



Promising Practices

Promising Practices: The Evolution of the Northside Fresh Coalition

Through their Health Equity in Prevention (HEiP) initiative, the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota awarded contracts to 13 organizations working to implement policy, systems, and environmental changes to support health and advance health equity. The Promising Practices series highlights successful strategies used by these organizations and important lessons learned that can be used by other organizations to inform their work.

Improving food access in North Minneapolis

Over the past five years, Appetite for Change (AFC) and the Northside Fresh (NSF) coalition, an initiative housed at AFC, have used multiple strategies to improve food systems in North Minneapolis (Northside). Strategies have included engaging with partners, expanding food access, increasing outreach at the West Broadway Farmers Market, and advancing local food policies. More information on the work accomplished over the past five years can be found in their ripple effect mapping report (Thakur, 2018).

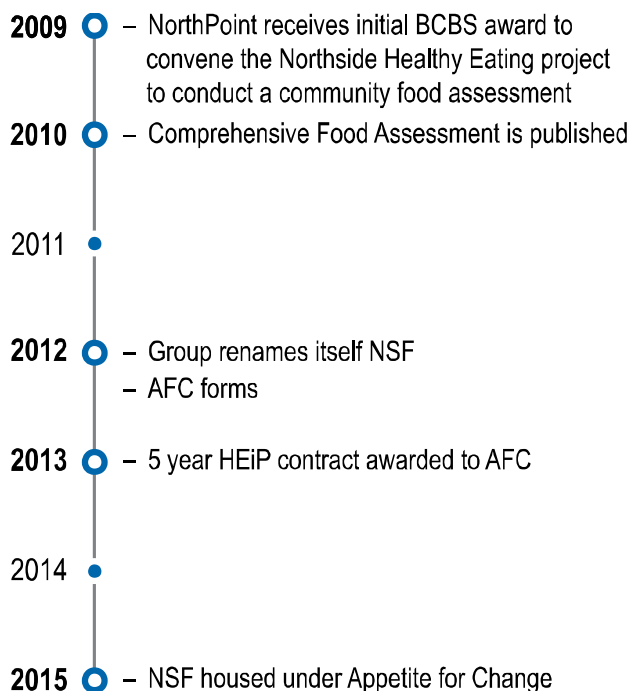
This summary describes the evolution of NSF since its inception in 2008. Information was gathered through interviews with AFC staff, a founding coalition organization representative, and a community member.

Coalition beginnings and evolution

The NSF coalition started in 2008 as a group of community members and organizations at Northpoint Health and Wellness Center (NorthPoint), a county institution, and was initially centered on conducting a community food assessment under the Northside Healthy Eating project. In 2009, the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross awarded a five-year grant to NorthPoint for this work. Funds were used to conduct the assessment, hire coalition and community coordinators, and create NSF branding. NorthPoint convened a group of community stakeholders interested in local, urban agriculture and food systems. The assessment gathered information about Northside residents' experiences, barriers, and ideas around accessing healthy foods.

Once the food assessment was completed, the advisory team drafted a strategic plan for what evolved into the NSF coalition. After the end of the initial five years of funding, a core group continued to meet regularly around food access in the community. The group's focus evolved from healthy foods towards community ownership, economic and racial justice, resident food sales and ownership, and contributing towards policy and system changes for their community.

In response to the changing group focus, NSF was relocated within AFC, a community-based organization centered around food access in the Northside in 2015. This relocation brought new energy to the group. At the group's initial meetings, there was frustration and distrust among partners around funding going to a large, county institution instead of smaller, community-based organizations. With time and a commitment to working together, this tension has eased.



Coalition aims and membership

Northside Fresh now describes itself as a “coalition that uses food as a pathway toward community well-being, economic and social justice” (<https://northsidefresh.org/>). It is centered on creating a racially just food system rooted in Northside. It is made up of around 60 community members and organizations. About 15 percent of members are individual community members, which is unique to coalition work where membership often consists of organizational partners. While many members have come and gone over time, a core group of 15 organizations has remained involved.

With coalition partner's commitment to building an equitable food system, NSF has explored community healing from structural racism and policies that have limited their community's access to food as an important component of food justice. Through their coalition's evolution, they have acknowledged this historical context and its impact

on the community through facilitating conversations that have at times been painful. While the initial aim was for the group to focus on multiracial and multigenerational coalitions, NSF's work predominantly surrounds the African American experience.

From its initial days at NorthPoint, NSF has had a team structure. Currently, NSF has the following action teams: policy, learning/evaluation, outreach/events, and special projects. The full coalition meets quarterly with action teams meeting more frequently.

Benefits of coalition work

Through their work in the coalition, NSF members reveal their strengths and skills. They have the opportunity to work together on new collaborations and build deeper relationships with one another. Through relationships developed under NSF's work, several new organizations and collaborations have formed and grown, including: Fresh Corners Growers Cooperative, West Broadway Farmers Market, the Fresh Bucks produce incentive program at Northside community retailers Twin Cities Mobile Market, K's Grocery and Wirth Co-op, and the McKinley Community CSA.

Coalition partners are also able to participate in policy and advocacy efforts around food access. Alone, organizations have limited power and resources to advance policy efforts. As a coalition, they can speak with more strength in advocating for policies that benefit their community.

What has led to the group's success?

The relocation of NSF within AFC has allowed for more time and resources that can go directly back to the community, as there are less administrative costs. Being rooted in the

community and staffed by community members with shared lived experiences has facilitated AFC's success in advocating for their community. It also offers an advantage when advocating for policies, one that wouldn't exist if they were housed at a university or government agency.

Other structural elements have increased NSF's impact. Being housed within AFC has allowed NSF to hire a full-time staff person who is responsible for coordinating NSF and overseeing policy, allowing the work to continue and grow. In addition, providing child care at NSF quarterly meetings has changed the dynamic of the group's interactions and keeps it rooted in the community they serve.

As NSF's work is highlighted across the region, other groups from across the state have come to AFC to learn how to better organize in their communities. Other food-oriented networks have emerged in Minnesota following the formation of NSF, such as the Metro Food Access Network and Minnesota Food Charter Network.

Challenges

Building trusting relationships with community members and organizations took a long time. There was initial tension around how funds would be distributed across the coalition, particularly when NSF was located at NorthPoint.

Navigating between serving as a coalition or organizational representative can be challenging for members at times, as there can be tension when representing their own organization or furthering the coalition's aims. Over time, this has become easier as members understand the coalition's work and shared goals.

Lessons learned

- **Individual, community member participation from different perspectives and disciplines helps NSF work on a wider range of topics.** It allows people with different skills and interests to work together from multiple parts of the food system (policy, retail, and farmers market). It also lets individual community members who may not represent an organization become involved in community building and policy changes.
- **Hiring a full-time staff member to coordinate NSF and manage policy keeps momentum moving forward.** It takes time to schedule meetings and skill to facilitate meetings among a broad group of partners with varying interests and skills. Having someone with dedicated time and who is paid for the coordination work is important.
- **The time investment needed to build deeper relationships and trust has important long-term benefits.** Working in coalition requires a deep commitment to the group's aims and trust in one another. Some of the members within NSF have worked together for over 10 years of the group's evolution.

References

Thakur, A. (2018). *Appetite for Change*. Retrieved from Wilder Research website:
[Appetite for Change report](#)

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