

## OUR STORIES

# Models, Practices, and Progress: Centering Racial Equity in Statewide Food System Plans

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## It's all about the layers

Submitted by: Jan Libbey - Iowa | Statewide Food Systems Plan: Yes - we are updating

Story Categories: Seasoning: A story of Small Successes – it may not be the ultimate goal, but it's a step in the right direction

I titled my story "It's all about the layers" because that's how it feels we are making our way into this work of centering racial equity. Additionally, I think understanding that each step takes our understanding deeper fits in the layer analogy.

The outer layer is like the dry skin of the onion at this point - when our group formed under the umbrella of Iowa Food System Coalition early summer 2021 and began to wrap our heads around the task we had agreed to take on, "centering racial equity" was what seemed to wrap the many moving pieces of developing a food system plan together. It stirred imagination that this is going to be something different, it inspired us to think boldly.

The next layer was using financial resources to support people of color to have a voice and role in our Input Process. Stipends were provided for Input group participation and for Coalition meeting participation.

We peeled a little deeper and added two Equity training sessions (4 hours each...if you can imagine), led by our equity consultants. They were well attended and powerful...and yes, folks did stick with it throughout all 4 hours! The emphasis of centering racial equity means a lot of personal work to reinforce a new mindset. We have these trainings recorded and they will be available on our partner portal on our website which should be done by early March.

We have looked at steps to operationalize the Coalition policies and practices which we feel help to set the culture and hold the group accountable to how we interact with each other - with an eye on how this helps create and ensure the Coalition is a safe and welcoming space for all participants.

Currently, the key policies include Consent-based decision making used by our Steering Committee, a Partner Commitment Form grounded in our detailed Handbook, and we are formulating a Restorative Justice practice to guide a process for responding to harm that may happen among partners. We will be adding a process to share with meeting participants (we primarily are meeting virtually) who is coming to/has registered for meetings - another way to make sure folks are comfortable with the environment we are working together in.

The most recent layer we're peeling back is investing more of our planning budget to bring BIPOC leaders together to help inform/shape the longer game plan for how to increase the leadership role of food system partners of color. We are a white dominated Coalition and have been spinning in place on this question for a while. We are finally deciding upon a course of action which invests in the wisdom and insight of the very people we want to hear from to help shape the direction.

I can only imagine this most recent process will help us to discover even more layers of understanding about centering racial equity in our food system work.

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## Ambassadors Bridge the Gap

Submitted by: [Lindsey Scalera - MI | Statewide Food Systems Plan: Yes - published](#)

Story Categories: Stone Soup: A Story of Unlikely Partners, Special Sauce: A story of transformative moments or models, Apple Cider: Gaining/learning when things "go sour" – or failure or challenges

"In early 2020, we were just beginning to launch our process to update the 2010 Michigan Good Food Charter. After creating a simple working draft of our core updates, we started to plan for a broader public feedback campaign. We created an online survey and a set of discussion questions that we could bring to conferences and meetings to gather feedback from our stakeholders. We envisioned discussion sessions and tabling at events throughout the year.

However, when the pandemic began, we quickly realized that our plans would not be as successful if we did not add a component of personal outreach. Our solution was to call upon our partners who had relationships with specific communities we knew we would not be able to reach on our own.

We contracted with several people to design appropriate outreach strategies to engage community members in Tribal and Indigenous communities and the more rural upper peninsula of Michigan. Our Ambassadors were able to incorporate this outreach into work they were already doing within these communities during the pandemic and gather valuable insights which informed our final product.

Working with people who have connections beyond our own, we were able to hear from and include ideas in our Charter that may not have surfaced otherwise. I would employ this strategy again, only with a larger budget to be sure to offer compensation to the community members who shared their time and expertise. "