

Austin/Travis County Food Policy Board Draft FY2020-21 Work Plan (DRAFT)

The Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board advises both Austin City Council and the Travis County Commissioners Court about ways to improve the availability of safe, nutritious, and affordable food that is grown locally and sustainability for all residents, particularly those in need. The [original city ordinance](#) creating the board stipulated that the board should conduct the following activities:

- 1) monitor the availability, price and quality of food throughout the Austin and Travis County area;
- 2) collect data on the food security (i.e., access to an affordable, diversified local food supply) and the nutritional status of city residents;
- 3) inform city and county policy makers, administrators, and the public at-large about the status of the region's food system and food security;
- 4) monitor and analyze the administration of city and county food and nutrition programs;
- 5) explore new means for the city and county to improve the local food economy, the availability, sustainability, accessibility, and quality of food and our environment, and assist city and county departments in
- 6) the coordination of their efforts;
- 7) review availability and recommend measures to promote the preservation of agricultural land in the City of Austin and Travis County; and
- 8) Recommend to the city and county adoption of measures that will improve existing local food production and add new programs, incentives, projects, regulations, or services

FY2020-21 Food Policy Board Work Plan (DRAFT)

Goal	Potential Strategies	How	(Other columns) Who/ Timeline
Strengthen board engagement practices to allow full participation of all board members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create Governance team ● Support mentorship among board members; strengthen member onboarding process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All board members partnered up ○ Shadowing Chair and VC positions ● Develop a full understanding of communications constraints related to being a board/commission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [Kara]: I think this is a great first step. I'd like to know, especially from the research of other boards/commissions, best practices on communication and collaboration that the board can implement. I think this is a "yes and". Document constraints, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Governance WG develops process and actions taken on by all ● Governance the result of creating these strategic areas ● Less siloed – board members attend other WG meetings ● Check/Update/Develop communications guide <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [Kara]: I'm not sure what the "communication guide" is but I think this could be expanded to implement communication channels/best practices ● Update advocacy docs ● How to start a WG guidance 	[Kara]: I think is clearly the governance work group to develop with execution by the entire board. Timeline is dependent on the

	<p>research best practices and governance working group implements new structures, processes, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build capacity for advocacy and leadership among board members 		<p>work group (and/or the board) deciding what to prioritize.</p>
<p>Create feedback loops to engage with under-represented groups in the local food system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engage with voices that have not been previously represented, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ food business/supply chain ○ farmers ○ community & consumer voices ● WGs reach out to more community groups and members ● Talk in WGs about how to do better community engagement ● How to report back work from WG to full board on those findings ● Is there another board or commission that does this well? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Operations follow structure ● Facilitate future conversation on this topic specifically ● Need to get specific on the who do we want to engage, e.g., eastern crescent, certain zips – be strategic ● Define feedback loops, and get out of circular loops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● what governance group would do vs board and WG ● guidance from governance, but something the board has to do all the time – not done very well thus far <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [Kara]: I see the working groups operationalizing this ● within WGs, how we talk with city and county ● Governance group helping define best practices for community engagement ● Go back to city for clarification on how we can communicate out - issues with social media and board communications ● Radio PSAs ● Use existing networks ● What are specific things board needs to do and specific groups that board can realistically engage – question of scope and network ● Using existing networks is why we are individually appointed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [Kara]: this is key ● Without staff member to manage input, be careful ● Some sectors are online – need to use broad platforms ● Kacey, Ellen want to work on 	

<p>Evaluate past board actions to better measure board success</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess past action and proposals that the board has passed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual report ● Develop process measures to measure progress toward goals ● Evaluate how other city boards and commissions handle supporting internal board systems and processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Connect to strengthening relationships to other boards and commissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How to revisit old recommendations that didn't go anywhere – google sheet with list and who and why – city staff can set up structure, but not comment ● When during the year do we want to review? How to keep on front burner ● County Commissioners and Council Members can best answer which board and commissions are doing this best <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Connect to conversation about prior recommendations ● [Kara]: I think what needs added to this section is the board needs key performance indicators (KPIs) and the working groups need (KPIs). There's not a lot of value if we look back but we aren't moving forward with an evaluation mindset. We need to do both. The governance working group can help support the process and structure for this but the board needs to better define their goals (SMART) and KPIs, as well as the working groups for this to effectively happen. 	
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<p>Improve coordination and alignment across city, county and regional food systems efforts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Define and clarify roles and lines of communication with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Regional food system collaboration/planning effort ○ Other city departments ○ Travis County ○ Other city boards and commissions; and ● Strengthen internal board cross-issue alignment ● Broaden to coordination with elected officials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emily has a lot of energy for this one ● Defining how we want our board to play with others – do we want others coming to us for input on critical policy decisions ● ID specific departments and people and so we are top of mind for them and they are for us ● ID other productive boards and commissions ● Timing to get in advance for QOL commissions budget forums? ● Regional Food System Planning – not defined yet – eventually have someone regularly participate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Someone who is not a board member do that reporting from that group ○ There is a community engagement piece 	
<p>Develop a focused advocacy agenda</p>	<p>Identified priorities for FY20 may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● COVID response/food access ● Supporting food businesses ● Food and climate ● Land use/land conservation (including review of the urban farm ordinance) ● Prioritizing the food system issues in the city and county budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overlap among WG ● Policy Scan timeline release? Use that as best practices – policy scan going through final approval ● [Kara]: Our advocacy agenda needs to align with the board vision and goals for the year (under the eval section). 	

What the year looks like:

- Quarterly check-ins

Governance WG:

- What worked from previous iteration: complicated by emergencies that happen in food policy world
- Originally, idea was to create single advocacy effort – building chops around advocacy; budget process; plug into those processes
- What didn't work: people didn't use the tools
- People not on another WG?
- This is more of an empowerment committee: teaching, monitoring

WGs

- Communicate advocacy information out to WG members – council members want to hear from community members

JSC - asked commissioners for information about engagement

- Resource Management Commission had a diversity and equity training recently and the topic of engagement came up, but no action

Potential Work Plan Implementation Strategies:

- Dedicated ongoing time for discussion in board meetings this year
- Share board work planning conversations in work group meetings in order to improve how work groups can support cross-group learning and better coordinate with other boards and commissions; board members share leadership responsibility in work groups
- Develop a working group to address internal systems and processes (governance or other committee; Vice Chair could help support)
 - [Kara]: Developing internal systems and processes (governance) on boards is what I have experience in. Happy to support this!
- Evaluate other boards and commissions to see how they handle this
- Could board members also be responsible for focusing on a board priority in addition to their roles in work groups?

Appendix 1: Summary of Focus Groups with Board Members

Poll Results

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Agree more than disagree</i>	<i>Disagree more than agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Often decisions of the board are made in advance and simply confirmed by the process.		4	1	3	1	
The board decision making process responds fairly to the needs of its members.	1	3	3	2		
In the board's decision-making process, everyone has an equal opportunity to influence decisions.	3	2	4			
The people involved in the board's decision-making process usually are focused on broader goals, rather than individual agendas.	2	4	2	1		

Focus Group Results

How long have you served on the Austin Travis County Food Policy Board, and why were you interested in serving on the Board?

Reasons for participating:

- Had previously participated in a working group
- Was invited by a policymaker to participate
- Thought my perspective was important on the board
- Had previously been a representative from my organization and wanted to continue the organization's connection to the board
- Wanted to connect my organization to the board

- Personal connection to the issue/lived experience
- Wanted to make changes in local food policy

What have been the Board's biggest accomplishments or wins?

- Visibility/awareness of the board – seen as local thought leaders on food
- COVID response work
- \$400,000 that city council invested in healthy food access
- Food pantry permitting
- Connections with other boards and commissions
- Mobile Markets & Fresh 4 Less program
- Food & climate work
- Developing FY20 city budget recommendations (even though they didn't result in funding)

Do you feel that that Board is accomplishing its goals? In your opinion, which of these areas needs the most attention in the coming year?

Needs additional focus:

- Focus on food businesses/supporting entrepreneurs/Owners/workers/vendors/supply chain disruption
- Improving strategy and relationship with other city departments
- Narrowing our focus to achieve impact
- Identify/revisit previous resolutions (one that pass and ones that didn't pass) – evaluate what worked and what didn't
- More inclusive board representation and address barriers to participation (for board members and community voice)
- Representation from food supply chain/major food retailers on board

What priorities would you like the board to focus on in the coming year? What is the specific outcome you would want the board to address?

- Increasing engagement with food businesses in Austin. Aligning with other groups - TX Restaurant Association, Good Work Austin group.
- improving food access/food system.
- Intersectionalities between food and other issues (e.g. food/farms/land conservation); How do we work as a board with other work groups/community plans/etc? Huge opportunity with the food and climate work.
- Coordinating with the Regional Food Planning initiative
- COVID response and equity issues.
- governance, structure, advocacy.
- Measurable goals
- Continue to advocate for city funding
- Engaging in county budget process/stronger engagement with the county
- Food access during COVID

In your experience, how have the working groups been functioning? What is working well? What is not working well?

Working Well:

- Have made progress in advocacy outcomes

- Level of participation on work groups (# of people engaged)
- Community members who participate in working groups tend to be well prepared for board participation
- Diversity of background and perspective in working group participation
- Having a clear and specific focus or charge (at least one at a time)
- Strong relationships with the department whose purview is over the issue the working group is focusing on
- Strategic planning for specific work groups
- Sharing working group chair responsibilities
- Videoconference meetings for work groups aids in accessibility

Not Working Well

- only having one board member on a working group
- Reactionary instead of proactive approach
- Large group size is a lot of work to facilitate
- Working groups having working groups
- Clarity about scope and focus (sometimes)
- If there's an issue that doesn't have a working group, it usually falls through the cracks
- Lack of relationship with the department who purview is over the issue the working group is focusing on
- Engaging harder to engage voices (e.g. farmers)

Other Observations

- Some working groups seems to have largely professionals; others have more community members. Pros and cons of both.
- Sharing wins, lessons learned, tips and tricks across working groups would be useful
- Having "standard operating procedures" for work groups could be useful

What do you think could make the board more successful?

- High bar for knowledge to feel like you can participate. Board buddies – mentors to new members?
- Create feedback loops and relationship building with board members outside of monthly meetings
- Requirement for board members to participate in a working group?
- Need to focus on onboarding and setting clear expectations for board members.
- More focused on board identity
- doing a better job of getting board members proactively involved
- having a north star as a board (who are we?)
- Reconsidering our approach to advocacy. How can we be more strategic?
- Engaging and building stronger relationships with city staff in a variety of depts (e.g. APH, Economic Development, PARD, etc)
- Develop clarity about how the board and the regional planning effort align
- A retreat to clarify board member interests
- Better accommodate board member constraints/lack of bandwidth. Offer pre-work to be done before meetings so members come informed; have a pre-meeting/office hours/work session mid-month so members could prepare
- Improved structure and processes
- Community engagement work group
- Making sure all board members' voices are heard

- Being very specific about what we're asking community members to weigh in on to avoid "input fatigue"
- Continuing to improve the visibility and awareness of the board
- Elevating community voice
- Facilitating connections between community members and city council members/county commissioners

What is the headline of the news story that outlines the successful accomplishment of the board's agenda in 5 years?

- *Austin Voters Pass Local Food Bond Setting the stage for major investment in local food system transformation.*
- *Food Policy Board Spurs Innovation in the Local Food System, Figures out way around the "good ol' boy food network"*
- *Post-pandemic, the Food Policy Board has helped to create a stronger food system and achieved goals in the climate plan*
- *Food Policy board fundamentally helps shift local food landscape*
- *Food Policy Board disbanded due to effective infiltration of food into all of the spaces where it needs to be discussed*
- *City department focusing on food and water is created.*
- *City and County Make Food a Priority in Annual Budgets*
- *Austin/Travis County Policymakers Know it's about food, but it's not really about food*
- *City and County share in joint success about reducing hunger, addressing food policy.*
- *Austin and Travis County Understand Joint Connections in Food System... What Happens in Austin Impacts Travis County and Beyond*

Is there anything else related to the Food Policy Board and its priorities and annual work plan that you'd like to offer or discuss?

- Purpose
- Need a spirit of innovation and intention right now.
- Our hard work won't speak for itself -we need to advocate. Need to build connections with boards/policymakers/communities.
- Suggest flipping voting to the start of meetings so it doesn't get lost.
- Need for standardizing processes so pre-meeting information always goes out on the same day of the month and other processes to keep the board on track
- How do we emulate the success of other high-functioning boards?
- We need to designate time to do a full strategic planning retreat
- Need to address why working groups may not be meeting
- Working groups can be too myopic. In some cases the board is substituting for city staff - not ideal. We're asking board members to do things that are outside of their scope.
- Measurement is important. We don't have any key performance indicators - makes it hard to quantify how successful we are. I'm a data person - would be good to dig into the data or have more data-focused representation on the board.
- We will be more powerful and effective if we can figure out a way to better engage with other boards and commissions
- Evaluating past successes to figure out how we measure success is critical to each board member understanding how they can make an impact

Appendix 2: 10/12 Board Meeting Feedback ([link to slide deck](#))

Welcome, Objectives, & Meeting Norms

Opening Conversations: Of the four categories, which do you think the board is weakest in?

- S=Separateness: the amount of diversity in perspective, expertise, and background among group members
- T=Tuning: the level of listening deeply, reflecting, and making sense of challenges together
- A=Action: the number of opportunities to act on ideas or innovate with group members
- R=Reason to work together: the benefits that are gained from working together

Responses were mixed – at least one board member mentioned each of the four categories.

Overview of Focus Group Results

Conversation Circle: What are the tensions inherent in the board's work? (responses below)

- *How is it that the board represents the community as a whole but representation is based on organization?*
- *How is it that the food policy board makes no policy?*
- *How is it that we are a city board but have to fight to get council's attention?*
- *How is it that everyone needs food but food is left out of critical policy conversations?*
- *How is it that we are all committed to the same mission but struggle to take action?*
- *How is it that food is only a key policy issue when there's a disaster?*
- *How is it that we are an innovative and progressive community but not around food?*
- *How is it that we are limited to 13 members but must represent the entire food system?*
- *How is it that we feel responsible for engaging the entire community but are limited by the constraints of being a city board?*

Conversation Circle: Of the six priority areas, what is your 1 or 2 top priority for the board in FY20-21?

Responses were mixed – board members mentioned all of the priority areas. Board members offered the following strategies to ensure effective implementation of the annual work plan:

- Dedicated ongoing time for discussion in board meetings this year
- Share board work planning conversations in work group meetings in order to improve how work groups can support cross-group learning and better coordinate with other boards and commissions; board members share leadership responsibility in work groups
- Develop a working group to address internal systems and processes (governance or other committee; Vice Chair could help support)
- Evaluate other boards and commissions to see how they handle this
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Closing: What is one word that describes how you're leaving this conversation?