms; and classes (some bilingual) on nutrition, cooking, wellness, gardening and food systems/literacy/justice; as well as youth food leadership development and internships.

HFDK Evaluation Approach

In March 2020, DDPHE contracted with Change Matrix as their evaluation and learning partner to help the HFDK Commission develop its vision, funding strategy, and an evaluation approach to measure change and impact over time. To date, Change Matrix has created a series of deliverables including a

baseline assessment, a systems map, a theory of change (Appendix B), and a Macro Evaluation Plan.³

The evaluation approach has utilized mixed-methods (both qualitative and quantitative data), drawing from primary data sources (including grantee-level data, key informant interviews [KIIs]⁴, and a focus group with program participants) and secondary data sources⁵ (including local, state, and national datasets tracking food insecurity and related indicators). More information about the methodology is included in Appendix C.

Guided by the following evaluation questions, the evaluation design may be adjusted during the ten-year Initiative to yield evaluation findings that will be most useful in refining the HFDC grantmaking strategies (Change Matrix HFDC Macro Evaluation Plan, 2021):

The macro evaluation will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What gaps and shortcomings in the food system exist? To what extent can HFDC help address them?
2. What strengths in the food system exist? To what extent can HFDC align with and leverage them?
3. How can HFDC improve the food system to better meet the needs of underserved populations?
4. Which neighborhoods/areas of the city are moving toward healthy food access through environmental changes?
5. To what extent are HFDC investments reaching populations who experience food insecurity the most?
6. To what extent is HFDC increasing the number of children and youth receiving healthy and culturally relevant food and meals in Denver?
7. To what extent is HFDC improving the diet quality of children and youth in Denver?
8. To what extent is HFDC increasing the number of children and youth receiving nutrition education, food skills, and sustainable/just food systems education in Denver?
9. To what extent is HFDC reducing overall food insecurity in households with children and youth in Denver?

The findings presented in this report are structured around the above evaluation questions and include grantee data provided by the Year 1 grantees funded from August 2020-July 2021. Given that grantees were funded during the COVID-19 pandemic, in **Chapter 2** we provide some context of the implementation environment related to food insecurity and other social determinants of health. **Chapter 3** will highlight themes related to gaps and strengths in the food system that emerged from interviews with key informants knowledgeable of the systems serving children and youth in Denver, and specifically those systems that provide food and food-based education. Drawing primarily from the Year 1 grantee data, **Chapter 4** will report on the grantee activities and the outcomes they were able to achieve. This report concludes with **Chapter 5**, implications for HFDC strategy as they relate to improving implementation, leveraging strengths, and addressing gaps in the food system.

³ The purpose of the macro evaluation is to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the HFDC funding portfolio and understand what has changed in the system as a result of HFDC.

⁴ KIIs were conducted with 24 professionals with knowledge of the systems serving children and youth in Denver, and specifically those systems that provide food and food-based education. They represented a mix of HFDC Commission members, policymakers, leaders/experts in food systems space and child food insecurity, direct service staff, and Denver and Colorado-wide food system initiatives (e.g., Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger, etc.).

⁵ Data sources include Hunger Free Colorado, *A Survey of Hunger in Colorado*; Colorado Children's Campaign, *KIDS COUNT in Colorado*; and from agencies such as the Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Denver Public Schools, USDA Food and Nutrition Service, and U.S. Census Bureau.



CHAPTER 2

The Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic for HFDK Grantees

This chapter describes how the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted food insecurity and related social determinants of health for Colorado and Denver residents. Where possible, data specific to children and households with children are cited. Particular populations have been disproportionately affected, further exacerbating existing economic, gender, and racial disparities. The pandemic-driven economic recession was the first the United States has experienced since 2007. Before the pandemic, the nation's overall food insecurity rate had reached its lowest point since its measurement began in the 1990s. Since the onset of the pandemic, food insecurity rates are again approaching levels seen during the 2007 recession (Feeding America, 2021).

Food Insecurity

People who experienced or were at risk of food insecurity before COVID-19 are facing greater hardship resulting from the pandemic, although interventions are lessening economic impacts. As a result of COVID-19, many individuals are experiencing food insecurity for the first time, contributing to the national projection that 42 million people (12.9% of the total population), including 13 million children (17.9% of all children), may experience food insecurity in 2021. Due to program and policy interventions that have helped mitigate the fallout from the economic crisis, 2021 projections are expected to improve compared to 2020 (Feeding America, 2021) as shown in Figure 1.

While overall rates of food insecurity have improved in Colorado since the December 2020 Hunger Free Colorado (HFC) survey, current levels are still roughly three times higher than they were before the COVID-19 pandemic (HFC, 2021a). Colorado and the City and County of Denver are following the same trajectory as national projections. Feeding America estimates that the overall food insecurity rate in Colorado will be 11.6% and the child food insecurity rate will be 15% in 2021 (2021). Consistent with national trends, results from the most recent Hunger Free Colorado Statewide Food Insecurity Survey (April 2021) show that food insecurity among Coloradans has

Figure 1. National, Colorado, and Denver Food Insecurity Rates



Note: Adapted from *The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2020 & 2021*, by Feeding America, 2021 (https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/National%20Projections%20Brief_3.9.2021_0.pdf).

increased significantly, with 21% of people reporting hunger to be a top concern and 33% of people reporting they lack reliable access to nutritious food (HFC, 2021a).

Child food security was especially affected during the pandemic shutdown with Black/African American families feeling the greatest effects. Hunger Free Colorado found that households with children are facing higher levels of hunger, with 44% of households with children unable to consistently put nutritious food on the table. Among households with children, 30% of adults reported having to cut back or skip meals because there was not enough money to buy food. Results suggest that 1 in 6 children (16%) are not getting adequate nutrition because there is not enough money to

buy food. Hunger Free Colorado survey results highlighted racial disparities in Colorado, with 43% of non-white and Latinx individuals struggling with food insecurity compared to 29% of white individuals (HFC, 2021a). Results from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey in 2020 reflect similar findings, with Black families with children in Colorado experiencing food insecurity at twice the rate of the state average and three times the rate of White households with children (Table 1; Colorado Children’s Campaign [CCC], 2021).

Table 1. Food Insecurity Among Households with Children by Race/Ethnicity in Colorado (2020) Compared to Proportions of General Population

	Percentage of Population in Colorado	Percentage of Population in Denver	Rate Experiencing Food Insecurity
All Colorado Households with Children			10%
Asian	3.3%	3.7%*	3%
Non-Hispanic White	67.5%	54.8%	7%
Two or More Races/Other Race	3.5%	3.8%**	15%
Hispanic/Latinx	21.8%	29.3%	18%
Black/African American	4%	8.5%	21%

*Data includes Asian and Pacific Islander

**Data includes American Indian

Note: Adapted from *Human Together*, Denver Department of Human Services, 2021 (<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/84fd6efcfa114be08a69753efa42d7cc>); *KIDS COUNT in Colorado!*, Colorado Children’s Campaign, 2021 (<https://www.coloradokids.org/data/publications/2021-kids-count/>)

Economic Insecurity

Economic improvements in Colorado were impeded as women and populations of color were disproportionately impacted by the economic downturn. Prior to the pandemic, several economic indicators in the state had been improving, including child poverty rates, unemployment, and median family income. The pandemic stay-at-home orders combined with business shutdowns resulted in job loss and reduced work hours for many families, contributing to reduced economic security. Hunger Free Colorado found that 32% of Coloradans experienced a drop in income compared to before the pandemic and the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey found that almost half of all Colorado households with children reported that they lost employment income between March and April 2020, leaving between 30%–43% of Colorado households with children having difficulty paying for usual household expenses (CCC, 2021). For parents who were able to keep their jobs, many struggled with having to care for children at home during school closures and managing virtual learning. Women were more greatly impacted by this difficult situation and many decided to leave the workforce altogether. For example, approximately one million U.S. mothers with children under the age of 18 left the labor force between late 2019 and late 2020, compared to approximately half a million fathers during the same timeframe (CCC, 2021).



Populations of color have been more likely to lose employment during the pandemic as many of the industries hit hardest by shutdowns are those in which they make up a disproportionate share of the workforce. Additionally, policies and practices have historically segregated populations of color to occupations with fewer benefits, such as paid leave, and have prevented aggregation of wealth for many. As a result, many communities of color did not have access to critical lifelines during the pandemic, causing additional hardship in the face of economic uncertainty (CCC, 2021).

Table 2. Racial Disparities Across Economic Indicators in Colorado

	Non-Hispanic White	Two or More Races	Hispanic or Latino
Lost employment income since March 13, 2020	43%	49%	64%
Difficulty paying for usual expenses in the past week	26%	44%	44%
Little or no confidence in ability to pay the next rent or mortgage payment on time	11%	*	29%

*Data were suppressed for the Two or More Races category for this indicator due to a large margin of error.

Note: Adapted from *KIDS COUNT in Colorado!*, Colorado Children’s Campaign, 2021 (<https://www.coloradokids.org/data/publications/2021-kids-count/>).

Food Assistance During the Pandemic

Many Coloradans were able to access food assistance, which helped offset loss of income and rising food costs. At the same time incomes were declining, food prices rose as a result of the pandemic’s impact on the supply chain. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that food prices at grocery stores rose 3.7% between January 2020 and January 2021 (Singer, 2021). Hunger Free Colorado found that 45% of Coloradans identified the high cost of healthy food as a problem for their household. According to Hunger Free Colorado, within three months of taking the April 2021 survey, 30.5% of participants had enrolled in at least one food benefit program, including free school meals or meal sites; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); meals at senior centers; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); and/or food from local pantries, soup kitchens, or charities (HFC, 2021a). The Food Bank of the Rockies distributed around 60% more food every month than it did before the pandemic — and approximately 40% of the people they served had never needed help with food assistance before the pandemic (Singer, 2021).



Federal food programs expanded their reach through increased budgets and reduced access barriers, including the use of waivers to address the crisis.

Waivers were intended to make it easier for children and youth to access food, especially as schools closed. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) expanded so that universal free school meals were available to all children and youth, removing the need for families to complete paperwork (CCC, 2021). This included Denver

Public Schools (DPS), which allowed all students 18 years and younger enrolled in DPS to have access to breakfast and lunch meals at no cost, regardless of free and reduced-price meal eligibility through the 2021-2022 school year (DPS, 2021). Nationwide waivers implemented by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) minimized potential exposure to COVID-19 by allowing school districts to use various distribution methods to get meals to families, children, and youth (e.g., meal time flexibilities, home delivery, multiple meal distribution, bulk meals, and parent pick-up; FNS, 2021a). The USDA released multiple waivers for many of its programs to make it easier for people to access food benefits (Colorado Department of Education, 2022). In March 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act was signed into law and expanded Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) for the duration of the health emergency, extended increase to SNAP benefits, expanded SNAP online purchasing, expanded access to more fruits and vegetables through WIC, and supported senior nutrition through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) (FNS, 2021b). While there was a federal and state public health emergency due to COVID-19, SNAP allowed all households who qualify for the program to receive the maximum amounts for their household size and a 15% temporary increase to SNAP dollar amounts, which equaled \$234 monthly for a household of one or \$782 monthly for a household of four (HFC, 2021b). Effective October 2021, households receiving SNAP benefits saw a permanent increase, which reflected the largest increase in the program's history (Colorado Department of Human Services, 2021).

Local government agencies, funders, and food-focused initiatives also redirected resources to local organizations trying to meet the increased community demand for food. For example, the City and County of Denver has completed two rounds of funding through the Denver Emergency Relief Funds program and an additional third round opened in September 2021. These grants are made possible through the Federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and are meant to expand critical emergency food, grocery, and meal programs for residents affected by COVID-19 (DDPHE, 2021). The Denver Public Schools Foundation launched the Food Security Fund to support families in need during the pandemic (Denver Public Schools Foundation, 2020). The Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger (The Blueprint) collaborated with a variety of funders, including the HFDK Initiative, to develop and administer the Colorado COVID-19 Emergency Hunger Relief Fund. The Blueprint has distributed \$5.3 million to 536 organizations since the beginning of the pandemic (Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger, 2021).

Several key informants concurred that the increased flexibility of federal programs through waivers and policy changes helped to increase families' access to food. More specifically, federal waivers helped schools, food banks, and other sponsoring organizations get more meals to more families. Providing universal school meals reduced the stigma associated with participating in the school lunch program, and the P-EBT program provided more money to families and increased families' decision-making power about where they shopped and what food they bought (HFDK Interviews, 2021).





CHAPTER 3

Food System Perspective

This chapter highlights the key gaps and strengths in the food system that emerged from the key informant interviews based on their knowledge of and experience with the systems serving children and youth in Denver, and specifically those systems that provide food and food-based education.

What Are the Gaps in the Food System?

This section primarily focuses on gaps related to food and nutrition programs. Overall, key informant interviews (KIIs) identified gaps occurring at multiple levels: individual knowledge of available resources and attitudes toward program resources, oppressive interpersonal dynamics with program staff, program limitations, and structural and systemic barriers that compound food inequities. Ecological systems and systems change frameworks (Bronfenbrenner, 2009; National Equity Project, 2021) highlight that individual attitudes and actions, interpersonal interactions and dynamics, institutional policies and practices, and broader societal structures and systems are interrelated. These present a variety of opportunities to disrupt or reinforce systemic inequities that could have multidirectional influence on other food system actors and [causal loops](#).⁶ Similarly, gaps in the food system — meaning negative patterns of behavior and structural barriers to healthy food access and eradicating hunger in the City of Denver — also exist and interact across multiple levels to reinforce and/or perpetuate food-related inequities.

Individual Knowledge and Attitudes

Key informants (KIs) attributed low enrollment in food and nutrition programs to a number of reasons including lack of awareness, accessibility barriers, and negative perceptions. Some KIs think that people experiencing food insecurity lack awareness of programs and other available supports:

I think the key shortcomings or gaps are awareness and understanding of federal food and nutrition programs. So anywhere from WIC to CACFP, to SNAP, to USDA Summer Food, all of those and understanding of that and how to participate in that, I think is a big barrier. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Alternately, other KIs believe that people are aware of programs but choose not to access them because of stigma, fear, and/or negative perceptions based on past experiences:

We have a lot of people who are like, “Just do more marketing!” And I’m like, people know about [the programs]. They’re going into human services offices and not being treated with dignity and respect. And so they’re not going back. Marketing is not going to change that. Training of human services staff after paying them a livable wage [will change that]. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

People know about [the programs]. They’re going into human services offices and not being treated with dignity and respect. And so they’re not going back.

⁶ See here for an example of a food system map that illustrates causal loops:

https://plos.figshare.com/articles/figure/Community_food_system_map_causal_loop_diagram_/9635261

Perceived judgement of people who access food assistance programs stigmatizes the programs and leads people not to participate and/or sparks shame in participating families. For example, in the following, a KI describes the stigma associated with school-based food pantries:

Some of [the pantries] are in the schools, they're in the high school and you're just talking like a high school student. So there's no way they want to go in there. [...] Yeah, one of [the people I spoke to recently] was just sharing as a teacher, she was encouraging some of the students, "You can just stop by, there's plenty of snacks in this food pantry part of the school today." And he was just like, "No, that's not for me, isn't that just for the refugee kids?" (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Another individual-level barrier identified by KIs is a lack of nutrition knowledge. Some KIs believe that insufficient nutrition education among many children and families results in poor healthy eating habits and/or cooking skills. That said, this belief among some KIs could itself be functioning as an individual-level barrier. It risks individualizing the systemic problem of inequitable access to healthy food by locating the "problem" to be solved (e.g., a lack of nutrition knowledge) in individuals experiencing hunger and directing our attention there rather than toward the inequities in the food system that perpetuate hunger and poor health. As highlighted in the [World Food Policy Center's research brief *Identifying and Countering White Supremacy Culture in Food Systems*](#), this mindset of "if they only knew" reflects [white supremacy culture characteristics](#) like individualism, paternalism, and universalism which promote narratives that "non-conforming" (e.g., non-white) communities require education and/or need solutions to their challenges prescribed for them.



Interpersonal Dynamics

Oppressive interpersonal dynamics were also identified as impeding change work. One key informant shared that when individuals [exercise power and privilege in dominating/supremacist \(vs. liberatory\)](#) ways, at best they are not able to effectively and meaningfully interact, and at worst they can do harm. In both instances, they become barriers to the trust-, relationship-, collaboration-, and coalition-building that are required to affect broadscale systems change. For example, a KI below describes how food pantry workers sometimes behave in demeaning ways toward families:

One of the things that they did at the food pantry was to go around the pantry with the person and help them pick out food, and they took that as very degrading. [...] So now someone is going to walk around and assume that you need to tell me what's healthy. I'm thankful I haven't had to experience that in my life. Making assumptions is just, I think, the worst. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

On a similar note, another KI expressed frustration with the dynamics of a coalition they were a part of, the ways in which people with more money and power dominated, and how this led them to eventually exit the coalition:

The goal of this coalition is to learn from [community members] and change the way these systems, these programs work. And they just weren't getting ... I got really frustrated and then we got into systemic racism and all of that, [someone said] it doesn't exist, and I was like, 'I'm out. [...] I can't do this, I can't do it.' I had a conversation with the [Colorado] Health Foundation. This was the goal of the coalition and from my experience, being a voice for the community, this is what I experienced, and my experience was that the community shouldn't ever come to this

coalition. [...] I was building a relationship with these folks and I really learned how intentional they were or weren't. And I think that's really where that relational [piece matters]... especially when money is power. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Program Limitations

Key informants highlighted participation requirements, exclusive eligibility requirements, and program guidelines as barriers to food access. A number of process and practice issues (e.g., poor quality, unhealthy food, a lack of cultural/linguistic responsiveness) serve as barriers to addressing hunger. Key resource gaps include limitations related to funding/budgets, insufficient staff and kitchen infrastructure, and a lack of delivery infrastructure. Program providers also feel a tension between wanting to affect systems change and the real urgency of addressing immediate needs through direct and emergency services.

A Closer Look at Barriers Related to Federal Child Nutrition Programs

There are barriers at multiple levels to enrollment in federal child nutrition programs. KIs highlighted participation requirements, exclusive eligibility requirements, and program guidelines as barriers to food access. For example, a KI called out the fact that the gap between eligibility ages for WIC and the National School Lunch Program leaves children and families without support, sharing, "I'm very familiar with the school-based program within Denver Health [...] clinics but [WIC] just stops at the age of five, so a lot of them are not quite school age." And another key informant highlighted outdated eligibility thresholds as barriers to hungry individuals and families accessing federal food assistance, stating, "So you have people that would benefit from accessing these programs but they're not eligible because their income threshold is 185% of poverty."^{7,8}

Key informants also highlighted a number of process/practice issues with federal child nutrition programs including poor quality/unhealthy food and inadequate cultural/linguistic responsiveness that they believe serve as barriers to addressing hunger. For example, one KI spoke to the challenges of providing culturally appropriate school meals for a school district as multicultural as Denver's:

I have been meeting with a group of students from [school name redacted]. It's very multicultural. [...] It represents every culture and nationality that I think we have in DPS. They approached me in February or March, and they were concerned because Muslim students weren't eating because [...] there's some very specific requirements on how food is prepared and what kind of food. They don't eat pork, for example. [...] We've really struggled with that. We want all of our kids to feel like there's something friendly for them on the menu. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

And KIs highlighted key resource gaps including limited funding/budgets, a lack of enough/trained staff, a lack of kitchen infrastructure, and a lack of data management/evaluation capacity. For example, one KI describes how their limited budget for school meals necessitates cutting corners and not purchasing the most nutritious food options, and how this has a disproportionate impact on the

⁷ In 2020, in the United States, the poverty threshold for a family group of four, including two children, was US\$26,200.

⁸ This is an example of how systems of oppression intersect/interlock — discussed later in this report in the section Gaps: Interlocking Structural/Systemic Oppressions Compound Food Inequities — and how food insecurity is exacerbated by inequities within other systems (specifically, housing, transportation, healthcare, and dependent care). [Eligibility thresholds were designed to be calculated off household food costs because this used to be the largest household expense](#). But that's no longer the case. For example, according to the [Economic Policy Institute's Family Budget Calculator](#), the monthly costs of housing, childcare, healthcare, and transportation for a family of four living in Denver are each now individually greater than the monthly cost of food, yet the federal government's eligibility threshold formula still uses food costs as its base.

low-income students who rely on school meals for food:

Exactly. That's right [protein meats just cost more and we can't afford that with our \$2.50/student budget]. [...] I think that's true for other organizations as well, that we have such a limited amount of money, and so you end up spending it on items that you could... just like if it was your own budget, quite honestly [...] You're going to buy items that are going to feed your family, even though calories may not be the highest-quality calories. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Finally, KIs acknowledged that the application processes for federal child nutrition programs can feel onerous and that other factors can create barriers to utilizing the benefits (e.g., WIC-approved stores, low-food access neighborhoods, transportation, restrictions in terms of what can be purchased with WIC/SNAP benefits). As one KI highlights:

Government programs like WIC and SNAP, those have such complicated enrollment and there are significant barriers to... I hear people talk about just struggles with getting the documentation needed, with getting to appointments needed, with staying on the phone for the amount of time that's necessary to complete an application, confusing requirements among the different programs. [...] Time is also a challenge. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Beyond these barriers, there is still painful stigma associated with receiving benefits, particularly when individuals feel 'othered.' Fears of "public charge" — that accessing benefits could lead to the denial of a green card, visa, or admission into the United States — persist among immigrant communities despite recent federal policy changes.

A Closer Look at Barriers Related to Early Childhood Programs

While children and youth are the focus for HFDK, there appears to be a missed opportunity to focus earlier in the life course (i.e., prenatal period, early childhood), when longer-term impact might be possible by establishing healthy practices earlier in life. Indeed, one KI highlighted a lack of nonprofit programs focused on early childhood as a critical gap:

I don't think there's a particular food program that really serves prenatal to five. I do know that some of them use Cooking Matters. [...] So other than childcare providers who know about and are connected to Denver Early Childhood Council or Denver Preschool Program [...] those who are disconnected are not having that same connection with how to get food for early childhood care and education. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

The early childcare sector has the potential to have a broader reach but many providers (e.g., home-based care, informal child-care providers such as family members, etc.) are excluded from receiving supports and/or don't know they're eligible or how to access them. These providers could benefit from access to supplemental food programs, nutrition education, and healthy food subsidies:

You have centers that function almost like a Head Start, those federally-funded sites that have somebody who could run a nutrition program, if that makes sense. But then you have others that, they're just trying to survive, this very small business, it's a very fragile world. There are a lot of rules and regulations, not a lot of resources. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Structural and System Barriers

There are interlocking structural and systemic oppressions that compound food inequities. Many KIs identified inequitable/inadequate transportation as a major barrier. Transportation is often required to access healthier food options because of geographic inequities like low food access areas, lack of local childcare options, and incomplete neighborhood coverage by federal child nutrition programs:

Practically speaking, our patients work, they have transportation struggles, a number of different issues with childcare, which prohibit the ability to very easily go to a place where there might be better fresh fruits and vegetables, prohibit their abilities to have appointments with human services to get these enrollment completed. There's million[s] of barriers. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Culturally appropriate food can be difficult[...] Usually there's some little mom and pop stores that have what people want but not[...] on a great scale.

Low food access areas in particular — [one of the legacies of racist urban planning, housing, and transportation policies that included 'redlining' and the placement of freeways in ways that segregated neighborhoods of color from city centers](#) — were also highlighted as barriers to culturally relevant food:

Culturally appropriate food can be difficult because it may or may not even really exist very well in the neighborhood. Usually, there's some little mom and pop stores that have what people want but not necessarily on a great scale. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Finally, even when families do have healthy food options nearby, the higher cost of this food sometimes keeps them from purchasing it. One KI remarked, "I think when we're talking about really good nutritious food, that price is an obstacle." And KIs directly connected this community-level challenge to the structural-level problem of federal food subsidy practices that favor industrial agriculture over local growers:

I work with farmers a lot in our program for the Good Food Purchasing Program. I know that their prices are generally more expensive — part of the reason that their prices are more expensive is because farm products in other programs, different USDA programs are federally subsidized. And so the prices are lower because the growers are getting additional money from the federal government. When you purchase local product, that's not the case. And because that's not the case, the price is higher. It's one of the reasons the price is higher. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Similarly, zooming out from the city of Denver, key informants also identified a number of challenges at the state and national levels. KIs highlighted a lack of coordination/collaboration across local food system actors and suggested the complexity of the system and variety of resources/supports drives families to fall back on easy-but-unhealthy food options. KIs highlighted national level challenges like the separation of the charitable and retail food systems (which fuels stigma), and the retail food system's promotion of unhealthy foods, as well as [inequities driven by industrial agriculture](#). They also

noted that state and federal policies are sometimes at odds with one another and force schools, for example, to make hard choices between which government supports to pursue. The prime example of this is the conflict between the federal [Community Eligibility Provision](#) (which allows schools to receive universal reimbursement for meals without burdening families with application paperwork, and has the potential to move Colorado closer to universal meals) and state practices for distributing Title I funding, which use free and reduced-price meal application paperwork to calculate schools' federal awards:

I think from the Community Eligibility Provision perspective, I think there's some pretty detailed policy work that needs to happen unpacking Title I funding and how that is distributed and authorized in Colorado. [...] I do think that's primarily policy driven at this point because the Community Eligibility Provision is opening. They're actually expanding that program under the Biden administration, but unless we can solve that problem, it doesn't really matter. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Finally, KIs highlighted cross-sector challenges, specifically how the food system is directly impacted by — and impacts — other systems in interlocking, oppressive ways. For example:

- **Increasing housing, childcare, and transportation costs** contribute to hunger and unhealthy food choices by dominating more and more families' monthly budgets, leaving less money for high-quality food;
- **Gentrification, displacement, and the City's failure to preserve affordable housing** is driving families away from, and sometimes beyond the reach of, food assistance; and
- **Oppressive and harmful federal immigration policies and practices** spark fear and mistrust of government that contributes to individual families' decisions not to access federal food programs.



What Are the Strengths in the Food System?

KIs identified numerous strengths across the local food system ranging from state and local policies and practices, to specific institutional and program strengths and successes, to actors they look to as models for equitable and culturally responsive practices.

Federal Nutrition Programs

KIs highlighted a number of strengths they see in federal child nutrition programs. **They noted that when federal child nutrition programs can provide selection/purchasing autonomy and anonymity, there are a variety of benefits including less food waste, dollars directed to local businesses, and reduced stigma.** For example, one KI highlighted multiple strengths of WIC including the fact that the program directs millions of dollars back into local communities through food purchases:

The incentive to be a WIC-approved store is that typically, [if families on WIC are] going to do their WIC shopping, they do all their shopping there. [...] For example, gosh, I could probably pull up the actual numbers. WIC puts millions of dollars back into the community with also the reimbursement of the WIC Foods, but just the additional dollars in shopping. Also, kids on WIC tend to have an overall healthier cart than those not on WIC or parents or caregivers of kids on WIC just because we do that nutrition education piece [...] so they learn about what to buy and recipes to use. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this report, USDA waivers — issued in response to the pandemic — also created new flexibilities that increased organizations’ abilities to support people experiencing food insecurity and reduced stigma:

[Pandemic EBT cards also allowed families] to have some bit of privacy in the fact that they need food assistance. With our programs, a lot of times they’re having to fill out an application where they have to detail their income. One family put it like, “Having to prove I’m poor year after year is just so [degrading].” This new program that was created, there’s some privacy in that as well. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Another KI highlighted that the new flexibilities offered by the waivers helped organizations significantly increase food access for struggling families, and they wish that these could continue beyond the pandemic:

From a food bank standpoint, the school districts this year with the waivers have really gone up with the child nutrition authorization program waivers. They have gone above and beyond. They’ve been able to get meals out in more ways than one. We have too. We’ve been able to really take advantage of a lot of these flexibilities through the waivers. [...] We’ve been able to get out grab and go meals, several grab and go meals at a time. We’ve been able to give them out to parents where in the past we have had to have a kid at a site receive that meal. Policy-wise, it would just be so great if moving forward these national child nutrition programs could lessen some of their requirements and continue with these waivers that were so successful over the timeframe of the pandemic. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

A Closer Look at the Strengths of Federal Child Nutrition Programs

In terms of the strengths of specific federal child nutrition programs, key informants lifted up the wraparound support that the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) provides for Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) providers, including their capacity building focused on the integration of academic enrichment into dining, family-style dining (when it’s safe), nutrition education, and training staff on food safety and culinary skills to support their ability to prepare more varied, healthy meals. They highlighted CACFP’s abilities to operate outside of school hours and to serve adults as strengths that complemented the school day-specific ‘coverage’ and youth focus of other programs. They also appreciate the ways in which CACFP’s strict nutrition guidelines promote healthier food choices. For example, one key informant shared that the requirement to meet CACFP’s strict nutrition guidelines to receive reimbursement acts as an incentive for them to prepare healthier foods:

I know it’s tough because we all work through the confines of the system. Even myself, I was just thinking that we worked with CACFP for reimbursement for our meals, and they have set procedures and regulations for what we can serve. If those things weren’t there, I don’t think I could with 100% certainty say that I wouldn’t serve Rice Krispies and things like that. Even though I know about nutrition, and dietary restriction. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

KIs were also very appreciative of WIC and its local staff, particularly its nutrition education work with families, and efforts to reduce the stigma associated with federal child nutrition programs (e.g., the introduction of an eWIC benefits card that can be discreetly used even at self-checkout kiosks in King Soopers, Safeway, and Walmart).

State-Level Advocacy

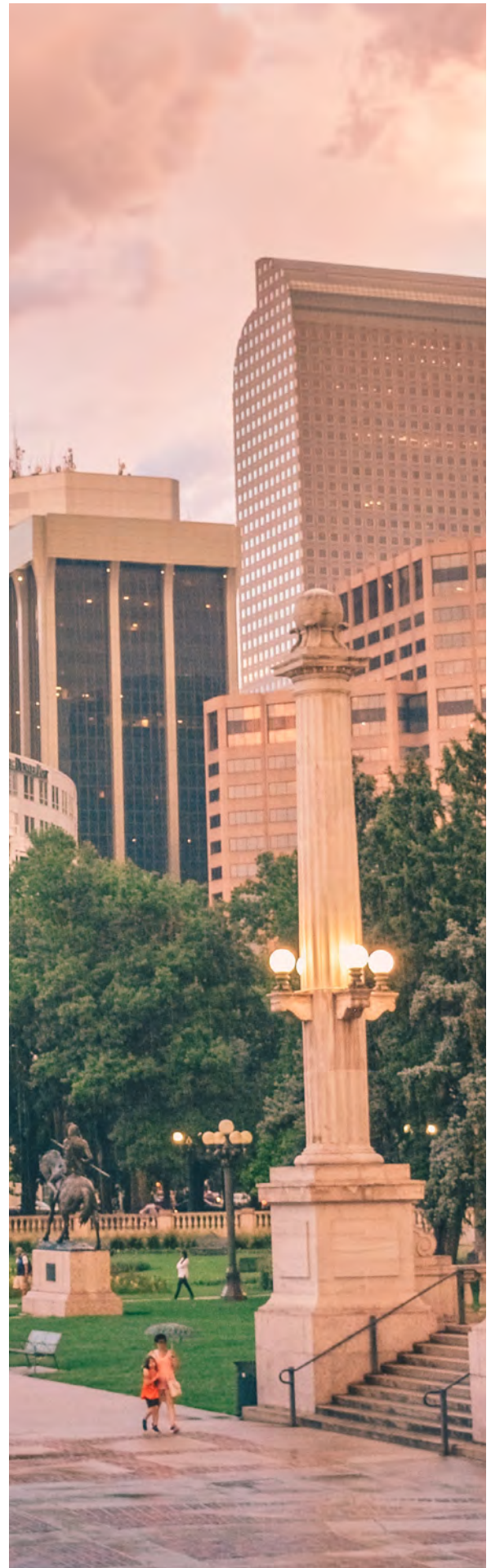
State- and city-level commitments and advocacy have supported change efforts in Colorado. KIs noted that states have the power to choose more or less flexible or supportive approaches to implementing federal child nutrition programs. They voiced appreciation for the fact that Colorado has made specific commitments to being flexible and subsidizing USDA reimbursements to increase access for low-income students and ensure Denver Public Schools food services employees are paid living wages. They also highlighted that state-level advocacy efforts are already underway to reduce barriers to participation in federal child nutrition programs, including closing the gap between WIC and NSLP eligibility and implementing [universal meals](#):

Something that is being advocated for federally, and also at the state level, is just being able to provide free meals through these [federal child nutrition] programs, to all kids, which we've been able to do through waivers through the pandemic. But in normal times, that's not an option. HFDK should know that's a big policy push, I would say, at the federal and at the state level. The Blueprint's policy [working] group, this is something that is on their agenda federally, but also they've looked into, How could we do this if it's not passed federally? How could we potentially get state legislation that would pay for it? (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Local Food Resources and Support

KIs lifted up that [the Denver food system has a lot of strengths](#) — including an abundance of food and food programs — that it can leverage to reduce hunger, while recognizing that these programs are not equally available across the City's neighborhoods. Related, KIs see HFDK itself as representing a significant investment of dollars and resources:

Healthy Food for Denver Kids — I think it's going to blow us out of the water. I mean, I would be disappointed if it didn't because that amount of money for such a specific ask or task is so rare that I think that it should be like, "What's the biggest thing that could be done? What is the most powerful thing that could be done?" [...] I've never seen that kind of money or something like this. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)



They also highlighted the City’s political support for children and addressing hunger, including the City’s recognition of the systems nature of the work:

I think that it’s clear that this is a priority for a lot of officials within Denver and it seems like people are willing to start talking about the long-term system-level change, which is exciting versus the ‘Let’s just get them food right now.’ (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

And KIs think that local food system actors are approaching the work more and more collaboratively. This increased collaboration is evident amongst community-based organizations. For example, one KI described their food bank’s partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Metro Denver and Cooking Matters as a strategy to pool their individual organizations’ resources — fresh produce, nutrition education, and direct distribution channels — to better support Denver kids:

Just from a personal example through the food bank...I think they’re really trying to reach more kids in a unique way. I think Boys & Girls Clubs received a grant. Boys & Girls Clubs of Denver received a grant and they’re utilizing our services. We’re providing food to them for weekend tote programs. So they’re taking grant money and repaying us for the food. ‘Cause we have food here in our food bank and then we’re putting them in totes and then we provide them to their centers for weekend food. And I think the Boys & Girls Club, we’re really trying to think, “Wow, who can we partner with? Who can we tap into that could do this on a high level?” ‘Cause we’re providing food to almost 25 sites. I think they have been really great at being creative and really trying to figure out how to use partners. [...] We’re partnering with [Cooking Matters too]. They’re producing some produce brochures for us, to put in some of our produce bags. So when we give a produce bag, kale and eggplant to people, and people know they’re getting this card that says how to cut an eggplant. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

And Denver is seeing more interest in collaboration amongst local funders. For example, a KI described early conversations about pursuing collective funding approaches that disrupt the power dynamics of traditional top-down funding models as a potential strength of the local food system:

This is really early days... I don’t know that it’s a strength yet, but it’s an interesting conversation around getting funders together to do more collaborative funding. Really fund what’s needed in the community, versus determining their strategies. Rather than more of a top-down funding strategy, more of a bottom-up strategy. Some of the funders are starting to come together to talk about “How could we have more community-informed and strategic-funding in Colorado around food security and food access?” Just the fact that Colorado is even having those conversations is really interesting. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Additionally, KIs voiced that local organizations are supporting the implementation of equitable and culturally responsive practices. KIs expressed appreciation for specific organizations and programs, including the wide reach and

Really fund what’s needed in the community, versus determining their strategies. Rather than more of a top-down funding strategy, more of a bottom-up strategy.



innovations they were seeing within Denver Public Schools and federal child nutrition programs in Denver, as well as a number of local organizations and programs that they feel are strong role models for equitable and culturally responsive practices.

KIs noted that Denver Public Schools as a district is able to reach large numbers of children experiencing food insecurity. The school system prioritizes nutritious food in its implementation of the National School Lunch Program and chose

to continue using the USDA's higher-quality/stricter nutrition guidelines as a starting point for meal design, even when the federal government offered them the opportunity to loosen the guidelines:

We certainly comply with all the USDA guidelines. We really use that as a floor, not the ceiling. Under the previous [Trump] administration, there was an opportunity to roll some of those back and we as a district chose not to. We were still complying with all those and/or doing better than that. From a nutrition perspective, I would say we are continuously looking at that. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Additionally, Denver Public Schools' Food and Nutrition Services Department has been dialoguing with kids and families about school meals to ensure that their perspectives and experiences inform meal design:

I'm doing outreach to parents, students, and staff to share the work that we have done to improve the quality and ingredients of our breakfast and lunch meals to encourage greater participation so that it becomes normalized for kids to eat a meal at school — [...] doing a lot of, I would say engagement to hear concerns and feedback from our families for how we can improve, but also creating a dialogue to share how we take their input and try to improve our work. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Finally, **many KIs identified programs (their own and others') that operate in equitable and culturally responsive ways as 'strengths' of the local food system**, indicating a broadening interest in this kind of practice across Denver. They described organizations that are:

- 1. Thinking about how their work relates to that of other organizations, including organizations working outside the food space.** For example, one KI described how their organization is taking a systems-perspective and considering how their work within the food system intersects with other organizations' efforts to ensure families' basic needs are met (e.g., education, employment, etc.):

[Systems change opportunities is] a conversation we actually have recently had as well within our organization. Why food? Why meals? What opportunity or support does this provide families so that they can focus those cash resources in other areas? And that's why I think it's so important to partner and collaborate with entities that do provide whole-child [support] or supports in the community, not just meal, but education, employment opportunities, employment coaching, navigating systems, all kinds of things, so that these meals are saving you costs for groceries for your family, so that you can put those costs to other areas that will better your future or help you become more financially sustainable. And so we are having those conversations. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

- 2. Focusing resources on communities that are most marginalized/in need of support.** For example, one KI describes how the Denver Preschool Program (DPP) decides where to direct their services and supports by ranking Denver neighborhoods according to how many risk factors they represent, including being a ‘childcare desert’ and/or having a large refugee and/or immigrant population:

We actually use ‘childcare deserts’ as the [term]... It came from food deserts. [...] What’s been helpful for us is we actually use this combination of information to make... they’re almost like rankings. We use ‘childcare desert’, we have information about where kids are in preschools that are served by DPP, where they are in the city. And so we’ve also [clarified]: “These are our high need, financial need neighborhoods.” One of the other areas [we focus on] that’s often overlooked are areas where the refugee and immigrant populations are in Denver. [...] So those tend to be the areas that when we’re thinking about delivering services we tend to look at those aspects. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

- 3. Reducing burdens/barriers and creating opportunities/providing more resources for people experiencing food insecurity.** For example, one KI describes how WIC is piloting a co-enrollment system to ‘piggy-back’ WIC appointments onto pediatric appointments, reducing transportation barriers:

Right now we’re doing a pilot of a co-enrollment system, which there’s about a 20 minute lag between the medical assistant [...] and the pediatrician comes in to actually do the appointment. We’re trying to go in there and do our WIC appointment during that time. So it eliminates that transportation barrier a little bit because even if they don’t have transportation, Medicaid will pay for transportation to a doctor’s appointment but not to a WIC appointment, so that barrier is eliminated. It’s not a whole other appointment because we ask and do a lot of the same things. So it’s us really working together with the providers. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

- 4. Sourcing food locally, supporting local economies and wages.** For example, one KI described how Denver Public Schools’ (DPS) Food and Nutrition Services policies aim to support living/fair wages, animal rights, ethical approaches to agriculture, and sourcing food locally:

Over the last two years, we are participating with the City on the Good Food Purchasing Program. That speaks to wages for our employees, it speaks to how we source our food, both in the humane treatment of animals, but also more locally sourced, fresh produced items and quality of ingredients. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

- 5. Seeing and supporting children in context, as members of families that also require food assistance.** For example, one KI lifted up Clayton Early Learning as an organization HFDK may want to learn from because of the way they engage young people as members of a family (vs. as individuals needing meals) and find ways to also support their families and connect them with resources:

The work that Clayton Early Learning is doing, I think is a [...] great thing to look at. From my understanding, the providers that are connected to those food programs really have a lot of success [...] providing food for families who may be food insecure. And, oftentimes, not just a preschooler. Young families are usually young families, meaning they have kids around the same age. So, it may not just be focusing on the preschooler, it may be focusing on maybe a preschooler who has an infant or toddler brother or sister, and maybe a kindergarten or first grade sibling. So, siblings on both ends, but, again, they’ve had

some success in just getting the whole family connected to providing food. But then others are connecting them to food banks or to other places that might help them get food. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

- 6. Prioritizing culturally responsive practices.** Specific practices highlighted by KIs included listening to and collaborating with community members to implement programs and other supports, ensuring nutrition education includes culturally appropriate food and substitutions, employing education staff who reflect/represent the cultural backgrounds of community members and/or are community members themselves, connecting healthy eating to family traditions, and even facilitating ‘cultural exchanges’ amongst community members via meals that feature community members’ diverse cuisines of origin.
- 7. Prioritizing linguistically responsive practices.** Specific practices highlighted by KIs included ensuring people can access services in their primary language or language of choice, working with community members to ensure the language used in marketing and communications materials is relevant and inclusive, and tailoring communication strategies and tools to families’ circumstances and preferences.
- 8. Organizing/building relationships with community members and leaders to center their lived experiences and expertise, and compensating them for contributing that expertise via advisory and leadership roles.** For example, one KI describes how their organization has worked to build deep relationships with community members and leaders (with an emphasis on listening to them, not telling them what they should do); drawing on organizing approaches, with the goal of both amplifying community voices at decision-making tables their staff are at; and bringing community members themselves to the table to represent themselves:

The approach has to be that we really got to get deep into the community. And that means, investing in staff, or contractors, whoever people, who are going to go into those communities, meet who the community leaders are, pair up with those community leaders. And to go into those communities, with the community leaders, to talk about, and to mostly listen. Tell us what the issues are. Tell us what your day to day life is like. Tell us what you’re facing. I’ll give you an example that’s always resonated for me: when President Obama was first running for office, one of the things that he did so powerfully and successfully, and immediately, is that he used social media as a platform to reach millions and millions and millions and millions of people who had otherwise, been left out, or ostracized, or marginalized intentionally out of the system. That is the electoral system, the debates, and the conversations. It was a very fundamental community organizing approach that he and his campaign took. He went very deep into the communities, and talked directly to a lot of people. And he used social media as a powerful platform in many ways to do that, to hear from millions and millions of people, right? The key lesson that I got from that is, historically, community organizing is that you go deep into the community. And then you raise the voices. And then, literally and figuratively, you bring people from the community to the table. You bring them to the table. For example, we might hire a high school student, or someone from the community, a senior person perhaps, to hold a focus group themselves. And they talk to their community members, and they get paid for doing that. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

A young child with curly hair is sitting at a table, focused on eating. An adult's hands are visible, one near the child's hand and another near the plate. The scene is set in a bright, indoor environment, likely a dining area. The image has a soft, greenish tint.

CHAPTER 4

Impact of HFDK Funding

This chapter draws primarily from the grantee data provided during the first cohort of HFDK funding (August 2020-July 2021) and presents the primary activities and outcomes achieved by the Year 1 grantees. Also shared in this chapter is information gathered through a focus group with high school youth that received nutrition and food systems education provided by Year 1 grantees.

Who Was Served by HFDK Funding?

It is estimated that nearly 28% of Denver’s 138,897 youth (Census, 2019) were served by the Year 1 grantees in the first cohort. Over this year, grantees reported serving an average of 38,403 unique youth⁹ each quarter. While it is not possible to determine whether the youth being served by different grantees are unique from each other (e.g., a child accessing services from one HFDK grantee is also receiving food from another), this gives an estimate of the unique number of youth reached through HFDK grants in the first year.

As a whole, grantees reported primarily serving low-income school-age children identifying as Hispanic/Latinx. Most grantees served racially and ethnically diverse populations. Hispanic/Latinx youth made up about 40% of the individuals served by grantees, followed by Black/African American at 18% (below the percentage of Black/African American households receiving SNAP — 24%), then White at 15% (about half of the percent of White households receiving SNAP — 31%), and under 10% Asian American/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Middle Eastern/North African. Of those that were able to report on racial/ethnic groups (n=19), Hispanic/Latinx is the only racial/ethnic group that is served in at least some capacity by all grantees. Some organizations are not serving Black, Asian, Middle Eastern/North African, Indigenous, or White children and youth at all. When looking at the approximate percent of youth served by grantees by racial/ethnic categories, the community served was fairly proportionate to the racial/ethnic identities of households receiving SNAP in Denver¹⁰ (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

All reporting grantees are largely serving school-aged children (age 6-18). Grantees reported serving more early childhood youth (age 0-3 and 3-6) as the contract year progressed, even if only at small percentages (1-25%). Younger-aged children may have fewer direct touchpoints with organizations, and the early childhood categories span fewer years (3 years each vs. 12 years for the school-age period) and therefore were served in relatively proportionate amounts.

⁹ Unique youth defined as a child or youth (age 18 and under) who is counted once no matter how many times they received food or participated in a program during the quarter

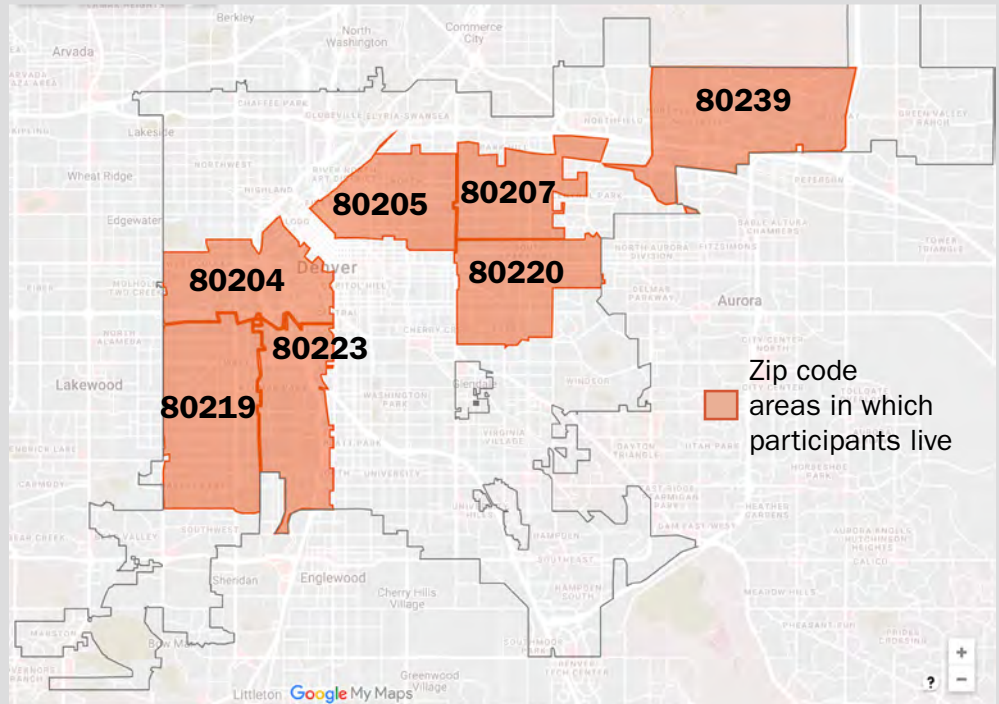
¹⁰ Few grantees were able to accurately report on the number of unique youth served through their programming. All HFDK contracted grantees were weighted equally to calculate the approximate percent of youth served by racial/ethnic categories (e.g., a grantee that served thousands of children and youth has the same weight as a grantee who served a hundred).



All grantees served Denver children and youth living in areas identified as at-risk for food insecurity. Children and youth being served by grantees most often came from the same Denver zip codes where At-Risk Ranks¹¹ are highest. These zip codes are in the regions of Southwest, West, Central, and Northeast (Figure 2). Overall, grantees were less able to report on whether or not they were serving immigrant and/or refugee populations, or people experiencing homelessness. As some Year 1 grantees have shared through conversations and during convenings, some of this information is not often collected regularly by or readily accessible to grantees. Many grantees avoid asking such questions of program participants, as they can be a perceived barrier to or discourage individuals from accessing food services.

¹¹ At-Risk Rank (AAR) is an index of eight socioeconomic indicators: households in poverty, median household income, unemployment, household owner occupancy, population with a high school diploma, population with at least a bachelor's degree, and population employed in professional occupations. This index was created by Five Points Geoplanning and overlaps greatly with the indicators and sources in Denver's Neighborhood Equity Index.

Figure 2. Top Denver Zip Codes of Participants Served by Year 1 Grantees



Among the subset of grantees (n=12) that reported serving immigrant and/or refugee populations (about 48% of all Year 1 grantees), there was a wide range in terms of the percentage of immigrants and/or refugees being served. Of note, a few grantees (n=4) reported that immigrants and/or refugees make up more than 50% of individuals being served with HFDK funds. About 60% of grantees were able to report on whether or not the people they served were experiencing homelessness, and of those, no one was serving primarily un-homed people.

How Did HFDK Impact Food Access?

Food Distribution Efforts

Over the course of the year, seven Year 1 grantees served nearly 120,000 meals and snacks and fourteen grantees distributed over 150,000 food boxes, increasing access to healthy foods for families and youth in Denver. More specifically, Year 1 grantees served 118,924 meals consisting of 66,400 snacks, 21,566 Grab-and-Go Meals, 15,399 breakfasts or lunches, and 15,559 dinners. 145,723 food boxes were distributed by grantees to youth and families (n=14).

Year 1 Grantees

**118,924
meals
served**

**145,723
food boxes
delivered**

Most grantees distributed nutrition information with meals and food. Four of the seven grantees who served meals provided recipe cards, nutrition information, or a cooking demonstration with the meals at least some of the time. Thirteen of the fourteen grantees who distributed food boxes provided recipe cards, nutritional information, or cooking demonstrations/nutrition classes with food at least some of the time. Many grantees who were not including these materials in their food distribution at the beginning of the contract period did provide these by the final quarter.

Highlights From Year 1 Grantees

A few grantees also distributed food boxes and meal kits with ingredients for families to prepare recipes featured in cooking classes. One of the grantees, We Don't Waste, provided recipe cards with a QR code that linked to a cooking tutorial video featuring a Johnson & Wales University culinary intern preparing the featured recipe.



Nearly 3,000,000 pounds of food were distributed with HFDK funds by four grantees to other partners in the Denver food system.

These four grantees rescued these millions of pounds of food, thereby diverting food that would have ended up as waste in landfills and increasing food access for families and youth who needed it. The rescued food was distributed to 185 schools, 39 community centers, and 52 housing facilities. Grantees were asked to estimate the composition of the food they distributed to partners. As a whole, these grantees are all distributing produce (100%), but overall, less than the USDA-recommended amount. The majority of the food distributed to partners is non-perishable (71%). Most of the time, the food distributed consisted of at least some food from local farmers, ranches, growers, or food hubs.

Using the food composition estimations, the following approximations for food distributed were created. **Produce made up the largest percentage of the food distributed over the year (37%),** followed by bread/grains (23%), meat (22%), and dairy (18%). Compared with the US Department of Agriculture's MyPlate, these totals are below the recommended amount for produce (approximately 50%). Grantees also approximated the amount of prepared food and non-perishable food that was distributed. Non-perishable food made up most of the food distributed (71%), while prepared food made up about 29% of food distributed. In preparing menus and determining food box content, grantees most often mentioned using the USDA dietary guidelines (e.g., whole grain, protein, fruits/veggies) to inform food selection.

Highlights From Year 1 Grantees

Some grantees partnered to expand food offerings, especially locally-sourced foods based on feedback from families requesting more variety in food options. For example, one grantee is using a google form to allow families to select food and schedule distribution at a time that was most convenient. Another grantee is refreshing their menu based on youth feedback.

Through grantee-led evaluation activities, grantees reported positive changes among youth served (n=23). Among the grantees, many reported increases in: vegetable consumption amongst children and youth (87%); access to fresh, healthy food (83%); the number of youth trying new foods (74%); and youth food security (74%). Additionally, grantees noted increases in coordination among food organizations in Denver (61%) and enrollment in SNAP, P-EBT, WIC, and free school meal programs (30%).

What Food and Nutrition Education Was Provided Through HFDK?

Through 15 grantees, HFDK grants provided education and instruction around healthy food and nutrition to over 25,000 youth and family members in Denver.

In aggregate, 14,822 youth and 10,457 adults participated in the educational activities created by grantees. In total, 972 food education and/or nutrition classes were held by 15 grantees. Together, the educational hours supported by the HFDK grant totaled over 5,105 hours.

Year 1 Grantees

held **972** food
education and/
or nutrition
classes
totalling
over **5,105**
educational
hours

Our success is facilitated by the trust the community has with the kitchen. The consistency of the kitchen's presence in the community when so many things are in flux and/or changing in our neighborhood has been a key factor in building that trust. (Sun Valley Community Center, a Year 1 grantee, 2021)

We see that when students and families can have multiple and multi-hour touchpoints with us, our programming is more impactful. For example, we saw great success from our teen leadership program, which meets twice a week for multiple hours at a time. (The GrowHaus, a Year 1 grantee, 2021)

Highlights From Year 1 Grantees

A few grantees engaged partners to offer cooking classes (e.g. local chef) or to teach a specific curriculum (e.g. Be Healthy curriculum).

Grantees adapted curriculum for virtual formats and remote-learning when in-person restrictions were imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Grantees primarily provided cooking classes in a virtual space and posted on YouTube or their websites.

Of the food education classes held, **78% covered nutrition or healthy eating, 71% had a focus on cooking, 41% included education on food production — such as farming or gardening — and food justice and food advocacy topics showed up in about 25%**. Additional topics that a few grantees covered in their classes included how to make healthier versions of traditional recipes, permaculture, food safety guidelines, kitchen safety, and the connection between food and physical, emotional, and mental health.

There has been great feedback from parents in the community, and we continue to receive photos from families making the recipes at home. The best feedback we have received is from the families we deliver kits to, along with the food from our No Cost Grocery Program. We have received comments about how the previous recipe turned out, as well as excitement and questions about what we will be making for the next cooking class. (Sun Valley Community Center, a Year 1 grantee, 2021)



It is important for us to go back to our cultural roots and understand how our ancestors ate, and why our culinary traditions as Latinos are so rich. It comes from our indigenous ancestors, along with our shared colonial history. We have to teach pride in those roots, and show different ways youth can straddle both American and Latino culture. Also, showing students where their food comes from and how it is sourced creates a deeper relationship. Our commitment to instilling a sense of cultural pride and justice in our curriculum truly drives its success. (Re:Vision, a Year 1 grantee, 2021)

Some grantees take a holistic view to health and saw that food education served as an entry point to expose youth to a broader range of experiences that support a healthy lifestyle.

The youth tried many new things: cooking, harvesting, stand up paddleboarding, yoga. By using food as a catalyst for youth to think about their culture and their health (physical and mental), each class challenged youth to look at the broader systems. (Re:Vision, a Year 1 Grantee, 2021)

Highlights From Year 1 Grantees

Grantees integrated curricula, such as Zero Waste and Ounce of Nutrition, into their educational programs. The GrowHaus, is co-creating a curriculum with past youth participants who will lead programming over the summer.

Many grantees conducted food education around production, farming, or gardening that often took place at growing sites. Re:Vision was able to hold outdoor classes in their garden, although at lower capacity to accommodate social distancing.

Montbello Organizing Committee, shared that their cooking classes included education on the cultural history of recipes, the plant morphology of the main ingredients, and the potential of food value relating to the benefits of consuming food that we grow ourselves. Another grantee is offering science classes and opportunities for creative writing.

Once vaccinations became available, grantees began to slowly transition back to in-person programming. Colorado Circles for Change, reported that they started onsite programming again as youth were vaccinated and following CDC protocols. Re:Vision, moved their educational programming outside, and used food as a strategy to support childrens' healing from the trauma of the pandemic.

Metro Caring, offered a hybrid Eating Seasonally summer class that engaged a group of families both in-person and virtually. The class included a tour of the hydro farm (a shipping container converted into a grow site), cooking instruction, and meeting community leaders. Families also received a few plants to start home gardens.

Feedback From Youth That Received Education Through HFDK

The youth that were part of the HFDK focus group reported participating in a range of educational activities focused on food and nutrition that included health classes, culinary classes, and gardening. They described learning about healthy food choices and food history, as well as specific skills related to cooking and growing/maintaining a garden:

So we had cooking classes and [...] we had someone come in and talk to us about food history and the history of gardening and things like that but mostly for us we had a cooking class where they talked to us about healthy alternatives for food. So for example, rather than using peanut butter which has a lot of sugar in it, maybe switch to almond butter which is a little more nutritious and it's less sugar and it's a little more healthier for you. We just talked about things like that and made some healthy snacks and kind of mostly just [talked] about healthy options. (Youth, HFDK focus group, 2021)

When asked about how these classes impacted their behaviors, youth shared that they are trying to make healthier choices, though it is sometimes difficult. The education has helped them re-visit what they view as healthy and they described using the knowledge they gained to try to find a healthier balance in terms of the food choices they are making:

I feel like yes in some ways because we're learning more about ... healthy alternatives to food that isn't very healthy for you. So I feel it's kind of shifting away. (Youth, HFDK focus group, 2021)

I'm trying but it's kind of hard to eat vegetables because it's vegetables. They're not... I mean, they're good but I don't always want to eat them but yeah I feel like somewhat, I do try to eat a lot of veggies. (Youth, HFDK focus group, 2021)



Yeah, sure. I guess kind of finding a balance between good protein and a good amount of veggies and fruit and that can be hard for a lot of people. [...] I don't eat vegetables every single day but I definitely try to and I guess it's just about finding balance and what works for your body, whatever is healthiest, I don't know. Cooking with vegetables as much as you can, stuff like that. (Youth, HFDK focus group, 2021)

Being able to have a balance between everything that's on the plate [...] because having too much of one thing will be able to damage your body and it's not good for you and I think that's it. (Youth, HFDK focus group, 2021)

A few youth connected with some of the content including the history of food and appreciated the ability to grow their own food:

I feel like they kind of covered a good amount of topics around food [...] but I thought food history was pretty cool and I think learning more about that would be cool because I really liked that class [...] It's something that you don't think about and I thought that it was nice to learn. (Youth, HFDK focus group, 2021)

I think it kind of encouraged me to want to garden more because I think it's really cool how you can just, you can grow your own food [...]. I think it can be a cheaper option especially for people who might not have access to food. They can go to their community gardens and grow stuff without having to, I think there's a plot fee but I think it's very small and it's like, you're going to have that plot for a very long time. And you can grow all this food and use it to cook and whatever you want to do with it. (Youth, HFDK focus group, 2021)

I think it kind of encouraged me to want to garden more because I think it's really cool how you can just grown your own food.

When asked about their ability to access healthy foods either at school or in their neighborhood, all of the youth described having no issues accessing healthy food, though one mentioned that "getting healthy foods and organic foods is more expensive," while others described how they benefit from neighborhood gardens and food distribution resources and programs:

It's not that difficult to be able to get healthy food. At my school. Yes because they usually serve the same things but around my neighborhood, not really. No, it's not that difficult. (Youth, HFDK focus group, 2021)

I think no, just because I have a lot of resources and there's this program called Heart and Hand which does food drives every other week. I feel like I just have a lot of resources and I know a lot of people might not have those same resources and I think it definitely makes it easier to reach out to communities that help with those sorts of things because they give you a lot of options. (Youth, HFDK focus group, 2021)

I feel like I don't have any difficulties as a lot of my neighbors during the gardening season, they will leave free produce for whoever wants to take it whether it's from their house or from their garden. So I feel even if I didn't have any produce I would have some kind of resource from my neighborhood. (Youth, HFDK focus group, 2021)



Eight grantees invested in equitable food education on farms and grow sites and were able to create and support 76 jobs, internships, and apprenticeships for youth to engage more meaningfully in the food system. Gardens served as educational sites for over 2,523 youth who interacted with the gardens and were often used in conjunction with a curriculum. With the shift to almost all virtual-based learning, the ability to safely interact and learn in an outdoors, in-person format was a welcomed opportunity for many of the youth grantees engaged.

Over the course of the first year of the initiative, 27 new jobs and 49 internships or apprenticeships engaging youth were created, fulfilling over 9,058 hours of work and \$124,204 paid to youth staff. Responsibilities spanned operations, food production, food education, and mentorship to other youth, but also included other food systems areas such as leadership education, food justice and advocacy, food sales, and food distribution. These opportunities to expand the food-based education and experiences of young people in Denver have further reduced food insecurity among these youth, as well as contributed to strengthening the broader food system.

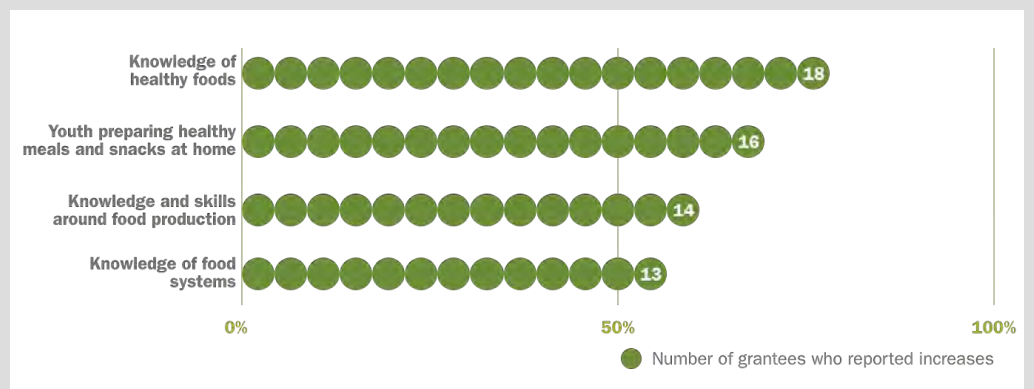
Highlights From Year 1 Grantees

Youth have contributed to installing, caring and harvesting the growing sites over the summer. Denver Urban Gardens, initiated their first high school internship program in the gardens.

Re:Vision, shared that parents have commented that their children are more open to trying new foods since they started working in the gardens.

Overall, among the grantees providing food access and/or education activities to youth (n=23), **the majority noted positive changes in youth knowledge and skills that are likely to have lasting impact on their food security, both short- and long-term.** Specifically, they reported increases in youth knowledge of healthy foods (78%), the number of youth preparing healthy meals and snacks at home (70%), knowledge and skills around food production (61%), and food systems knowledge (57%).

Figure 3. Positive Changes in Youth Food Knowledge and Skills Reported by Year 1 Grantees



How Is HFDK Supporting Healthy Environments?

New Gardens and Greenhouses and Farm-to-School Activities

Over the course of the first year, HFDK supported the establishment of nearly 500 new growing sites in neighborhoods with higher levels of food insecurity. These sites served as local food sources available to communities and educational environments for youth and families.

Highlights From Year 1 Grantees

Gardening activities were seasonal with prepping gardens in the spring and harvesting in the fall. A number of grantees shared that they have been prepping gardens for planting this spring.

For example, Stedman Elementary, reported having a successful community clean-up day in April to prepare the garden for planting, which hasn't been utilized in 2 years. The classrooms have been able to start seeds so they can be transplanted by the end of the school year.

Grantees supported expansion of community and individual gardens. Montbello Organizing Committee, supported the planting of 112 backyard gardens beginning in mid-May. Denver Urban Gardens, is distributing seeds and seedlings to community members as part of the Grow a Garden program. South High School Food Pantry partnered with Grow Local Colorado to create a student-run community garden at a local high school. They also partnered with other organizations (Ekar Farms, The Table, Public House, and Slow Food Denver) to produce seedling packets for families to create and/or supplement their own vegetable gardens.

The Urban Farm shared that **virtual programs were provided to educate students/youth on growing methods** (i.e, aquaponics, hydroponics, soil-based) and then engaged youth in the installation, planting, and care of growing sites.

Through the first year of HFDK grants, seven grantees established 490 new growing sites — gardens, greenhouses, and farms — in 35 schools, 57 community centers or nonprofits, 396 residential backyards, and 2 in other places. Growing sites were established across the city of Denver in the zip codes of 80204, 80205, 80207, 80216, 80219, 80223, 80226, 80236, 80239, and 80249. These growing sites overlap largely with the areas of Denver that have higher At-Risk Ranks (Five Points Geoplanning, LLC, 2020).

In the fall and spring, 21,502 pounds of food were harvested from gardens, farms, and greenhouses, yielding \$54,619 worth of produce supported by HFDK funds. This food was then distributed in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) boxes and to food pantries; community feeding programs; local children/families; and farmers markets to be sold, provided for free, or bought through a 'pay what you can' model. Harvesting and distribution did not occur during the winter season.



What Other Changes Did HFDK Support?

In addition to the primary strategies undertaken by grantees — providing healthy food/meals as well as nutrition, cooking, gardening, and food system education — they also contributed to food systems development with Year 1 grantee, DPS. HFDK funds have helped create an agricultural pathway for DPS students, broke ground on a new DPS greenhouse project, and facilitated partnership development across grantees to support the work.

Food Systems Development

Using HFDK grant dollars, DPS hired a STEM consultant to develop the K-8 Agricultural STEM Framework and share with stakeholders for feedback. The AgConnect Program offers several different career pathways related to the study of food, farming, health, and nutrition: agricultural business pathway, environmental science and natural resources pathway, food science pathway, and sustainable urban agriculture pathway. Without the HFDK Grant, they would not have been able to accomplish food systems development, partnership creation, or overall pathway development.

The Denver Public Schools Greenhouse Project

DPS broke ground this past year on their one-acre greenhouse project in the Marston Neighborhood. They will grow produce that will supply the salad bowl items for Denver students who participate in the school lunch program. When the greenhouse is financially and operationally sustainable, DPS will launch an urban agriculture Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathway for students and provide workforce development opportunities for students and adults.



As a result of HFDK grant dollars being awarded, DPS was also able to justify 2020 Bond dollars to aid in the funding of the Bruce Randolph School (BRS) hydroponic classroom project and develop community-wide systems. Roughly \$900,000 has been allocated to completely build the Ag Program at BRS. The 2020 Bond was needed to supplement the cost of the architectural design of the BRS classroom as well as construction costs associated with the classroom space. The total cost of the architecture was \$116,300, of which \$15,000 was covered by the HFDK grant. BRS was also awarded \$150,000 to purchase a greenhouse to complement the hydroponic farm classroom space and the Big Green Outdoor Learning Garden, which was not funded by HFDK, but was a part of an additional grant BRS received to help create an all-encompassing Urban Agriculture Program that will focus on healthy food access and justice. As a result of this grant funding, DPS students are now able to take university classes at community college rates and have hands-on experiential learning that will teach them advanced urban farming techniques, how to build their own gardens and hydroponic systems, what healthy food is and how to cook nutritious recipes, and how to make a difference in their community.

HFDK Grantees in Collaboration with New Partners and Organizations

Grantees coordinated and collaborated with organizations — both Year 1 grantees and other organizations — in Denver to support local food access and educational activities. Partners helped to provide additional resources, materials, and connections for food assistance. These efforts expanded grantees' ability to be responsive to families' food preferences, enhanced food and nutrition classes and curricula, and helped to mobilize the larger community by generating greater donations from community members.

Collaborations Among Year 1 Grantees

ViVe Wellness worked with Urban Farm to talk to students about the best crops to plant, the process, and how to harvest.

Denver Public Library partnered with DPS by picking up summer meals in bulk from participating DPS summer meal sites to redistribute at library locations to youth.

Sun Valley used produce from Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) in their classes and planned themes/menus to correspond with foods grown by DUG.

Grantee Collaborations with Other Organizations

The Boys & Girls Club worked with a nutritionist at Food Bank of the Rockies to advise on USDA standards for meal distribution.

Denver Urban Gardens worked with Groundwork Denver to coordinate a group of student gardeners and partnered with Denver Botanic Gardens to run a virtual program, Botany in the Kitchen.

Re:Vision worked with RISE Westwood Collective to host six online classes with local Latinx chefs, each sharing their twist on Latin-American holiday favorites: polvorosas from Venezuela, ponche, cochinita pibil, Guatemalan paches, tamales, and pastelitos. This is the start of a virtual library of content focused on holidays and cultural events.

We Don't Waste partnered with the Denver Mayor's Office to co-host six drive-through markets.

There were many key partnerships formed with other local organizations to achieve maximum impact within the community. Heart & Hand Center (H&H) reported that they worked with the Food Bank of the Rockies, Denver Food Rescue, and We Don't Waste to provide fresh, nutritious meals to students during programming. These organizations are key partners for H&H and have been working with the organization over the course of its 11-year history of working with kids and families in Northeast Denver. Additionally, H&H has an emerging partnership planned for the coming year with Metro Caring for gardening and food justice workshops. Moreover, Kaizen Food Rescue reported prioritizing healthy and culturally responsive food — fresh and local when possible. They order over 12,000 pounds of food each day from the Food Bank of the Rockies, local farmers, and through donations from backyard gardeners and farms in Metro Denver. Each food box includes staple items such as produce, low-sugar snacks, shelf-stable items, dairy, and frozen meat, when available.

For example, the Program and Outreach Coordinator at Sprout City Farms helped to mobilize the larger community, provide school supplies for their participants, and gather extra food boxes leftover from food pantry distributions at the Denver Green School Food Pantry. Sprout City Farms was able to deepen their relationship with local producers, Amish Acres and Ela Family Farms, to provide weekly egg and fruit shares to participants throughout the year in response to requests for access to a more well-rounded diet and additional pantry items to develop food security plans to continue providing

healthy and nutritious meals at home. Additionally, Sprout City Farms partnered with Denver Health and the Lowry Clinic, to provide more front-end engagement with WIC Educators to align the program more with families that are utilizing WIC benefits, which will provide more comprehensive support.

There was also a great relationship built between the Denver School of Innovation and Sustainable Design (DSISD), Sprout City Farms, and Hunger Free Colorado. DSISD highlighted Sprout City Farms and Hunger Free Colorado as significant partners of theirs for a nutrition education course in their Food and Culinary Innovator (FCI) classroom, to present information on healthy food assistance programs to students in their FCI (previously Youth Food Leadership) class. They presented every week, participated in discussions with DSISD students around its content, and created a cooking slideshow to demonstrate to students how to make a healthy recipe. They also participated in some of the planning sessions and created a virtual farm tour so that students could still experience a farm visit remotely. Both Sprout City Farms and Hunger Free Colorado presented to students about the following: why access to food matters, what hunger looks like in Colorado, what programs and resources exist that families have the right to access, how hunger has changed since COVID-19, and how the students can get involved by either volunteering or advocacy.



HFDK Micro-Grant Funding

The HFDK Initiative awarded ten micro-grants in the amount of \$10,000 per organization with the goal of increasing the number of children and youth aged 18 and under receiving healthy meals and snacks in the City and County of Denver — especially those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the ten micro-grants awarded, five organizations reported on the successes of their micro-grants over the past year.¹² All respondents reported that grant funds were used to distribute food and purchase supplies; the majority also noted program operations and personnel among the top three program costs. **Grantees served an average of 2,275 unique youth (average across 5 reporting micro-grantees). The total children and youth served across the 5 grantees is 11,375.**

In terms of food distribution, micro-grantees reported an average of \$22,642 spent on meals served and food distributed to youth and families as measured by meals (snacks, breakfast, lunch, dinner), pounds of food, and food boxes. Micro-grantees also reported collaborating with other organizations in order to gather the healthiest food options for distribution. For example, H&H collaborates with We Don't Waste to ensure each box of food distributed contains an array of healthy food options, including fresh produce, dairy, bread, eggs, healthy snacks, frozen meat, canned goods, cereal, juice, tea, non-perishable items, and individually packaged lunches. H&H also provides culturally relevant food staples and ingredients, including tortillas, plantains, avocados, and hominy.

¹²The five micro-grantee responses included in this report include: Dream Center Denver, Heart & Hand Center, WeeCycle, Echinacea Montessori School, and Kaizen Food Rescue.

Thanks to the HFDK funding, grantees reported on several successes within their programs and greater outreach throughout Denver. H&H reported that they provided healthy food, meals, and snacks to Denver's youth during the organization's afterschool programs held four days per week during the school year. Additionally, funds were used for hands-on, experiential food-based education components of their programming for cooking and nutrition workshops utilizing fresh produce. For example, as part of exploring Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) culture during AAPI Heritage Month, elementary students made mochi and boba. Additionally, middle school students learned how to cook new dishes and tried new foods as part of learning about Arab American history. Echinacea Montessori was also able to accomplish three major successes: educating young children and their families about growing healthy food through their school garden; providing exposure to new fruits, vegetables, and healthy food options to children; and distributing two healthy meals and a snack free of charge to all families at the school through their catering program.

HFDK micro-grant funding was also able to help provide for basic needs for children and infants. Thanks to the funding, WeeCycle was able to purchase more supplies to help families struggling to meet their child's basic needs. Over 400 infants and toddlers were provided with baby food and formula with the micro-grant funding. H&H also provided two meals, (breakfast and lunch), and two snacks to each summer camp participant from the beginning of summer camp on June 7, 2021, through the end of the grant period.



How Did HFDK Funds Ensure Cultural Relevance and Responsiveness?

Community Engagement Efforts

Year 1 grantees used a range of community engagement methods to get input from youth and families in order to ensure foods and programs were culturally relevant to participants. The majority of grantees relied on surveys, but also reported getting feedback via one-on-one conversations, social media and email, as well as listening sessions and focus groups, such as in the following two examples:

We have learned through our post-season survey, interviews, and conversations with participants, the most popular types of produce, as well as produce that our participants were unfamiliar with. We found that produce items that are widely used throughout a larger amount of cultures were the most popular, like tomatoes, onions, garlic, potatoes, peppers, and carrots, while items like leafy greens, salad greens, and other abstract varieties were often unfamiliar. (Sprout City Farms, a Year 1 grantee, 2021)

We sent out a community survey to the families we serve at our mobile food markets to help inform the future of [these] markets. One highlight of the survey was that 91% of respondents reported that their family has been able to eat more nutritious meals due to the food we provide. Additionally, 70% of respondents indicated that their kids have tried new fruits and vegetables from our markets. [We Don't Waste, a Year 1 grantee, 2021]

91% of respondents [to our community survey] reported that their family has been able to eat more nutritious meals due to the food we provide.

Culturally Relevant Foods

Year 1 grantees used feedback from families to identify the most important culturally relevant foods. **They would often provide culturally relevant foods around important cultural holidays and celebrations.** For example, Metro Caring offered special bags for Lunar/Chinese New Year and Ramadan, and noted that they are constantly innovating their culturally relevant options. South High School continuously adjusted their procurement and distribution based on the needs of the students. This included providing Halal meat and other provisions that are consistent with a Halal diet.



Several grantees mentioned purchasing foods for specific cultural groups such as Latinx populations, which included items such as corn and flour tortillas, pinto and refried beans, rice, and corn masa, to distribute at a food market in Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods — a community with a large immigrant population. One grantee shared:

Our healthy bags/boxes include fresh vegetables (we have done surveys to learn which vegetables are best for our culture), at least one leafy green, fresh fruits, whole grains, dairy, eggs, protein, sometimes Chile rojo or culturally appropriate herbs. All that goes in our bags/boxes usually to make favorite community relevant dishes...a healthy pósole, healthy tacos, etc. (ViVe Wellness, a Year 1 grantee, 2021)

Culturally Relevant Materials and Educational Programs

Year 1 grantees provided culturally relevant materials and educational programs by understanding the diverse needs of the young people they served. All mentioned providing materials in both English and Spanish but depending on the populations they serve, also provided materials in 13 additional languages: Karen, Arabic, French, Somali, Vietnamese, Swahili, Nepali, Amharic, Rohingya, Dari, Tigrinya, and Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese). Grantees sought to provide interpreters or translated materials into preferred languages of participants in their one-on-one interactions.

To be responsive to youth participating in the educational programs, grantees also considered the importance of representation as well as integrating lessons that were culturally relevant to the students. For example, Re:Vision provided bilingual curriculum books and used cultural representations in their teachings (e.g., a lesson plan on the historical significance of corn). Some of the cooking class instructors brought the importance of Latinx heritage and cuisine into the classes, such as the following grantee that worked with promotoras and a Latinx chef to create the recipes:

Everything we do comes from a culturally informed place. Our recipes are created by our promotoras, who are Latinas from the community. They have taken their healthy equity and food access training to create recipes that incorporate fresh healthy food into traditional dishes (i.e. Zucchini enchiladas, fruit salad with Chamoy, cauliflower ceviche — which was featured for our Mother’s Day cooking demonstration). Likewise, everyone on our team is from the community and speaks Spanish. Our XULINARIA instructor, Chef Edwin Sandoval, is Honduran. He grew up bicultural, much like the students he is now teaching. We believe fully in the importance of representation for our community. (Re:Vision, a Year 1 grantee, 2021)

Everything we do comes from a culturally informed place. Our recipes are created by our promotoras, who are Latinas from the community... We believe fully in the importance of representation for our community.



CHAPTER 5

Implications for HFDK Strategy

The evaluation identified implications for HFDK's future grantmaking strategy. This section includes recommendations that emerged from the KIIs. Key informants (KIs) were asked to speak about the current child nutrition and food security landscape in the Denver area. Questions posed to the KIs were fairly broad and without parameters, to help the evaluation team establish baseline knowledge of the current context in which HFDK is operating. The following were themes that emerged from the KIIs as strategies to improve implementation, address gaps, and leverage strengths in the food system, assuming that HFDK was implementing its programming without restrictions or limitations.

What Are the Opportunities for HFDK to Improve Implementation?

Grantmaking Processes

KIs advised that HFDK should practice proactive communication with potential grantees and community members, including being transparent about funding requirements and clearly defining concepts that are central to this work. HFDK could improve its communication with potential grantees by:

- Engaging in focused outreach/relationship-building with grassroots organizations rather than expecting organizations to know about the grant opportunity;
- Clarifying eligibility criteria;
- Having direct conversations with applicants about the extent to which their programs reflect/ embody equitable, culturally responsive, and community-based practices; and
- Clarifying where applicants are at in the application process and providing unfunded applicants with stronger feedback.

For example, KIs suggested that HFDK more clearly define how it views terms and practices like ‘equity,’ ‘community engagement,’ ‘culturally responsive food,’ and ‘healthy food’:

I guess my first question is: how has HFDK defined equity? I feel that right now equity has been a buzz word and everyone is like, “We want to do equity work.” Right? And I faced it in my own organization where we embarked on this equity journey and I was like, “Well what are the distributions?” And I started to be like, “Well, this is the work we say we’re doing. Why do we have these policies?” And then I got in trouble four different times for calling things out. [...] I don’t know if you guys have defined [...] equity and where you want to prioritize it and how? [...] Clearly defining [equity] and all of us being on the same page really helps all of us move together towards that work. [...] But when it hasn’t been [defined], it gets muddy. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Clearly defining [equity] and all of us being on the same page really helps all of us move together towards that work.



In particular, what constitutes ‘healthy food’ needs to be defined in partnership with communities. This is viewed as an equity issue and KIs noted that past efforts to implement guidelines for healthy food have perpetuated inequities and actually created barriers to providing culturally relevant food. For example, one KI described the challenges of ‘outsiders’ determining what healthy food looks like for communities of color, and suggested that community members should contribute to the process of identifying what is healthy and relevant (i.e., creating healthy menus that are also culturally responsive):

I think although great intentions, often when legislators or policy writers are writing things around healthy, nutritious, and building out nutritional requirements, many people automatically go to a certain menu. [...] How can we expand or show, I don't know, like a toolkit? Give vendors or providers of these grants menus that they can pick from to partner with a food provider and say, "Okay, we'll partner with you to deliver or order meals, but we want this menu. These community members created this menu for it." (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

KIs would like to see HFDK revise its grants' administrative and financial processes — including contracting, disbursement, tracking/reporting requirements — to reduce the burden for grantees and release funds faster.

Grantmaking Strategy

KIs would like to see HFDK also consider investments that indirectly support young people — for example, investments in families — highlighting that much of systems change is indirect work, advanced through ripple effects, rather than linear cause and effect. To facilitate this, several called for HFDK to change the ordinance itself to be more inclusive of families/family members of children experiencing food insecurity; they were skeptical of a funding strategy that treats children's experiences of hunger as individual, rather than as interconnected with those of their family members. As it turns out, HFDK felt similarly and did, in fact, pursue and successfully change aspects of the ordinance in the summer of 2021 — they expanded the number and type of organizations eligible to apply for grant funds (including those that may not have feeding children or providing food education as a 'primary purpose' but just a part of their overall work), and created greater inclusion and diversity for representatives appointed to the Commission.



HFDK should develop a multi-pronged equity strategy that can adapt to the strengths and challenges of different Denver neighborhoods. Specific ideas for actions HFDK could take include taking a ['curb cut effect' approach](#) and prioritizing the most marginalized communities and children, learning from existing models of equitable grantmaking and program practices, and/or taking a long-term approach to funding and funding cycles.

HFDK should pursue strategies that center collaboration with communities and with other funders. KIs suggested that HFDK's funding strategy should prioritize deep relationships with communities by focusing on organizations that have existing, strong partnerships with their local communities. It was also recommended that HFDK intentionally connect, and potentially coordinate funding strategies, with other funders working on addressing hunger and healthy food access:

I do think [HFDK] partnering with other key groups like the Colorado Health Foundation, other key groups that are putting funds towards this... Who is the catalytic leader with this? Do they all ever meet? I mean, are they all kind of doing separate things? I'm not totally sure at this point, but I think if one organization could figure out, "Okay, we're going to focus on kids. We're going to focus on parents. We're going to focus on maybe teens..." Or they all connect and talk. It just seems like people tend to create their own programs before they really know what else is out there. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Specific strategies KIs were interested in seeing HFDK explore included:

- Promoting mutual aid/collaboration amongst nonprofits vs. the competitive approach typical of grantmaking;
- Exploring participatory grantmaking;
- Referring unfunded applicants and grantees to other funders; and
- Collaborative grantmaking with other local funders, including funders outside the food system (this practice is one of the characteristics of restorative philanthropy identified by Justice Funders in their [Spectrum of Extractive to Restorative Philanthropy](#)).

What Are the Opportunities for HFDK to Address System Gaps and Leverage System Strengths?

KIs highlighted that the interconnectedness of the food system offers opportunities for far-reaching impact if change agents are able to find powerful leverage points. For example, a KI noted how legislative or grant-level interventions (e.g., supporting a [farm workers' rights bill](#)) can have a variety of positive impacts 'on the ground', including improved labor conditions and pay for farm workers, improving food pantries' ability to offer local/fresh produce, and increasing access to healthy food:

Thinking systemically, larger, there's just so many issues even in [agriculture], right? We don't pay our farmers the correct wages so then they themselves are going hungry. And then a lot of the food is going to large corporations — it's not making it into our local communities. So, I know that there was this really awesome bill that was the farm workers' rights bill and a lot of us really supported it. So, really being in tune with those policies... are they equitable and what are they supporting in the long-term? Do they benefit our communities and when are we thinking about sustainability? We ran the food pantry assistance grant that allows food pantries to purchase directly from farmers... And again, communities want that fresh food so it's like this bill is helping to promote a pantry purchasing directly from a farmer. [...] Then it's helping our local economy [...] and it's the healthy food that people want. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)



HFDK needs to prioritize, engage, and uplift/leverage community perspectives and leadership.

This reflects an equity-as-process perspective that asserts that those most impacted by food insecurity should be meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives, so that solutions reflect their lived experiences/expertise and are owned by communities. Specifically they suggested that HFDK talk with, listen to, and partner with community members directly impacted by hunger. This means partnering with and engaging the youth and community leaders, and program providers.

Noting the above, KIs were also conflicted about using participatory approaches to engage community members and leaders. On the one hand, community participation and leadership was viewed as an important equity practice; on the other hand, KIs were sensitive to the time and capacity burdens of participatory work and the ways in which it can feel extractive to communities. They are adamant that community members and leaders should be compensated for their time and contributions. They know that data collection can be burdensome for community members and community-based organizations. They also stressed that communities should only be engaged if HFDK is committed to acting on the information and expertise shared by community organizations and members.

It would be helpful for HFDK to facilitate or support better communication and coordination amongst actors in the food system. KIs suggested that HFDK could function as a convener, facilitating connections across organizations across sectors (nonprofits, governmental organizations, social services, local businesses) addressing food insecurity in Denver. HFDK could assist in painting a ‘big picture’ of hunger and anti-hunger work in Colorado, and how everyone’s work fits together, and support data and information-sharing amongst these local actors. This perspective would position HFDK well to support a collective impact approach that can successfully leverage resources that could impact Colorado and the local Denver community. For example, in the following comment, one KI discussed how HFDK might contribute to the current national conversation about WIC partnering with Dollar Stores to increase food access in areas with low food access:

Another way is we’re looking at developing a broader range of the types of stores that take WIC benefits. One of the areas of opportunity... I don’t know if [HFDK] would be interested or not... but one of them is working with dollar stores in some capacity to make them look eligible, help them see the benefit of becoming WIC authorized dealers, because they’re in a lot of the areas that are food deserts in Denver and would provide an alternative to a large chain grocery store where people could use their benefit. It would require some pretty significant advocacy — and political capital, maybe, is the right word — because that’s a conversation that’s happening at a national level. It’s not really something that even a local manager of a dollar store could decide because it would change what they carry and all of that. (HFDK Key Informant, 2021)

Advocacy Priorities Identified By Key Informants

- Federal-level advocacy priorities include fighting for the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act to lower barriers for participation in federal child nutrition programs.
- State-level advocacy priorities include sorting out the state and federal policy conflicts around the Community Eligibility Provision to pave the way for universal meals
- Local-level advocacy priorities include supporting Land Use Rights in Denver for urban farmers.

HFDK might consider exploring the potential of engaging with and leveraging social change and advocacy work happening outside of the food system. HFDK could indirectly support local and state advocacy efforts to address and shift policies and other ‘upstream’ factors that contribute to food insecurity by leveraging its leadership’s political capital, and funding the creation of artifacts (e.g., briefs, case studies of innovative practices, etc.) that support other organizations’ advocacy work. KIs wondered whether root causes — and potential solutions — for eradicating hunger might exist outside the food system. For example, the local transportation system was highlighted by a number of KIs as a major community-level barrier to food access. Perhaps HFDK could partner with, or contribute resources toward, transportation reform efforts being led by coalitions like Denver Streets Partnership.



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APPENDIX A - List of Year 1 Grantee Strategies

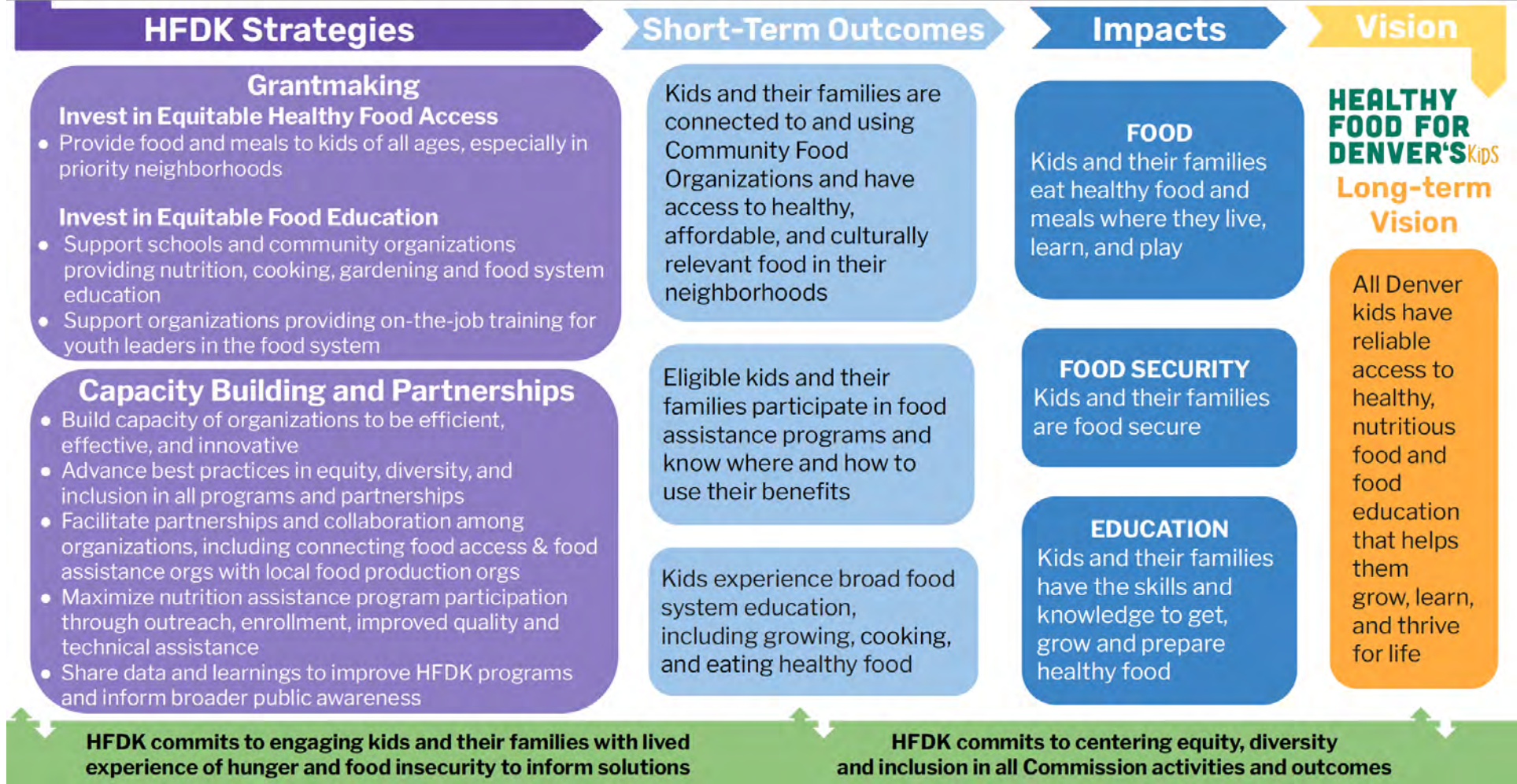
- **Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver** | Food Distribution
Deliver weekend food boxes for kids and deliver daily grab-n-go meals for kids
- **Denver Food Rescue** | Food Distribution and Food Education
Deliver fresh, healthy food to No Cost Grocery Programs around the city, administer nutritional/food preparation youth education course, and hire and train youth in food systems
- **Denver Public Library** | Food Distribution
Serve snacks at branch locations and hire youth assistants to decrease hunger among youth visiting the library
- **Denver Public Schools Career and College Success** | Food Education
Educational program focused on agriculture, food, and natural resources with a hydroponic farm classroom that educates on food justice and insecurity, health and nutrition, and STEM education
- **Denver Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services** | Food Education and Training
Provide a professional training program of basic culinary skills to kitchen employees and managers in order to serve nutritious, healthy meals
- **Denver School of Innovation & Sustainable Design** | Food Education
Develop and conduct youth food leadership course, engage high school students in course, and engage students in championing a cause in the food system
- **Denver Urban Gardens** | Gardening, Education, and Food Distribution
Cultivate gardeners, grow food, and nourish community through school-based gardening initiatives and youth internship opportunities
- **Colorado Circles for Change** | Food Distribution and Education
Serve meals at CCFC Programming and deliver food packages to youth as well as offer workshops incorporating healthy eating and nutrition elements
- **Food For Thought Denver** | Food Distribution
Deliver weekend 'PowerSacks' (non-perishable food packages) to Title I schools within Denver Public Schools
- **Metro Caring** | Food Distribution and Education
Operate food distribution programs and implement Kidz in the Kitchen cooking classes
- **Metro Ministries** | Food Distribution
Deliver family 'meal packs' to Denver Housing Authority properties
- **Mile High 360** | Food Distribution and Education
Administer youth nutrition and family cooking classes, hire and train youth culinary interns, distribute food to participants' families in need during COVID-19, and provide family resource navigation
- **Montbello Organizing Committee** | Food Education
Implement a variety of programs to increase knowledge and skills regarding healthy eating, nutrition and food production

- **North High School** | Food Education
Develop and conduct youth food leadership course, engage high school students in course, and engage students in championing a cause in the food system
- **Re:Vision** | Food Distribution & Gardening Education
Develop gardening curriculum for children's garden and establish backyard and champion gardens
- **South High School Food Pantry** | Food Distribution
Operate weekly food pantry for students, integrate healthy snacks into counseling sessions for students, and provide culturally-appropriate and fresh food items in pantry food boxes
- **Sprout City Farms** | Food Education and Distribution
Connect WIC-enrolled families to CSA produce boxes, develop food security plans for families, and conduct family visits at farm
- **Stedman Elementary** | Food Distribution and Gardening Education
Engage youth in serving fruit and vegetable snacks during school day, establish school garden, and promote youth engaging in the garden
- **STRIVE Prep - SMART** | Gardening
Establish school garden, promote youth interacting in the garden, hold classes at garden and courses utilizing garden (Real Food Lab), and grow produce in garden for cafeteria
- **Sun Valley Kitchen and Community Center** | Food Education and Distribution
Provide meals to at-risk youth, host cooking classes for elementary youth, distribute food through no cost grocery program, and develop youth employment and professional development
- **The GrowHaus** | Food Distribution and Education
Distribute healthy food boxes, operate no cost grocery program, and conduct summer sessions and multi-generational classes on nutrition, growing food and wellness
- **The Urban Farm** | Food Education and Farming
Establish new production site, train youth farmers, and distribute healthy food from farm to partners
- **ViVe Wellness** | Food Distribution and Education
Deliver healthy food and snacks to youth during programing and educate families around nutrition, healthy cooking, and to grow gardens
- **We Don't Waste** | Food Distribution and Education
Serve by food rescue and distribution efforts, hold mobile markets in low-food access neighborhoods, and offer nutrition, cooking, and food waste education classes
- **West Campus Food Bank** | Food Distribution and Education
Host Saturday food banks for parents/families and host cooking and nutrition workshops for families



APPENDIX B - HFDK Theory of Change

Healthy Food for Denver's Kids (HFDK) Theory of Change





APPENDIX C - Evaluation Methodology

The macro evaluation used a mixed-methods approach (both qualitative and quantitative data) that drew from primary data (grantee data, key informant interview, and focus groups with program participants) and secondary data (including datasets tracking food insecurity).

The Macro Evaluation Team undertook several initial activities in year 1 — including the HFDK Baseline Assessment, Journey Map, HFDK Systems Map, and development of the Theory of Change — which are described below:

- **Baseline Assessment.** The HFDK Baseline Assessment laid the foundation for the first draft of the Theory of Change (TOC) and informed the overall evaluation plan for the HFDK initiative. The baseline assessment helped:
 - Understand and document the current state of food insecurity, diet quality and nutrition, and food skills and food systems education for children and youth in the City and County of Denver;
 - Understand existing efforts and initiatives currently in place to support increased food security and food skills among children in Denver and identify opportunities to leverage that work;
 - Identify gaps and shortcomings in current programs, practices, and policies at the local level;
 - Identify evidence-based practices and policies that may inform HFDK strategy; and
 - Understand how food insecurity affects different populations with respect to health equity, including healthy food access and nutrition-related health outcomes.

In the context of the HFDK Macro Evaluation Plan, the HFDK Baseline Assessment informed the TOC and provided guidance for which indicators HFDK should use to measure progress. In the HFDK Baseline Assessment and HFDK Systems Mapping processes, the evaluation team leveraged existing data, research, grey literature, and opportunities for data collection in an effort to reduce duplication and inefficiency. Through thoughtful stakeholder engagement and on-going strategic learning, the HFDK Initiative will be able to understand how investments can maximize impact within the broader food system landscape. The Macro Evaluation Plan builds on the work to date, including the: (1) HFDK Baseline Assessment, (2) Journey Map, (3) HFDK Systems Map, and (4) the Theory of Change. Moving forward, the evaluation plan will include on-going annual data collection, analysis, and reporting.

- **Journey Map Process.** The HFDK Evaluation Team facilitated a Journey Map exercise (from [PolicySolve](#)) with the HFDK Commission to help identify how the COVID-19 pandemic context is shaping our future, and how HFDK can strategically learn from and change systems that were not even considered a few months ago. The Journey Map walks through three time frames (Before COVID-19, COVID-19 Crisis Response, and Moving Beyond Crisis), examining the priority problems, opportunities, and strategies/solutions in each time frame. This exercise was added to help the HFDK Commission think through how HFDK was structured pre-COVID-19, how HFDK has responded to the COVID-19 crisis, and where HFDK is going in the future within the context of COVID-19 impacts. The Journey Map paved the way for a deeper discussion during the Theory of Change and helped ensure the HFDK Commission was thinking strategically about how COVID-19 may impact their work moving forward.

- **Systems Map Development.** The Macro Evaluation Team developed a systems map, which provides a visual representation of connections (or lack thereof) in the system and identifies high-impact leverage nodes within the food systems serving children and youth. It is an interactive tool that community stakeholders can also use to better understand relationships among organizations in the Denver food system.
- **Theory of Change Development.** The process of developing the TOC was useful to map the primary HFDK strategies to those outcomes and longer-term impacts that indicate sustainable momentum toward impact. The HFDK TOC was developed through an iterative process that was informed by the Baseline Assessment with input from an Evaluation Sub-Committee as well as the full Commission. The TOC is a dynamic tool meant to evolve as the HFDK work progresses.

These initial evaluation activities established some baseline information and informed the evaluation design and data collection instruments (e.g., grantee surveys, key informant protocols).

- **Year 1 Grantee Cohort Data Collection.** An aggregation of the individual grantee surveys that were completed quarterly by cohort 1. The Year 1 Grantee Cohort Data was used to track the programmatic outcomes and indicators. The Evaluation Team also provided technical assistance and capacity building to help grantees evaluate their work and meet evaluation requirements associated with their grant funding
- **Interviewing Key Informants.** Interviews were conducted with 24 key informants with knowledge of the systems serving children and youth in Denver, and specifically those systems that provide food and food-based education. They represented a mix of commission members, policymakers, leaders/experts in food systems space and child food insecurity, direct service staff, and Denver and Colorado-wide food system initiatives (e.g. Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger, etc.). This information will help the Evaluation Team better understand the strengths and gaps in the child nutrition landscape in Denver.
- **Conducting Focus Group.** A virtual focus group was conducted with high school youth receiving food and education (e.g., nutrition and food systems-focused education) from Year 1 grantees to assess their experience and learnings.
- **Secondary Data Analysis.** Quantitative data were collected through various sources, including state agency data, organizational data, and other population-level data for Denver County. Qualitative data was collected through document review from various sources including peer-reviewed articles, grey literature, HFDK-specific documents, and reports from organizations, initiatives, and State agencies.
- **Mapping Primary and Secondary Data.** Using systems mapping or other tools to map secondary data and primary data to help HFDK see the work that is happening across the food system in Denver. This includes, but is not limited to, mapping areas with highest rates experiencing food insecurity, identifying strengths and gaps in the system, and understanding connectivity between organizations working to address child food insecurity in Denver.

The table on the following page includes the schedule and timing for these evaluation activities undertaken in Year 1.

Schedule and Timing for Data Collection and Analysis Activities

Activity	Schedule	Year 1
Baseline Assessment	Once	x
Journey Map Process	Once	x
Theory of Change Development	Re-Visit Annually	x
Secondary Data Analysis	Annually	x
Year 1 Grantee Cohort Data Collection	Quarterly (Year 1); Semi-Annually (Year 2)	x
Interviewing Key Informants	Annually	
Conducting Focus Group	Annually	
Mapping Primary and Secondary Data	Semi-Annually	x