

Developing a Community Food Hub in Brantford/Brant: Feasibility Study



Brant Food System Coalition
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prepared by



Introduction

The Brant Food System Coalition has committed to building a resilient and diverse local food system for everyone living in Brantford/Brant. Through community food forums and conversations, the Brant Food System Coalition (BFSC) and community members identified an interest in the creation of a community food hub tailor-made for Brantford/Brant.

In winter 2021 Grand River Community Health (GRCHC), in collaboration with the BFSC received funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to undertake a Food Hub Feasibility Study. In the spring of 2021, the Coalition partnered with Openly, a social impact strategy, research and design firm, to lead a feasibility study assessing the community's interest, ideas and capacities for the creation of a community food hub. This report summarizes the learning and theory of change emerging from this process as well as actions and considerations for moving forward.

What is a Community Food Hub?

The Coalition began this journey with a vision for a community food hub as a welcoming, supportive space where people would come together to grow food, cook together, share food and meals, and advocate for good food. They imagined the community food hub would be animated with activities such as advocacy and education, cooking and eating together, community leadership development and collaboration.

These preliminary concepts have been tested and further developed through the feasibility study.





Community Engagement Findings

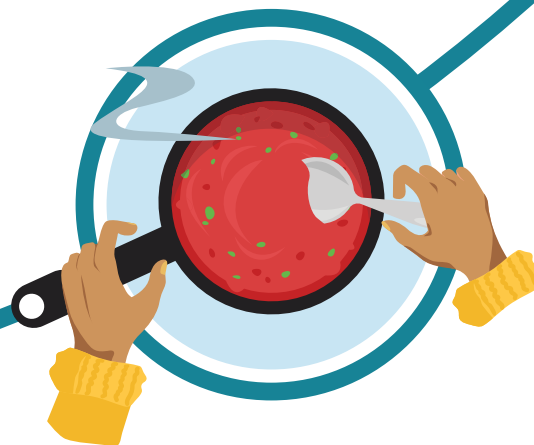
Process

Openly facilitated a comprehensive community engagement process between March and July 2021. Over 440 people participated in sharing their perspectives on the community food hub, including community members, community leaders, volunteers, frontline agency staff and Coalition members.

Engagement methods included:

- Key informant interviews (17 participants)
- Focus groups (14 participants), and
- Online and hard copy survey (412 community members).

Peer Researchers: A small group of people with strong knowledge and networks was recruited and trained to support the engagement of community members who may not have been reached through online distribution channels. The role of Peer Researchers was to strengthen community reach and reduce barriers to participation. They assisted community members by handing out and collecting paper surveys and helping people to complete the survey where required.



Themes and Highlights

The key findings are summarized below. Please see *Community Engagement Brief* for further details.

- The majority of stakeholders believe that a **food hub would benefit the community**.

According to the survey:

- **87%** agree that Brantford/Brant needs a welcoming space that brings people together around food.
- **88%** agree a community food hub would benefit the community
- **77%** are interested in participating in a community food hub

- There is a **need in the community for more:**
 - Access and spaces to prepare healthy, fresh foods.
 - Inclusive, welcoming spaces that bring people together around food.
 - Accessible information about local food projects and services.
- There is enthusiasm for **community food hub offerings**, including:
 - Partnering with community groups and organizations to bolster community food resources (eg. grants/funding, food distribution, kitchen spaces, community gardens, farmers markets).
 - Offering food-based educational programs (eg. cooking and gardening classes).
 - Facilitating a drop-in space where all residents can gather and host events, cultural activities, and celebrations.
 - Providing community members with a clean, safe, and secure space to access basic needs (eg. bathrooms, food prep space) and make connections to local service providers.





- **Key challenges and tensions** to consider in launching a community food hub include:
 - The success of a community food hub requires support from local politicians, the City of Brantford and funders. These relationships will require significant time and resources to develop.
 - Multiple interests can challenge collective goals and objectives. A successful community food hub would enhance community-driven collaborations and increase, rather than diminish, shared benefits and resources for diverse agencies and groups.
 - The physical location of a community food hub requires thought and creativity. While a single location could foster collaboration and joint programming, it may pose challenges to access for some community members.

- **Design principles** to guide the development of a community food hub include:

1. Listening and responding to the needs of community members, paying special attention to those who have lived experience of food insecurity.

“There’s poverty but people are also hungry for experience and connection.”

2. Location matters; community members need a location(s) that is easy to access.

“Location would be a huge selling point for a project like this”

3. Create an inclusive and friendly space where all community members experience dignity and the joy of food and community.

“This is not only about access to food but promoting the joys of food. That is also lost, [it is] seen as drudgery to prepare meals. Food should be celebrated too and that would be a message that is non-stigmatizing.”

4. Building strong partnerships can help enhance the community food hub’s impact.

“Community partners are key to engaging various pockets of folks who could use a food hub.”

Emerging Theory of Change

Through a series of facilitated workshops, the Coalition and other stakeholders discussed the community engagement themes and designed a preliminary theory of change to begin shaping the Brantford/Brant Community Food Hub. Through further engagement and dialogue, this theory of change should evolve to reflect greater clarity, agreement and alignment on the nature of activities and the measurable change that could be expected as a result.

A theory of change maps and clarifies the relationship between what we want to see and what we think it will take to get there. It includes:

- the **strategies** that will direct the actions the community food hub could take;
- the **expected change** that results from implementing those strategies;
- and the **long-term difference** the community food hub intends to make, as a result of those changes.



Our vision for a **COMMUNITY FOOD HUB** in Brantford/Brant



Our Theory of Change

Our Purpose: A connected food community in Brantford/Brant

If we...

Are guided by principles:

- Celebrate the joy of food to build community
- Embrace a spirit of reciprocity
- Honour everyone's gifts, traditions and skills
- Centre community members' aspirations and solutions
- Prioritize equity in all that we do

Connect, mobilize and inspire :

- Spaces and activities for people to share food and celebrate together
- Possibilities to learn about locally grown food
- Opportunities for all community members to access and prepare food
- Actions that uphold the right to good food for all

We expect...

A connected food system in which:

- People with a passion for food can grow their ideas
- Community groups share resources and work together
- Community members know about local food-related activities

A welcoming community in which:

- Food facilitates connection and belonging
- People are able to grow, prepare and share food
- People can access food supports with respect and dignity
- People know about and value our local food system

So that...

Everyone shares in the joy of food and community.



From Theory to Action

Getting Started

Activating this theory of change will require strong relationships, resources and new ways of working. The Coalition has identified three activity streams to bring the theory of change to life over the coming year:

- 1. Project Framework** - Create a project framework with clear, shared vision and purpose, as well as roles and plans to support communications, monitoring and ongoing refinement of the initiative.
- 2. Asset Mapping** - Develop a map of relationships and local food initiatives/assets that could be part of the Community Food Hub. This process will illuminate gaps as well as opportunities to build relationships and identify early wins.
- 3. Testing** - Drawing on the Asset Map, test ways to connect, mobilize and inspire the local food network in shaping the vision and building momentum. Identify 2-3 existing initiatives that are ready and willing to test the theory of change and to share their learning. These experiments will help to refine the theory of change and provide insights into the supports and infrastructure that will be required to initiate and sustain the Community Food Hub.

Future Considerations

Based on learning from the pilot year, further exploration may include:

- **Space** - Undertake an inventory of existing spaces for community and food initiatives. Engage community members in exploring both the need for a shared space(s) and potential location(s).
- **Structure** - Develop an organizing/governance approach and structure to facilitate purposeful decision-making.
- **Funding** - Develop a fund development strategy to sustain the Community Food Hub as it evolves over the long term.

See Appendix B for detailed Action Plan with timelines.



Moving Forward

By listening to 400+ community voices, we have learned that a community food hub has the potential to animate a joyful, connected food community in Brantford/Brant. The majority believe it would benefit the community and they are interested in being involved. Their ideas and inputs have shaped a theory of change and action plan to guide the next steps toward clarifying, testing and realizing this shared vision.



**GOOD
FOOD
FOR
ALL**



Appendix: Action Plan

Deliverable	Actions	Timeline - 2022											
		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
FRAMING													
Purpose: Key discussions and decisions to build Coalition's shared vision, purpose and action plan for this project.													
Project Framework	In 1 Coalition meeting, create a preliminary project framework that establishes next steps. The framework : 1. Sets the vision and purpose of the project; 2. Identifies Coalition leads and their roles to carry out the next steps of the project; 3. Establishes a communication process to share project progress and gather feedback with/from the Coalition.												
CONNECTING													
Purpose: To understand the current system of food stakeholders and initiatives underway; to prioritize and develop key relationships													
Asset Map	In 2 meetings, revisit and expand existing stakeholder map; begin to map relationships and food initiatives/assets, gaps and opportunities. This can be further developed over time with community members (i.e., online).												
Connection Strategy	Based upon Asset Map, identify relationship priorities and early wins - opportunities to build relationships, to start connecting people and initiatives												
TESTING & LEARNING													
Purpose: To experiment with building connections and momentum between people and existing food and community assets													
Learning Plan	Develop selection criteria for pilots based on asset map and readiness assessment.												
	Develop learning/evaluation plan to support testing.												
	Activate learning plan so that learning from pilots/prototypes informs future approach and activities to creating a connected food community.												
Select Pilots	Based on Asset Map exercise, identify 2-3 pilots to test the new theory of change.												
	Launch pilots. (Note: some pilots may not required funding and can launch right away. Pilots that require funds may need to wait until funding is available.)												

