



IN PROMOTING **NUTRITION**  
**SECURITY**

STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-27: FULL REPORT

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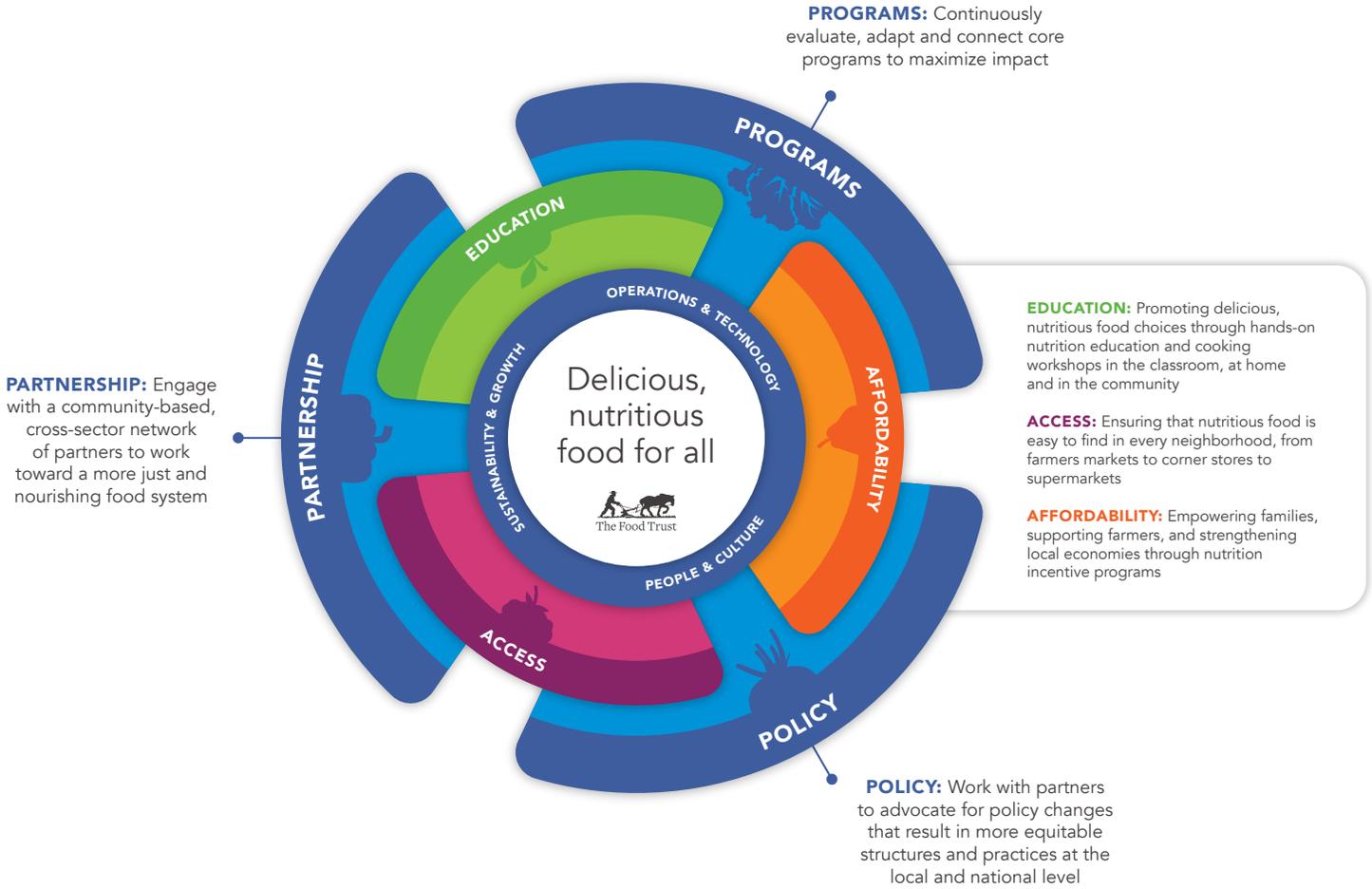
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For the past 30 years, The Food Trust has worked to ensure that everyone has access to affordable, nutritious food and information to make healthy decisions. With the onboarding of President & CEO Mark Edwards in late 2020, the organization embarked on a deeply participatory strategic planning process that engaged our entire staff and our Board of Directors, as well as myriad external stakeholders.

The culminating plan, which centers evidence-based programs, community engagement and policy advocacy, will chart The Food Trust's future direction for the next five years, and guide the organization as it carries out its new mission: **delicious, nutritious food for all.**

The 2022–27 strategic plan, titled "**Partners in Promoting Nutrition Security,**" includes six key priorities that will allow the organization to work collaboratively on the local and national level to effect change, spark innovation and strengthen infrastructures across programs and departments. By focusing on programs, partnerships and policy, The Food Trust can work toward its shared vision for a more equitable society, where nutritious food is abundant, people of all backgrounds are nourished and prosperous, and communities are thriving.

The Food Trust's Strategic Plan, 2022–2027:  
Partners in Promoting Nutrition Security



For a detailed look at The Food Trust's 2022–27 Strategic Plan, [turn to page 11](#).



Through a robust proposal review period, The Food Trust selected the Chicago-based firm Sort Sol Group (SSG) to facilitate a strategic planning process centered around Board and staff participation. With SSG's guidance, the organization worked to capture a deep understanding of how internal and external stakeholders perceive The Food Trust's strengths and challenges; methods included background interviews, staff and Board focus groups, partner surveys and focus groups, an organizational capacity assessment, a series of virtual strategy workshops for all staff and Board, and a feedback period where draft plans were reviewed internally and externally.

Through this process, The Food Trust achieved its goal of developing a set of strategic priorities to guide the organization over the next five years, as well as new language to define its mission, shared values, principles and shared vision. In addition, SSG worked with internal and external stakeholders to identify a set of established strengths that distinguish the organization in the field, as well as developing a strategy screen decision-making tool that will allow the organization to evaluate new opportunities based on their alignment with its values.

The following report details The Food Trust's strategy development process and the organizational, programmatic and operational strategies that have been prioritized to further its work.



### **Design Team Establishment**

Solving complex challenges requires a team with a diverse set of skills and perspectives that reflect the full scope of the systems involved. To help shape and monitor the planning process, a Design Team was formed to partner with SSG to ensure that effective stakeholder engagement was integrated throughout the process. This core working group included members of The Food Trust's Board of Directors as well as a diverse contingent of staff, representing myriad employment levels and departments.

### **Organizational Assessment**

To obtain perspective on The Food Trust's strengths, reputation and niche in the sector, SSG conducted eight individual and confidential interviews with key members of the organization, including Board officers, executive leadership, program and administrative leaders, and The Food Trust's founder. It also facilitated 13 virtual focus groups for Board members, consumers and staff, and deployed a partner survey to 117 organizations.

In addition to this qualitative feedback, SSG deployed an Organizational Mapping Tool (OMT) to the organization's full staff and Board of Directors, garnering 63 individual responses. The OMT assessed 14 areas of organizational development, and respondents were asked to rank The Food Trust's strengths from "minimal" (1) to "strong" (7). To summarize the data, SSG calculated an overall score and scale score for each of these areas based on respondent ratings. These ratings, which provided a snapshot of the organization based on the intentions, attitudes and experiences of the respondents, were intended to spark a discussion about the potential priorities of the organization, guide the development of the strategic plan and identify areas where The Food Trust's resources could be directed in support of capacity building.

Qualitative and quantitative analysis revealed five overarching themes, interconnected through eight key findings:

#### **1. PEOPLE, PASSION, PIONEERING SPIRIT**

- A. The Food Trust has strong assets in its people who are passionate about their work. It has a strong reputation for its knowledge and expertise bolstered by its role as an early pioneer in the healthy food access field.

#### **2. CULTURE AND BUSINESS MODEL**

- B. Events and challenges of years past reflect deeper internal cultural issues at the organization.
- C. The Food Trust is recognized internally and externally as a programming pioneer, which, as it refines its strategic and financial models, will open space for future innovation and experimentation.
- D. Greater attention to scale and sustainability will lead to larger transformation.
- E. The Food Trust must refine its identity in the field as it straddles the line between programs and systems work.

#### **3. CHANGING NATURE OF THE FIELD**

- F. The Food Trust's role, priorities and intended impact should reflect the changing landscape of the field of healthy food access.

#### **4. DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION**

- G. There is a yearning for interconnections, transparency and to be heard, all of which are part of a pressing need for more equitable practices internally and to the communities The Food Trust serves.

## 5. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

H. The Food Trust's leadership and Board of Directors have potential to increase The Food Trust's organizational impact.

Undertaking this evaluative work speaks to The Food Trust's willingness to ask difficult questions, engage in self-reflection and build a strategic plan that represents internal and external feedback. It reflects the organization's pledge to develop the resources, initiatives, services and activities required to fulfill its mission.

### Bellwether Interviews

The Bellwether Interview Methodology was developed to help organizations pinpoint where a particular issue sits on policy agendas; understand how policymakers and thought leaders think and talk about the issue; and forecast how likely policymakers may be to act on the issue or related policies. In the context of strategic planning for The Food Trust, eight 30-minute bellwether interviews were conducted with individuals from various sectors to review:

- Salient issues in healthy food access and nutrition education
- Current and future social, economic and political context that the strategy will be operating within
- Potential advocates
- Competing issues

Key themes in alignment with The Food Trust's work include:

- A. While there is some variation in order, the areas of health, technology, transportation, education and economic development all top the policy agenda. Sustainable food systems in low-income communities are seen as intersecting with all these areas. Other areas mentioned were climate and environment, including water systems.
- B. It is crucial to sustain COVID-era flexibilities, waivers and benefit increases to further reinforce safety nets; it is also important to expand eligibility by lifting some of the onerous requirements that limit participation.
- C. The way food access has been defined in the past is too limiting and does not cover the interconnectedness of vast sets of systems and practices that will need to come together, such as food production, distribution and consumption.
- D. Models that address food access as an emergency response rather than addressing root issues of inequity and how we define hunger in this nation will not deliver the types of comprehensive systems change that is necessary long-term.
- E. While there are currently the funding mechanisms and political will to grow food access, most states do not have the infrastructure to successfully implement and sustain these changes.
- F. Health care can be a powerful ally, but partnership with this sector needs more attention.
- G. The Food Trust could lead discussions around narrative shaping, infrastructure and building local capacity with models for understanding underserved communities.

**“We need folks at ground zero who can pull together the concentric circles and be a legitimate and credible. TFT could be that — build on excitement, shared stories and then let policy design happen.”**

## Partnership Survey

A Partnership Survey was designed to solicit qualitative feedback and input from the vast network of The Food Trust's community partners (e.g., schools, communities of faith, CDFIs, funders, etc.). Nineteen partners responded to the online survey, the majority of whom have been partners of The Food Trust for five or more years.

The survey asked partners a small set of questions on the broader field of food access; their perceptions of and experiences with The Food Trust; and their insights into what might be helpful for the organization to consider as it moves forward in the strategic planning process. Broad responses indicated a growing recognition of the complexity of food access as a systems issue and the perceived absence of a collective response and shared vision across systems that touch food access. Partners recognized The Food Trust for the breadth of its work and see opportunities for the organization to bridge and convene multiple sectors that touch food systems.

Participants were also asked to describe The Food Trust in two words. The following word cloud represents their responses:



## Benchmarking

Finally, with the support of Evaluation+, SSG conducted an external benchmarking exercise to analyze organizations that align with The Food Trust's mission and impact goals.

The benchmarking process used three sources of data and the following criteria to gather information: (1) the information must be consistently calculated or defined in the same way across organizations, and (2) it is publicly available at no cost. Organizations included in SSG's benchmarking exercise included Fair Food Network, Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, Philabundance, PHMC Integrated, Reinvestment Fund, The Wallace Center (Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development) and Wholesome Wave.

This exercise revealed that while many organizations focus on similar populations or service areas, and some programs overlap among organizations, what distinguishes The Food Trust in the field is its breadth and depth of programming offerings: The Food Trust's holistic approach to healthy food access incorporates several key programming elements of any individual organization it was being compared to. This shows both the diversity of programming and impact potential in the field, as well as the need for collaboration and synergy among like-minded organizations.

While the benchmarking exercise served as a point of discussion for The Food Trust, it is important to note it was limited in scope as most of the benchmarks used were from data provided pre-pandemic. (Trend data over time is most useful but was not easily accessible.)



### Strategy Development Workshops

A series of virtual strategy workshops were conducted with The Food Trust's full staff and Board of Directors. Using the Institute of Cultural Affairs' group facilitation method, these sessions aimed to recognize and honor the contributions of all participants; pool individual contributions into larger, more informative and inclusive patterns; and use diversity as an asset while minimizing polarization and conflict.

The sessions focused on the following objectives:

- Develop and/or refine organizational commitment statements including mission, shared values, principles and vision statements
- Distinguish competitive advantages, or established strengths
- Build a strategy screen
- Identify a practical vision
- Address contradictions
- Chart strategic directions

The series generated the following ideas for strategic directions to explore:

- Pursuing authentic community engagement
- Identifying core program areas and increasing collaboration
- Strengthening overall HR function
- Developing strong DEI practices
- Pursuing innovative resource development and financial stability
- Developing sustainable business model
- Increasing staffing and support for organization's infrastructure
- Strengthening evaluation and evidence-based decision-making
- Increasing focus on policy/advocacy work
- Developing strengths-based, sustainable approach to innovation and growth
- Improving internal and external communication

### Testing

The Design Team worked with SSG to refine the ideas generated during the strategy development workshops. As a result, a short summary of strategic targets was produced, to be tested with external stakeholders. The Design Team identified thought leaders with expertise in an area of strategic importance to The Food Trust. These leaders are aware of trends that may impact The Food Trust, have a reputation for the success of their own organizations, and/or are known for effective programs serving a similar constituency.

SSG conducted nine confidential interviews with these external stakeholders to test the drafted organizational commitment statements, established strengths and priority areas. SSG also administered a survey for Board and staff feedback. A summary memorandum was provided highlighting key themes that emerged from the interviews and topics for discussion in the action planning/implementation phase of the strategy development process. This feedback was used extensively during the final stages of plan revisions.

### Organizational Commitment Statements

Strategy must always begin with an understanding of the organization's core identity. The Food Trust developed new language to define its mission, shared values, principles and shared vision, all of which align with the future direction of the organization:

## Delicious, Nutritious Food for All ← OUR MISSION

Founded in 1992, The Food Trust works with neighborhoods, institutions, retailers, farmers and policymakers across the country to ensure delicious, nutritious food for all. Backed by three decades of research and evaluation, our holistic, community-centered approach to nutrition security weaves together three core programming elements—access, affordability and education—as well as a focus on advocating for public policy solutions.

### Shared Values

**Passion & Purpose:** We are driven by our belief that nutritious food is a human right, and that eating well is an essential part of good health and happiness.

**Collaboration & Innovation:** We are committed to amplifying communities' collective resources, and co-creating and advocating for adaptable, sustainable, creative solutions to big problems.

**Diversity & Inclusion:** We strive to create spaces where people of all races, genders, ages, religions, identities and experiences are welcome, and all perspectives are valued.

**Responsibility & Learning:** We listen and learn as we go, and we are accountable to the communities we serve.

### Our Principles

- Communities have the power to create a more just and nourishing food system.
- We should all be able to find, afford and learn about the foods that support our health and bring us joy.
- Together, we can disrupt the systems that were built to separate us.

### Shared Vision

Everything we do is guided by our vision for a more equitable society, where nutritious food is abundant, people of all backgrounds are nourished and prosperous, and communities are thriving.

## Established Strengths

A key component of strategy development is the identification of an organization's unique strengths, or its "competitive advantage." The term "competitive" highlights the reality that any organization must compete for resources in order to advance its mission; however, this does not override the need for, and value of, collaboration with other organizations.

Through a combination of internal and external data collection, The Food Trust examined its strengths relative to other organizations and tested them through external review. Four key themes were identified that The Food Trust can leverage to make a greater impact:

**Strong reputation:** Known as a trusted thought leader, The Food Trust has 30 years of experience developing, testing, and sharing best practices in every area of its work.

**Strong partner who convenes and collaborates well:** The Food Trust understands the power of collective impact and establishes cross-sector partnerships to work toward shared goals.

**National presence, local feel:** The Food Trust works collaboratively with local partners to improve environments and create systems change while advocating for sustainable policies nationally.

**Holistic approach:** Utilizing a comprehensive approach, The Food Trust works toward nutrition security from multiple angles and through a variety of programs.

## Strategy Screen

Through the strategic planning process, The Food Trust also worked with SSG to create a Strategy Screen, a decision-making tool that will allow the organization to evaluate new opportunities based on their alignment with its mission, vision, values and strengths. The screen asks questions about intent and impact, community engagement and support, resources and capacity, and role in the greater healthy food access ecosystem.

## 2022–27 Strategic Plan

The Food Trust's culminating 2022–27 strategic plan, titled "Partners in Promoting Nutrition Security," includes an overarching objective and six key priorities that will allow the organization to work collaboratively on the local and national level to effect change, spark innovation, and strengthen infrastructures across programs and departments.

## Overarching Objective

By 2027, The Food Trust will have mobilized a diverse set of partners to bring about measurable, sustainable, positive change that promotes nutrition security and thriving communities.

## Strategic Priorities

**PROGRAMS:** Continuously evaluate, adapt, and connect core programs to maximize impact.

- Ensure strong, evidence-based programs through comprehensive evaluation
- Strengthen connections across core programs that lead to greater innovation and impact
- Encourage the expansion and replication of core programs

**PARTNERSHIP:** Engage with a community-based, cross-sector network of partners to work toward a more just and nourishing food system.

- Prepare the organization to engage more deeply in community-based collaborative work
- Grow our diverse network of partners across systems to collectively address nutrition security
- Engage with partners to identify community assets, address gaps and work toward sustainable change

**POLICY:** Work with partners to advocate for policy changes that result in more equitable structures and practices at the local and national level.

- Identify priority areas and create a comprehensive interdepartmental policy strategy
- Convene community residents and leaders to build a roadmap for action
- Work collaboratively to influence policies that support equitable practices

## Supporting Priorities

**PEOPLE & CULTURE:** Build an inclusive organization that fosters a positive culture.

- Strengthen processes to ensure equitable practices across the full human resource cycle
- Develop and integrate DEI practices, methods and tools that support an inclusive culture
- Guide and support individuals and teams during organizational change

**SUSTAINABILITY & GROWTH:** Develop a robust business model that ensures long-term financial sustainability and strengthens our impact.

- Assess current business model and identify opportunities for change, innovation and new revenue generation
- Enhance brand visibility and organizational awareness
- Develop comprehensive fundraising strategy to attract unrestricted resources and inspire expanded investment in our work

**OPERATIONS & TECHNOLOGY:** Strengthen core operational systems and infrastructures to maximize efficiency and effectiveness and support organizational growth.

- Identify and assess core operational systems, including finance, technology, human resources and office administration
- Organize, update and streamline internal operational systems and processes
- Utilize streamlined systems and leverage data for decision-making

Strategy is built upon an organization's business model, market awareness and competitive advantage. While strategic plans are intended to endure for a predetermined length of time and cover specific focus areas, goals and objectives, it is important to continuously monitor the environment under which a strategic plan was built in order to ensure it continues to be effective and mission-aligned.

The Food Trust intends to utilize this plan as a living document, reviewing it regularly to revisit trends, policies and cultural shifts in the external environment that may affect—or call for alterations to—the organization's strategy going forward. It will also continue to focus on developing the actions, processes and systems that support the organization's staff and Board as they work to fulfill its mission.

By envisioning strategy development as a more fluid, continuous cycle, The Food Trust can identify and act on challenges and opportunities as they arise, and remain agile in an ever-shifting environment.

## The Food Trust

Founded in 1992, The Food Trust works with neighborhoods, institutions, retailers, farmers and policymakers across the country to ensure delicious, nutritious food for all. Backed by three decades of research and evaluation, our holistic, community-centered approach to nutrition security weaves together three core programming elements—access, affordability and education—as well as a focus on advocating for public policy solutions.



## Sort Sol Group

At Sort Sol Group, we focus on strengthening client impact in practice areas such as business modeling, collaboration, facilitation, governance, leadership, organizational effectiveness, strategy and team development. Bringing a networked consulting model, combined with community learning and development, we co-create knowledge with community leaders to be a collective force for social change.

