



Explanation

A food partnership can have many functions, and there is certainly no one size that fits all. One of the most important things it can do is to demonstrate the connections between food, health, community, social equity, the environment and economic prosperity, and how this approach can deliver a sustainable food system. An integrated, joined-up, whole food system approach can bring together people and organisations with diverse interests for the mutual benefit of all.

The starting point for most food partnerships is to **bring stakeholders together** to share thinking and explore a common vision or purpose and aims. To become a member of the SFC Network the food partnership needs to include representatives from the public sector, third sector and business sector.

Public sector representatives tend to come from a range of local authority departments (e.g. public health, economy, communities, environment, and equalities) or from the NHS (hospital trusts, clinical commissioning groups, and community health services). You may also want to engage with local universities.

Third sector representatives should come from a wide range of organisations either food related (e.g. food coops, food banks, growing groups, cookery groups, city farms) or from infrastructure organisations (e.g. council for voluntary service) or networks representing food projects or environmental concerns (community food growing networks, Transition movement etc.). Social enterprises fall into this sector and are useful members to have on board too. Business sector representatives could come from farming, catering, retail, food distribution etc.

Engaging with **businesses** (commercial or private sector) is an area that many food partnerships struggle with. SFC Network is therefore happy to accept food partnerships with no or little business representation so long as there is a commitment to engage businesses as the partnership develops and this is reflected in the action plan and terms of reference.

Any partnership, especially an emerging one, will be unlikely to have a 'perfect' membership with high-level influential members from the public, third and business sectors. This should always be the aim, but membership will vary as priorities, people and politics change. A new partnership may well be best having a handful of committed members that can drive action forward rather than a large less committed group. Experience shows it takes time to develop the trust needed for strong partnerships.

Key to the development of stakeholder engagement is **bringing people together** to explore a shared vision for the local food system. This is best achieved through face-to-face meetings gathering together potential participants in the Food Partnership.

What to consider

- Initial meetings are about establishing relationships between the key individuals.
- They can be informal but should be focused on sharing: information; perspectives on issues and suggestions on overall vision and actions.
- It's a good idea to host each meeting at a different location – ideally one of the institutions/ organisations in the group. This will help to build a sense of shared responsibility and balance.
- Emerging food partnerships may find it useful to look at the [Food Partnership Structures Guide](#) which captures the stories of how existing SFC members have evolved along with guidance on choosing your structure.
- In order to determine who the key stakeholders are it may be useful for a smaller Steering Group (see the next section) to use the [Food System Mind Mapping Tool](#) with a focus on **Question 2:**

Who is doing what in your local food system?

- The tool suggests asking prompt questions including:

Who are the **main stakeholders** e.g. people, groups, businesses, organisations who:

- are most involved in the food system?
- have most influence on the food system?
- are likely to be most affected by changes in the local food system?

Which people, groups, businesses and organisations are actively involved in local food issues, or who produce, sell or provide local food?

Who to consider

- Identify who are the key Local Authority Officers:
 - Sustainability Team
 - Environment
 - Planning
 - Economic Development
 - Public Health
- Identify who are the key **Health Sector managers**:
 - NHS Trusts
 - Community Health Services
 - Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Identify who are the key **local community food advocates**:
 - Local community growing projects
 - Local food campaigns and activism
 - Locally focused national food organisations and projects

- Identify which are the key **local food Businesses**:
 - Farmers and growers
 - Processers
 - Caterers
 - Retailers
 - Restaurants and cafes – particularly those championing local produce

Useful questions to address

- What do you see as the purpose of the Food Partnership/Food Strategy?
- Why is a Food Partnership/Food Strategy needed?
- What is it aiming to achieve?
- Who should be involved?
- What sort of organisational structure would best suit the Partnership in achieving its aims?
- How committed are you to the concept of a local Food Partnership and the development of a local Food Strategy?
- Has anything been done towards this in this area already?
- Are there potential funding streams within different strategic/statutory bodies to support this initiative?

STEERING GROUPS

Explanation

The early days of building a Food Partnership usually take the form of informal gatherings of stakeholders. Early meetings typically focus on getting people involved and establishing who the key stakeholders are from the local authority, health sector, community food, business sector etc.

The next step for many Food Partnerships is to nominate a smaller group of people who are going to actively work to take the idea of the Partnership forward. This group could be called the Steering Group, steering committee, secretariat or management committee for example. This guide refers to the group as the Steering group.

Role of the Steering Group

In most instances the Steering Group leads on the development of the Food Partnership, the Action Plan and the Food Strategy.

Possible tasks of the Steering Group could include:

- Acting as a focal point
- Providing a forum for discussion and debate
- Motivating wider stakeholders to engage with action planning and strategy development
- Raising the profile of the Food Partnership and Action Plan
- Setting up and receiving reports from subgroups on particular themes e.g. food poverty, waste, procurement
- Helping develop more effective ways of getting things done
- Maintaining energy and enthusiasm

Who should be on it?

Steering Groups are generally made up of representatives from different sectors including:

- The Local Authority
- University and other academic institutions
- NHS and Public Health
- Community food organisations
- Food Businesses
- Third sector or community and voluntary organisations.

The simplest approach is to create a list of stakeholder organisations you want represented on your Steering Group and then ask each organisation to nominate a representative. Many Food Partnerships, however, stress the importance of getting the right individuals, with the right personality and vision, onto the Steering Group and that this is often more important than what people's particular 'role' is. So, it might be worthwhile investing time to really get to know your stakeholders and approach certain people within these organisations.

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Alternatively, you might want to establish a process for electing members onto your steering group. This approach has been adopted by a number of SFP members (Leeds Food Partnership are a good example) and demonstrates a commitment to a democratic, participatory and inclusive ethos and governance approach.

Responsibilities and expectations

It is helpful to be clear about what the responsibilities and expectations are of members of the Steering Group. This could be spelled out in your Terms of Reference for example (see the **TERMS OF REFERENCE WORKSHOP** tool) and could include:

- Showing a real commitment to making the Food Partnership work
- Not working to their own agenda but to that of the group and declaring any interests they have
- Attending a minimum number of meetings in order to maintain their membership
- Having capacity to take an active role in the Steering Group and between meetings
- Using any specific knowledge or experience to help the group reach sound decisions
- Helping to engender action through their ability to influence actions within their own organisations

Appointing a Chair

SFP Members identified 'Having a strong Chair' as a key factor contributing to their success. The Chair should:

- be an ambassador and influencer
- provide effective leadership for the Steering Group
- ensure actions from the Steering Group are taken forward, and
- ensure links with other strategic agendas.

In most Food Partnerships the Chair is elected by the rest of the Steering Group. A rotating chair has been used by a few, but this has been when the role of chair has been viewed more as chairing the meeting rather than acting as a figurehead for the Food Partnership.

Steering Group top tips

- It is important for partners to sign up to the partnership with the interests of the partnership in mind, rather than their own organisational interests.
- Spend time at the outset getting to know stakeholders to really work out who would be best on the steering group.
- Whatever the make-up of the steering group it is a good idea to enable the steering group to co-opt additional members to fill gaps in expertise should the need arise.
- A successful steering group meeting should question, provide ideas and offer fresh perspectives.