Background

The HFDK Initiative seeks to build an equitable\(^1\) 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 insecurity\(^2\) in households with children and the number of children and youth experiencing hunger in the City and County of Denver.

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 be distributed by December 31, 2029 (Denver Department of Public Health & Environment [DDPHE], 2021).

HFDK Evaluation Approach

In March 2020, DDPHE contracted with Change Matrix (CM) as its 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. The evaluation approach utilizes mixed-methods (both qualitative and quantitative data), drawing from secondary data sources (including local, state, and national datasets tracking food insecurity and related indicators) as well as primary data sources (including grantee-level survey data, key informant interviews [KIs], a focus group with youth program participants, and grantee-led community listening sessions with community members).

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\(^1\) 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 secure/food security as follows: 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, and assured ability to acquire acceptable foods.
Description of HFDK Grantees

In years 1 and 2, HFDK has distributed $18 million dollars to over 80 organizations through competitive grants to local government agencies, public schools in Denver, and nonprofits with an emphasis on those organizations serving low-income youth (DDPHE, 2021). HFDK funded 25 organizations in year 1 (August 2020–July 2021), collectively referred to as HFDK Year 1 grantees. In Year 2, HFDK funded 39 organizations, including 15 new grantees (August 2021–July 2022). The following figure presents all grantees funded in Year 2 by strategy. Almost all grantees (n=37 or 95%) distributed food (e.g., served meals, distributed food boxes) — the majority of them in combination with provision of food and nutrition educational programming (n=34 or 87%). Twenty-five grantees (64%) incorporated organizational, policy, and/or environmental changes into their program activities, with 20 grantees (51%) performing some form of gardening, farming, and food production activities.

Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food distribution</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal nutrition assistance program enrollment and support</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational, policy, and/or environmental changes</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening and farming activities</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food/nutrition education classes</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=39

Data Source: HFDK Grantee Survey & Contract Summary Data (Change Matrix, 2022)
Populations Served by HFDK Grantees

In Year 2, grantees estimated serving 132,619 unique children and youth, a 15% increase from those served in Year 1. While it is not possible to determine whether the children and 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 provides a picture of the reach achieved through HFDK grant funding in the second year. As a whole, grantees primarily served low-income, school-age children identifying as Hispanic/Latino/a. Most grantees served racially and ethnically diverse populations.

All grantees served Denver children and youth living in priority neighborhoods — neighborhoods with higher percentages of populations experiencing poverty and other socioeconomic conditions that increase their risk of experiencing food insecurity. The neighborhoods most served by HFDK grantees were based in West Denver, followed by those in the North and Northeast.

Impact of HFDK Funding

Grantees have impacted food access and education in the communities they serve. Grantees have created ripples of change in the Denver food system by positively shaping the organizations and environments they work in and by advocating for policies that further their work.

Food Access Impacts

Over Year 2 of HFDK implementation, grantees continued to make an enormous impact by serving over 17 million meals and snacks to children, youth, and their families, reflecting a significant increase from Year 1. The large increase in Year 2 was driven by a few grantees, including Denver Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services (DPS FNS) Food for Thought Denver, and new grantee Kaizen Food Rescue.

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3 Unique youth are 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 throughout the year. This number includes the 45,000 unique youth served by Denver Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services (the highest youth unique served), over 25,000 unduplicated youth served by Denver Food Rescue, and the 10,000 unduplicated youth served by each Food for Thought Denver and We Don’t Waste. It excludes the 9,600 duplicated youth served by Kaizen Food Rescue (previously reported).

4 CM partnered with Colorado Health Institute (CHI) to develop an index used to map priority neighborhoods in Denver using the following economic and demographic metrics: the percentage of individuals with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level, the percentage of individuals under 18 years of age, and the percentage of individuals age five and older who spoke a language other than English at home.
Thirty-one grantees (79%) distributed over 11 million pounds of food to youth and families, most frequently in the form of grocery boxes and bags and meal ingredient kits. Grantees shared that there continues to be a high need for food distribution, as the economic conditions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation continue to challenge families’ ability to access healthy foods.

Grantees reported that between the meals served and food distributed, they impacted food security among children, youth, and families. The majority of grantees (71%) stated their work resulted in increased food security. Beyond the vast amount of food that was distributed to families, grantees were particularly proud of the diet quality of food that families would not have otherwise received without the HFDK funding. Figure 11 shows that the majority of grantees (n=34 or 87%) reported increased access to fresh, healthy foods.

Grantees improved the nutritional quality of food families were eating, mostly distributing fresh fruits and vegetables as well as high quality proteins, dairy, and whole grains. They also ensured that these foods were culturally responsive and locally sourced whenever possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Meals and Snacks Served to Children, Youth and Families</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meals served</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13,289,779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>25,201%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Snacks served</strong></th>
<th>Y2</th>
<th>Y1</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3,959,493</td>
<td>66,400</td>
<td><strong>4,025,893</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5,863%</strong></td>
<td>increase in snacks served</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*SNAP, WIC, P-EBT and/or free and reduced-price school meal programs*

Data Source: HFDK Grantee Survey (Change Matrix, 2021 & 2022)
Education Impacts

Over the course of the last year, 32 grantees (82%) used their HFDK funds to offer food-based education to children, youth, and families in Denver. Through education efforts, grantees were able to reach 15,500 children, youth and family members (this total includes duplicated counts) throughout Denver that they otherwise would not have been able to serve. Grantees leveraged HFDK funds and partnerships to provide 11,000 hours of food and nutrition education, with a focus on hands-on experiential learning opportunities.

Education included individual instruction, cooking demonstrations, and gardening workshops in schools and other community settings. The 32 grantees that used HFDK funds to support food education covered a variety of topics, shown in Figure 10, with the most common being nutrition/healthy eating and food production. All grantees who provided education for children, youth, and families typically covered multiple topics.

Table 3

Pounds of Food Distributed to Families in Year 2

11,359,749 lbs

Data Source: HFDK Grantee Survey (Change Matrix, 2022)

* Food is distributed via food boxes and bags such as CSA Boxes, Family Meal Packs/Weekend Mealpacks, Food Pantry Boxes

79%

of grantees distributed over 11 million pounds of food to youth and families, increasing access to healthy foods in Denver

Figure 3

Topics Covered by Educational Food Content by Number of Grantees

Data Source: HFDK Grantee Survey (Change Matrix, 2022)
Grantees saw impacts on student learning and their engagement in cooking, gardening, and growing their own food. All but one grantee (38 or 97%) saw changes in knowledge, skills, and behaviors associated with their HFDK-funded work, depicted in Figure 12. Almost all grantees (34 or 89%) saw an increase among youth in their knowledge of healthy foods and nutrition. Grantees also indicated that youth had increased healthy behaviors, such as trying new foods, consuming vegetables, and preparing healthy meals and snacks.

Healthy Environment Impacts

Grantees shaped environments, both within their organizations and in the neighborhoods they served. HFDK has increased the visibility of nutrition and food inequities in Denver and has supported organizations addressing child food insecurity in Denver through responsive approaches. Twenty-five grantees (64%) reported that their work included organizational, policy, and/or environmental changes in the past year.

A total of 20 grantees (51%) indicated that their work over the past year improved environments to make fresh produce more available to their communities. These food production activities included supporting families to start their own gardens as well as farming or gardening in neighborhoods with limited access to healthy food. Of the grantees that produced food in the past year, nearly 100,000 pounds of food was harvested from community gardens, farms, or greenhouses. Across the two years of HFDK funding, grantees have harvested 117,104 pounds of food.

Additionally, a few grantees — Denver Health and Denver Public Schools (DPS) — have used their HFDK funds to support changes within these large health and school systems that are streamlining enrollment in The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); improving access to high quality food; and creating a career pathway related to food, farming, and nutrition.

Efforts to create healthier environments for children, youth, and families in Denver have resulted in increased food production and improved food quality, an investment in local growing and career opportunities, and systems improvements in health and education systems, which would not have been possible without the HFDK funding.

### Table 4

**Education Classes and Hours of Instruction Provided to Child and Youth Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Y2</th>
<th>Y1</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Group Classes (i.e., Sessions, Workshops) Offered</strong></td>
<td>1,810</td>
<td>972</td>
<td>2,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Instruction Hours for Food/Nutrition Education</strong></td>
<td>10,895</td>
<td>5,106</td>
<td>16,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Youth That Participated in Food/Nutrition Education</strong></td>
<td>15,500</td>
<td>13,047</td>
<td>28,547</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19% increase in youth that participated in food/nutrition education

Data Source: HFDK Grantee Survey (Change Matrix, 2021 & 2022)

### Table 5

**Pounds of Food Harvested**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Y2</th>
<th>Y1</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>95,602</td>
<td>21,502</td>
<td>117,104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: HFDK Grantee Survey (Change Matrix, 2021 & 2022)
Figure 4

Number of Year 2 Grantees Reporting Changes in Knowledge, Skills, and Healthy Behaviors

N=38

INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AMONG YOUTH

| Knowledge of healthy foods and nutrition | 34 |
| Food production knowledge and skills    | 26 |
| Food systems knowledge                  | 22 |

INCREASED HEALTHY BEHAVIORS AMONG YOUTH

| Trying new foods                        | 35 |
| Consuming vegetables                    | 32 |
| Preparing healthy meals and snacks      | 25 |

Data Source: HFDK Grantee Survey (Change Matrix, 2022)
Recommendations to HFDK Commission

The evaluation identified implications for HFDK’s future grantmaking strategy. This section includes recommendations that emerged primarily from KIs as well as a review of secondary data and feedback from grantees, youth participants, and community members.

Improve Grant Administration and Implementation

1. HFDK should review grant administration processes and consider expanding administrative support.

The current process of not distributing upfront funds or lag times associated with reimbursements has created financial stress for some grantees. KIs encourage HFDK to explore where this process might be streamlined and whether additional support might be needed to ensure timely communication with grantees. It should be noted that many of the policies and processes related to contracting, reimbursements, and budget changes highlighted by KIs in this section are set by the City and County of Denver.

2. HFDK should provide grantees with more guidance on equity practices.

KIs appreciated that HFDK centers equity as part of the application process. They recommended more emphasis be placed on how HFDK activities will embody a culturally responsive approach — specifically, how grantee strategies will ensure they are culturally responsive, related to food served and distributed, and the provision of education. They recommended that HFDK better define what is meant by the term culturally responsive and provide examples of how past and current grantees have approached this concept in their work.

3. HFDK should apply a lens of food justice and revisit messaging around healthy foods to grantees and community members.

KIs suggested shifting the narrative on healthy foods and re-examining what foods HFDK has promoted as healthy. KIs expressed concern about the limited view of how healthy food has historically been defined. Programs distributing food and providing nutrition education would benefit from educating themselves and better understanding how the definition of healthy food has been shaped by colonialism. A KI suggested that the colonial mindset assumes there’s only one way to eat healthy and challenges HFDK to not subscribe to what was described as the “toxic influence of diet culture” that reinforces a negative relationship with certain foods. The suggestion is an approach of moderation, such as trying to expand the foods families are exposed to rather than trying to limit what is included in their diets. Also stressed by KIs is the need to understand the broader role (e.g., community, connection, history) that food plays in some cultures. Rather than disparaging foods and shaming families for their food choices, KIs suggest that a more moderate approach be taken by HFDK and other similar-minded programs.
Facilitate Connection

1. **Connect grantees with partners that are able to provide resources and other social support to families.**

   Community members, grantees, and KIs all commented that families struggling with food access are also challenged to meet other basic needs, including housing and health care. Some grantees are able to address broader needs based on their mission and capacity, while others could benefit from partnering with organizations better equipped to provide resources.

2. **Actively promote Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and connect interested sites and centers with the state agency (CDPHE) or a sponsor agency.**

   HFDK can leverage what is working with CACFP by continuing to raise awareness because the program is less well-known, in comparison to other federal programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and WIC. One KI from CDPHE suggested that HFDK could fund an organization to help sign up providers to become a CACFP site. Important to note is that HFDK is funding two new grantees (Wildwood CACFP and the Denver Office of Children's Affairs) in Year 3 to identify potentially eligible sites and enroll daycare sites, centers, and after-school program locations in CACFP and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).

Leverage Data

1. **Use data on HFDK grantee reach to identify areas of focus for future funding.**

   All grantees served Denver children and youth living in priority neighborhoods. Map 1 in Appendix E shows the HFDK grantee reach by priority neighborhoods in Denver. The neighborhoods most served by HFDK grantees were based in West Denver, followed by those based in North and Northeast Denver. This distribution of grantees was well-aligned when looking specifically at high priority neighborhoods, meaning that most of these neighborhoods had at least 12 grantees providing HFDK-funded activities. Only a few high priority neighborhoods were less represented (had fewer than 12 grantees working in their area), and that included East Colfax, Washington Virginia Vale, and Windsor in East Denver; and Goldsmith, Hampden, and Kennedy in Southeast Denver. Of these neighborhoods, East Colfax and Kennedy have low access to a full-service grocery store. In its next round of funding, HFDK should consider prioritizing these neighborhoods that may benefit from additional food distribution efforts.

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5 CM partnered with the CHI to develop an index used to map priority neighborhoods in Denver using the following economic and demographic metrics: the percentage of individuals with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level, the percentage of individuals under 18 years of age, and the percentage of individuals age 5 and older who spoke a language other than English at home. The priority neighborhoods that have been identified by HFDK as being at higher risk of food insecurity based on healthy food access include but are not limited to: Athmar Park, Baker, Barnum, Barnum West, Capitol Hill, Chaffee Park, Clayton, Cole, College View/South Platte, East Colfax, Elyria Swansea, Five Points, Gateway – Green Valley Ranch, Globeville, Goldsmith, Hampden, Harvey Park, Harvey Park South, Kennedy, La Alma Lincoln Park, Mar Lee, Marston, Montbello, Northeast Park Hill, Overland, Ruby Hill, Skyland, Speer, Sunnyside, Sun Valley, University Park, Valverde, Villa Park, Virginia Village, Washington Virginia Vale, West Colfax, Westwood, Whittier, and Windsor.

6 Grantee reach is defined as the extent to which HFDK grantees are providing services in priority neighborhoods (defined above) throughout Denver.
2 Leverage data to support grantee outreach for SNAP and WIC enrollment.

Specific to food assistance, KIs called out that more efforts were needed to support enrollment in SNAP and WIC because many eligible families are not utilizing these programs. They pointed to several reasons and named a lack of awareness as the primary barrier to enrollment. One KI recommended that outreach be continuous and widespread to include all places that families frequent such as stores, libraries, parks, and recreation centers. Though KIs raised the possibility of HFDK supporting more outreach, the majority of grantees (85%) conducted outreach efforts in Year 2. In looking at future outreach efforts, HFDK could share enrollment data (e.g., SNAP enrollment and demographic data by neighborhood) with grantees to help them focus their efforts. Using SNAP as an example, there are a group of Denver neighborhoods that are both high priority neighborhoods and have low SNAP participation rates (i.e., below 16%)\(^7\) (American Community Survey, 2016–2020).

Support Education

1 Train grantees on federal nutrition programs, including CACFP, SNAP, and WIC.

Fewer grantees (23%) undertook more intensive efforts to support enrollment by providing application support (e.g., help to complete applications) as well as actually enrolling youth and families in federal nutrition programs, such as WIC and SNAP. The vast majority of HFDK grantees not providing this level of support could benefit from training from agencies (e.g., CDHS, CDPHE, CDE) or other grantees, to increase their understanding of program eligibility, the enrollment process, and how to facilitate enrollment for families or sites/centers.

2 Support grantees distributing food in prioritizing education, especially those working with refugee and immigrant populations.

While some HFDK grantees were praised by KIs in their equity-minded practices, they recognized there are still organizations distributing food that are falling short of providing culturally responsive foods, which can lead to food waste. Several KIs suggested that organizations need to provide more education around food preparation, such as providing recipes for new foods, including adapting cultural recipes with healthier preparation methods, and offering cooking classes. This is particularly important for immigrant and refugee families that may be less familiar with some foods that are distributed by food banks and pantries.

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\(^7\) West Denver: Athmar Park, Barnum, Barnum West, Mar Lee, and Ruby Hill; Southwest Denver: Harvey Park; South Denver: College View/South Platte; Southeast Denver: Goldsmith, Hampden, and Kennedy.
Expand educational opportunities using culturally responsive models, especially ones designed to engage the entire family.

KIs shared that nutrition education programming that engages families creates a shared learning environment and positive experience with food, for both parents and children. For example, the Cooking Matters Program was praised by KIs for different reasons, including the fact that their approach is culturally responsive and engages both parents and children. An experience where families could learn together was described as more impactful.

Expand opportunities for children and youth to participate in experiential learning.

KIs emphasized that programs exposing children, especially at a young age, to hands-on opportunities can influence their relationship to food, which is also supported by research. HFDK grantees have observed shifts in attitudes and behaviors related to healthy eating as a result of the experiential education they have provided (e.g., cooking demonstrations, gardening workshops, art interventions).

Explore Funding Strategies

1. Fund organizations that are well-connected to (friend, family, and neighborhood) FFN providers.

KIs identified organizations — such as the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition, the Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning, Empowering Communities Globally, and Lutheran Family Services — as being well-connected to FFN networks. Ineligible to participate in CACFP and struggling to provide healthy food for the children in their care, FFN providers could benefit from being connected to farmers markets, community gardens, and mobile food pantries. One KI believes that FFN providers would be interested in growing community gardens and would welcome food delivery, assuming foods were culturally relevant — especially meal kits that are easy to prepare. A KI from CDPHE also spoke about a new statewide initiative, Farm to Child, that is expanding community gardens with a focus on FFN providers. They are viewing the gardens as a way to support food access and nutrition education for children.
2 Fund purchase of books and curricula on food, nutrition, and gardening and other educational materials for early childhood and school environments.

A few KIs brought up how critical it is to build healthy habits early in life and how habits are shaped by the early environments where children spend the majority of their time (e.g., child care, preschool). KIs suggested that HFDK funds could be used to purchase curriculum, books on food and gardening, and educational materials that would allow for sensory learning experiences. Research supports that “younger children acquire their food preferences by direct contact with foods through sensory experiences such as tasting, feeling, seeing, and smelling foods.” When preschool-aged children participated in experiential opportunities that included “playing games, storybooks, role-modeling, and creative arts,” this had a large impact on influencing their food attitudes and behaviors (Varman, 2021).

3 Continue to fund grantees that are distributing food via delivery and mobile strategies that address stigma and transportation barriers.

HFDK grantees shared examples of how effective delivery models were, especially during the pandemic, when federal waivers allowed for the offsite consumption and delivery of meals. KIs mentioned that home delivery and mobile food delivery models are a solution to transportation barriers and can also reduce stigma, for students and families.

4 Prioritize funding programs that focus on sustainable strategies for expanding food access in neighborhoods impacted by food apartheid.

Several KIs are aware that HFDK is funding grantees to support community gardens and farmers markets, and they advocated for the expansion of these as a more sustainable approach within neighborhoods with low food access. This is also consistent with local food sovereignty efforts, focused on local residents controlling production of food using sustainable methods. One KI did note potential challenges related to the expansion of gardens — county laws impeding introduction of certain food-bearing plants and the need to have shared land use agreements, which may require county-level policy changes.

5 Fund infrastructure projects in schools (e.g., build kitchens) and other strategies that bring more healthy food into underserved schools.

A few KIs believe schools should be prioritized for HFDK funding because of their broad reach and regular touchpoints with children for most of the year. One KI described the variability of foods available in schools and cites as multiple factors that determine what is offered to students, including available cooking facilities. Public schools located in older buildings, and charter schools in particular, tend to lack kitchen facilities and infrastructure to prepare scratch meals and/or store foods. One KI recommended allocating HFDK funds in collaboration with DPS FNS to support building upgrades to build out kitchen facilities and/or add food storage. This would expand the types of foods, such as hot meals, they would be able to offer students.
Fund strategies that bring healthier foods into schools.

One KI working in the school system observed variability across schools in terms of what food is available to students — meals served, snacks provided in classrooms, competitive foods, and other foods available for purchase (e.g., concession foods, vending machines). This KI recommended that funds be invested in helping schools source local produce. This KI referenced a state grant that supports schools to purchase local produce, but to her knowledge, Denver County has not applied for these funds. This KI shared that in her role working with schools, she has increasingly received more requests to co-locate food banks within schools. And while co-location does make it easier for families to pick up food bags or boxes, other KIs have noted that co-location can sometimes create stigma and make it less likely that students will take advantage of the available resources.

Build Partnership and Community

HFDK should explore opportunities to partner with other funders to support large-scale improvements to neighborhood food environments.

Because there are a number of efforts to increase food access in Denver, KIs suggested that HFDK could explore opportunities to collaborate on joint initiatives. One suggestion was for funders, such as HFDK and local private foundations, to collaborate on funding opportunities that could award larger funding amounts to support large-scale infrastructure projects in neighborhoods. And beyond other funders, HFDK could work with other actors in the local food system (e.g., Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger, Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council) to support joint and coordinated efforts. Large-scale investments would require a long-term commitment from funders in addition to funds contributed through HFDK. For example, supporting the development of a full-service grocery store in neighborhoods with low food access could benefit residents.

Support community building among HFDK grantees and Denver residents.

KIs viewed HFDK as having a broader role in building community. This includes supporting the development of quality relationships across grantees. For example, HFDK could consider funding and/or supporting more grantee communities of practice, similar to the one being led by Denver Urban Gardens and the Montbello Organizing Committee on school gardens that is meeting regularly during the 2022-2023 grant term.
KIs also believe that stronger relationships should be fostered with community members receiving support through HFDK funds. Building relationships based on trust and transparency was viewed as an equity strategy. In terms of engagement strategies, KIs shared the following suggestions:

- Identify community members who could serve as a wellness champion, promotora, or community health worker who are invested in their health as well as that of their community.

- Outreach to and invite these community members to participate in local councils and initiatives focused on food systems work, for example the Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council.

- Listen and learn from the community through focus groups and listening sessions in priority neighborhoods.

- Provide incentives (e.g., gift cards or monetary compensation) to community members who provide feedback.

- Offer opportunities for community members to connect with each other, such as sponsoring community meals in different neighborhoods prepared from food harvested through HFDK efforts.

Commit to a community-driven approach that shifts more decision making power to grantees and those most impacted.

KIs named several grantees that were invested in understanding community needs and allowing that to guide their work. One KI recommended building on strengths such as community networks that already exist and are trusted by community members. Several KIs stressed the importance of listening to and learning from the community — perspectives that could inform food systems work. In fact, several listening sessions have been conducted with residents receiving HFDK-funded activities as part of the evaluation and will be used to inform recommendations. Most important is integrating these learnings to inform implementation and future funding strategies. Learnings could also be shared among grantees to help them advance the work.

One KI also suggested that HFDK could move beyond engagement and support community organizing, such as through community coalitions that bring together community-based organizations with trusted leaders and community members. KIs saw this approach as shifting more power to families impacted by food insecurity and making their experience the primary driver behind strategic and programming decisions.
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