



F.E.E.D. The Culture

feed. empower. engage. develop.

COMMUNITY STRATEGIES FOR FOOD JUSTICE IN RICHMOND

February 2020

Report by:
Richmond Food Justice Alliance &
Richmond City Health District



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BACKGROUND

Throughout Richmond and across the nation, low income residents and residents of color have dealt with food access issues for generations. Federal policies like segregation and red lining cemented countless families into the same socioeconomic statuses for decades to come, contributing to their access to healthful and culturally relevant foods. While various remedies have been pursued in Richmond, including the 2011 appointed Food Policy taskforce¹ and the 2014 appointed Richmond City Food Policy Analysis,² the systemic roots that cause low food access have yet to be addressed. Specifically, the policies that are implemented have rarely been informed by the past and systemic issues, nor designed or directed by the people most affected. Therefore the system of top-down determination continues to control peoples' destinies without solving the problems at hand.

Beginning in 2019, the community-led Richmond Food Justice Alliance (RFJA) partnered with the Richmond City Health District (RCHD) to develop F.E.E.D. the Culture - a program that connected the residents closest to the problem directly with food policy development. RCHD leveraged their resources, staff, and networks, compiling successful food policies from around the country and vetting them with experts from Harvard and Johns Hopkins to determine which were appropriate for Richmond. RFJA engaged with a committed group of impacted residents to develop the engagement campaign. This 8-month effort allowed real-life experience to guide the process of community engagement instead of the usual top-down strategies of research and statistics. Together, the organizations and community members developed a campaign to engage neighbors, family, and friends in determining the policies that would most affect their lives.

PROCESS

The community was involved from the name of the campaign to the design of the engagement strategy. F.E.E.D. the Culture was created to be a game that was both easy and accessible while still holding weight as an in-depth survey and serving as an educational tool at the same time. The group crafted this tool to be played by the people most frequently alienated, by considering accessibility issues, intentional engagement, and survey fatigue.

¹ Richmond, Virginia Food Policy Task Force: Report and Recommendations to improve food access in the City. Mayor's Healthy Richmond Campaign. July 2013.
http://www.richmondgov.com/ProjectFoodPolicyTaskForce/documents/FPTF_ReportJuly2013.pdf

² Richmond City Food Policy Analysis and Recommendations -- A report to the Richmond Food Access and Equity Task Force. Institute for Public Health Innovation. October 2016 <http://www.institutephi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Richmond-City-Food-Policy-Recommendations-Report-FINAL.pdf>



The language that was used in the game was pulled directly from beneficial policies that exist in other cities, translated to a common wording that is accessible by anyone, in both English and Spanish. The engagements were designed to accommodate people who had only a few minutes and offered more in depth engagement for people with more time to give feedback. This allowed for feedback to be gathered quickly at bus stops and with more detail at community events.

The full in-depth engagements were detailed, 10-15 minute interactions that empowered community members to select their top priorities within the listed policies. These offered opportunities for education focused on

historical inequities that carved out the current landscape of food access in Richmond, along with important conversations around our places in the food system and changing the future of our food. Policy examples included options within three main categories: eat fresh, buy local, and grow fresh. These categories allowed participants to select their top priorities and then, if they had time, go more in-depth within those topics.

All engagements were designed as conversations, *never surveys*, between residents and F.E.E.D. the Culture volunteers who also live in the neighborhoods most affected by low food access. The results presented are well-informed recommendations for food policy change, directly from the people that food policies most often affect.

"For change to be sustainable, the individuals that have the most at stake have to be involved in the development and implementation of solutions."

**-Omari Al-Qadaffi
Community Organizer**

GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

In order to have more information on participant priorities, without being too intrusive, we asked for participant age ranges and for the neighborhood they live in. Geographic context is provided in this report in order to help organizations and decision makers recognize the specific requests from residents of different neighborhoods and areas throughout the city.

Due to the history of segregation, red lining, and discriminatory urban planning that designed Richmond and many large cities across the nation; issues of food access look very different from neighborhood to neighborhood. A person's location, identity, and socioeconomic status compound to determine most of their experience with food access. People with the same income or who identify similarly, who live just a few miles apart, have dramatically different experiences with accessing foods. With this in mind, we sought to identify groups of food access concerns and priorities by different neighborhoods.



It is important to acknowledge the dramatic differences that continue to exist between neighborhoods in close proximity, as it is not uncommon to see low income neighborhoods budded up next to, or being gentrified by, wealthier populations. These different populations will have very different priorities and so familiarizing oneself with the areas is critical to understand the needs of the people there. Areas void of grocery stores will likely focus more on bringing one in than an area saturated with grocery stores, and an area with middle to high income residents will likely not have SNAP and WIC programs as a top priority.

Policy and decision makers, as well as individuals and organizations who influence change, must deeply familiarize themselves with the populations they are affecting before attempting to address community needs.

How neighborhoods and areas were determined:

When asking participants to name their neighborhood, we allowed them to self-identify the community they belong to, instead of staying strict to their current zip code or the name of the area according to the census tract. For example, some people named specific neighborhoods like Church Hill, while others named a larger East End region. The language people use to identify themselves is important to understanding their experiences. Furthermore, some participants explained that they recently moved, but that they lived in a certain area their entire life and preferred to list that area instead of the new location, as they still identified with that community.

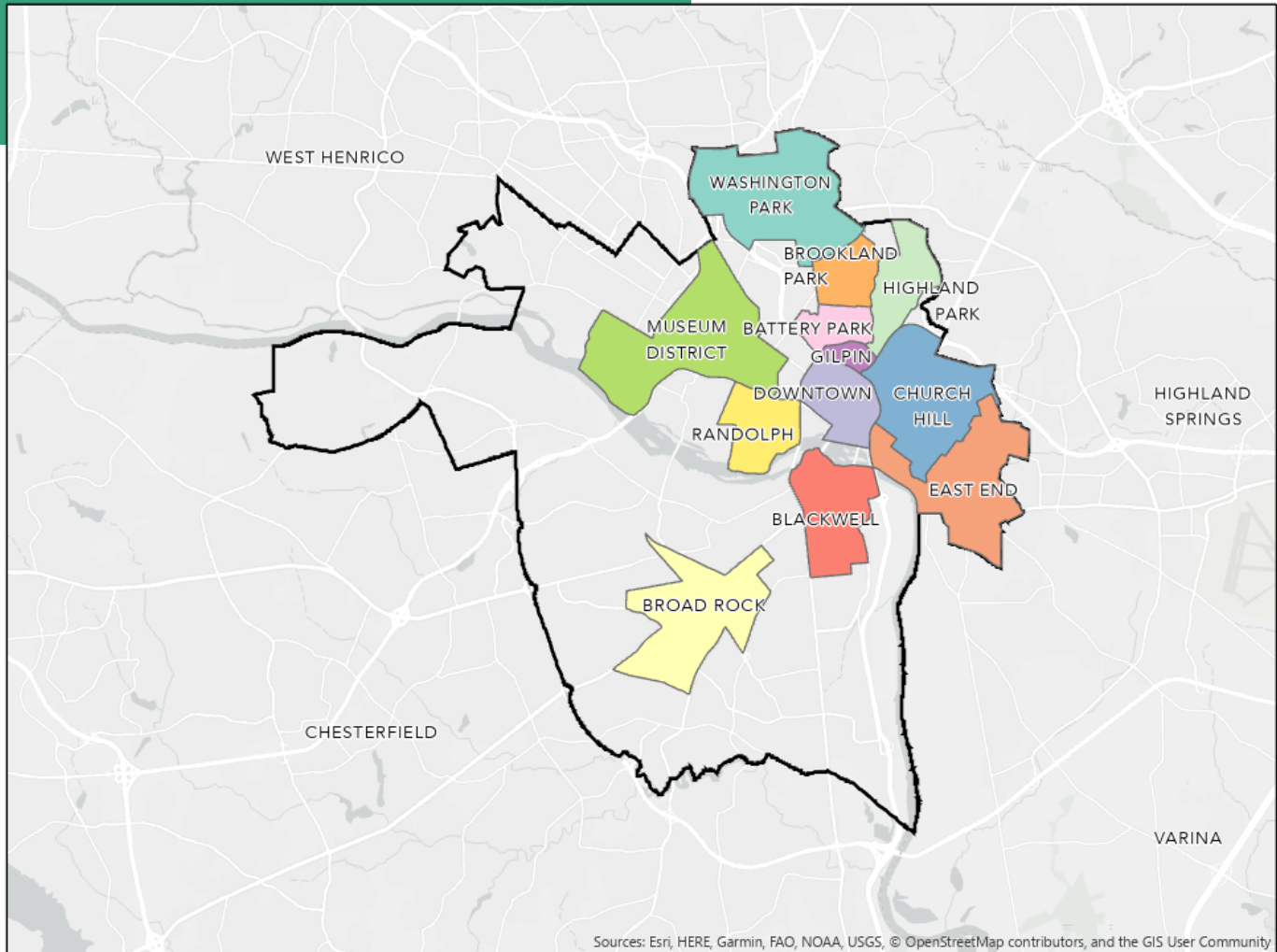
We received nearly 50 names of neighborhoods and areas around the city. In order to establish more clear correlations between geography and need, we grouped areas by more well-known area names, via consensus between long-term Richmond residents on how they would best identify the area names. Consolidating the list to 17 neighborhoods and areas has allowed for a more clear understanding of the different needs across the city.

Note that the colored regions are not representative of neighborhood or area boundaries, but instead represent a grouping of multiple areas with similar experiences under a common, recognizable name from that area. Therefore the absence of neighborhood titles on the map does not mean they were ignored.

The 17 consolidated neighborhoods and areas can be seen in the following Graphic 1.



Graphic 1 Neighborhoods and Areas



The colored areas show consolidated neighborhoods and areas that F.E.E.D. the Culture participants identified as where they live.



POLICY PRIORITIES

Below are explanations of the most selected food policies by neighborhood area.

Battery Park

Battery Park residents expressed interest in producing food, specifically they wanted **help making sure soil is safe** for growing food and asked that the City **prioritize funding to support growing food** in the City and **change zoning laws and provide staff** to support growing food and raising animals in the City.

Residents requested that the City make **access to healthy food a priority in long term city plans**, give businesses **tax breaks to encourage fresh food sales** in neighborhoods that have none, support all new small businesses to **accept SNAP and WIC**, and **establish City jobs** focused on increasing access to healthy foods.

Battery Park residents also asked to ensure that all students have the chance to eat breakfast by **providing it in the classroom**.

Blackwell

Blackwell residents expressed interest in growing food, specifically they wanted help **renting/purchasing land in the City** to grow food, help **getting water to community gardens and urban farms** to grow food, and **help in making sure soil is safe** for growing food. Residents also requested that **equipment be made available to develop vacant lots** to grow food and compost food waste.

Blackwell residents showed interest in having **summer meal programs serve fresh fruits and vegetables**, and requested that the City of Richmond give businesses **tax breaks to encourage fresh food sales** in neighborhoods that have none and **provide job training** for fresh food retailers.

Broad Rock

Broad Rock residents requested that **breakfast be provided in classrooms** to ensure that all students have the chance to eat it and that **summer meal programs serve fresh fruits and vegetables**.

Residents want the City to **make access to healthy food a priority in long term city plans**, put **more food programs into neighborhoods and community spaces**, ensure eligible **residents are able to enroll in SNAP and WIC**, and to **require nutrition standards for food served in government buildings** (DMV, Social Services, Rec Centers, etc.).

Broad Rock residents also requested that the City gives businesses **tax breaks to encourage fresh food sales** in neighborhoods that have none and **provide job training** for fresh food retailers.



Brookland Park

Brookland Park residents focused on schools, asking to bring **local farming and gardening programs into RPS curriculum** and to **set nutrition standards and regulate/enforce** nutrition standards.

Residents also requested that the City make **access to healthy food a priority in long term city plans**, give businesses **tax breaks to encourage fresh food sales** in neighborhoods that have none, **establish City jobs** focused on increasing access to healthy foods, and **prioritize funding to support growing food** in the City.

Brookland Park residents also asked that the City **require nutrition standards** for food served in government buildings (DMV, Social Services, Rec Centers, etc.) and that **summer meal programs serve fresh fruits and vegetables**.

Chesterfield

Chesterfield residents find it important that access to healthy food be made a **priority in long term city plans**, requesting that the City **set nutrition standards** and regulate/enforce nutrition standards, and ensure eligible residents are able to **enroll in SNAP and WIC**.

Chesterfield residents want **breakfast to be provided in classrooms** to ensure that all students have the chance to eat it and **summer meal programs to serve fresh fruits and vegetables**.

Regarding businesses, residents requested that the City give businesses **tax breaks to encourage fresh food sales** in neighborhoods that have none, and **give funding to healthy food retailers** in neighborhoods with limited access to fresh foods.

Church Hill

Church Hill residents requested that **breakfast be provided in classrooms** to ensure that all students have the chance to eat it and that **summer meal programs serve fresh fruits and vegetables**. They also asked to **require nutrition standards** for food served in government buildings (DMV, Social Services, Rec Centers, etc.).

Residents also requested that **City jobs be established** that focus on increasing access to healthy foods and job training for fresh food retailers be provided.

Church Hill residents asked that access to healthy food be made a **priority in long term city plans**, they are interested in **tax breaks for businesses** to encourage fresh food sales in neighborhoods that have none, and they want help **renting/purchasing land** in the City to grow food.



Downtown

Downtown residents were interested in producing food and requested that the City **prioritize funding to support growing food** in the City, help residents **rent/purchase land** in the City to grow food, and bring **local farming and gardening programs into RPS curriculum**.

Residents also requested that the City **hold public meetings** to talk about increasing access to healthy foods, include **food-related programs** in community improvement efforts, **require nutrition standards** for food served in government buildings (DMV, Social Services, Rec Centers, etc.), and encourage **summer meal programs to serve fresh fruits and vegetables**.

East End

East End residents requested the City **establish City jobs** focused on increasing access to healthy foods, **hold public meetings** to talk about increasing access to healthy foods, **give funding to healthy food retailers** in neighborhoods with limited access to fresh foods, **support all new small businesses** to accept SNAP and WIC, and put more **food programs into neighborhoods and community spaces**.

Residents also asked to have **salad bars up and running in schools** and to ensure that all students have the chance to eat breakfast by **providing it in the classroom**.

Gilpin

Gilpin residents requested that the City makes access to healthy food a **priority in long term city plans**. They focused on businesses, asking that the City **supports all new small businesses** to accept SNAP and WIC, **gives funding to healthy food retailers** in neighborhoods with limited access to fresh foods, and gives **businesses tax breaks** to encourage fresh food sales in neighborhoods that have none.

Residents also asked to put more **food programs into neighborhoods and community spaces**, to ensure eligible residents are able to **enroll in SNAP and WIC**, and to encourage **summer meal programs to serve fresh fruits and vegetables**.

Highland Park

Highland Park residents expressed interest in growing food, specifically they wanted help **renting/purchasing land** in the City to grow food, help **getting water to community gardens and urban farms** to grow food, and help **making sure soil is safe** for growing food. Residents also requested that the City **prioritize funding to support growing food** in the City.

Residents requested that the City makes access to healthy food a **priority in long term city plans**, encourages stores to **sell SNAP and WIC eligible foods** and **support all new small businesses** to accept SNAP and WIC.

Residents also want **summer meal programs to serve fresh fruits and vegetables**.



Highland Springs

Highland Springs residents requested that the City **establish more food programs into neighborhoods and community spaces** and create a full **list of food-related programs** (ex: food pantries, community gardens, etc.).

Residents also asked to have **salad bars up and running in schools**, to bring **local farming and gardening programs into RPS** curriculum, and to have **summer meal programs to serve fresh fruits and vegetables**.

Highland Springs residents also requested that the City give businesses **tax breaks to encourage fresh food sales** in neighborhoods that have none.

Museum District

Museum District residents expressed interest in growing food, specifically they wanted help **renting/purchasing land** in the City to grow food, help **getting water to community gardens and urban farms** to grow food, and **equipment be made available to develop vacant lots** to grow food and compost food waste.

Residents asked that the City make access to healthy food a **priority in long term city plans, improve transportation routes**, like sidewalks, bus routes, bike lanes, and street lights, for safe traveling to places that sell healthy food, and **require nutrition standard** for food served in government buildings (DMV, Social Services, Rec Centers, etc.).

Museum District residents also asked to have **salad bars up and running in schools**.

Randolph

Randolph residents expressed interest in growing food, specifically they wanted help **renting/purchasing land** in the City to grow food and asked that **equipment be made available to develop vacant lots** to grow food and compost food waste. Residents also requested that the City **prioritize funding to support growing food** in the City, **bring local farming and gardening programs into RPS** curriculum, and have **salad bars up and running in schools**.

Residents asked that the City make access to healthy food a **priority in long term city plans, require nutrition standard** for food served in government buildings (DMV, Social Services, Rec Centers, etc.), and give businesses **tax breaks to encourage fresh food sales** in neighborhoods that have none.

Randolph residents also asked that the City **create healthy food guide maps** for residents.



Surrounding Counties

Residents of surrounding counties expressed interest in growing food, specifically they wanted help **renting/purchasing land** in the City to grow food, help **getting water to community gardens and urban farms** to grow food, and asked that **equipment be made available to develop vacant lots** to grow food and compost food waste. Residents also requested that the City **prioritize funding to support growing food** in the City and **bring local farming and gardening programs into RPS curriculum**.

Residents also requested to put **more food programs into neighborhoods and community spaces** and to **encourage summer meal programs to serve fresh fruits and vegetables**.

It was also important for them to ensure that all students have the chance to **eat breakfast by providing it in the classroom**.

Varina

Varina residents focused on schools, requesting to have **salad bars up and running in schools**, to ensure that all students have the chance to **eat breakfast by providing it in the classroom**, and to bring **local farming and gardening programs into RPS curriculum**. They also requested that **summer meal programs serve fresh fruits and vegetables**.

Residents also requested that the City make access to healthy food a **priority in long term city plans**, give businesses **tax breaks to encourage fresh food sales** in neighborhoods that have none, **establish City jobs** focused on increasing access to healthy foods, and **create healthy food guide maps** for residents.

Washington Park

Washington Park residents focused on schools, requesting to ensure that all students have the **chance to eat breakfast by providing it in the classroom** and to bring **local farming and gardening programs into RPS curriculum**.

Residents asked that the City make access to healthy food a **priority in long term city plans**, **establish City jobs** focused on increasing access to healthy foods, **give funding to healthy food retailers** in neighborhoods with limited access to fresh foods, and give businesses **tax breaks to encourage fresh food sales** in neighborhoods that have none.

Washington Park residents also want **summer meal programs to serve fresh fruits and vegetables**.



Western Henrico

Western Henrico residents requested to ensure that all students have the chance to eat breakfast by **providing it in the classroom** and to encourage **summer meal programs to serve fresh fruits and vegetables**.

Residents want the City to **require nutrition standard** for food served in government buildings (DMV, Social Services, Rec Centers, etc.), create a full **list of food-related programs** (ex: food pantries, community gardens, etc.), and to include **food-related programs in community** improvement efforts.

Western Henrico residents also requested that the City make **equipment available to develop vacant lots** to grow food and compost food waste.

SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION

While policy priorities varied by neighborhood, a commonality between them remained that there were clear channels for implementing the community-identified solutions. Many of the residents' priorities could be achieved by working closely with local departments to improve or adapt existing programming, rather than require a vote by City Council.

Below is a framework of how changes to city programs and policies can be done holistically with the community leading the effort, and organizations and local leaders working alongside them. *Italicized text is an example of one of the community priorities and a path for change.* Institutions such as Richmond Public Schools and Parks and Recreation are tasked with promoting student success and community well-being; the graphic below provides one example of how these agencies can work together to achieve these priorities. The guide focuses on likely stakeholders and is not an exhaustive list.

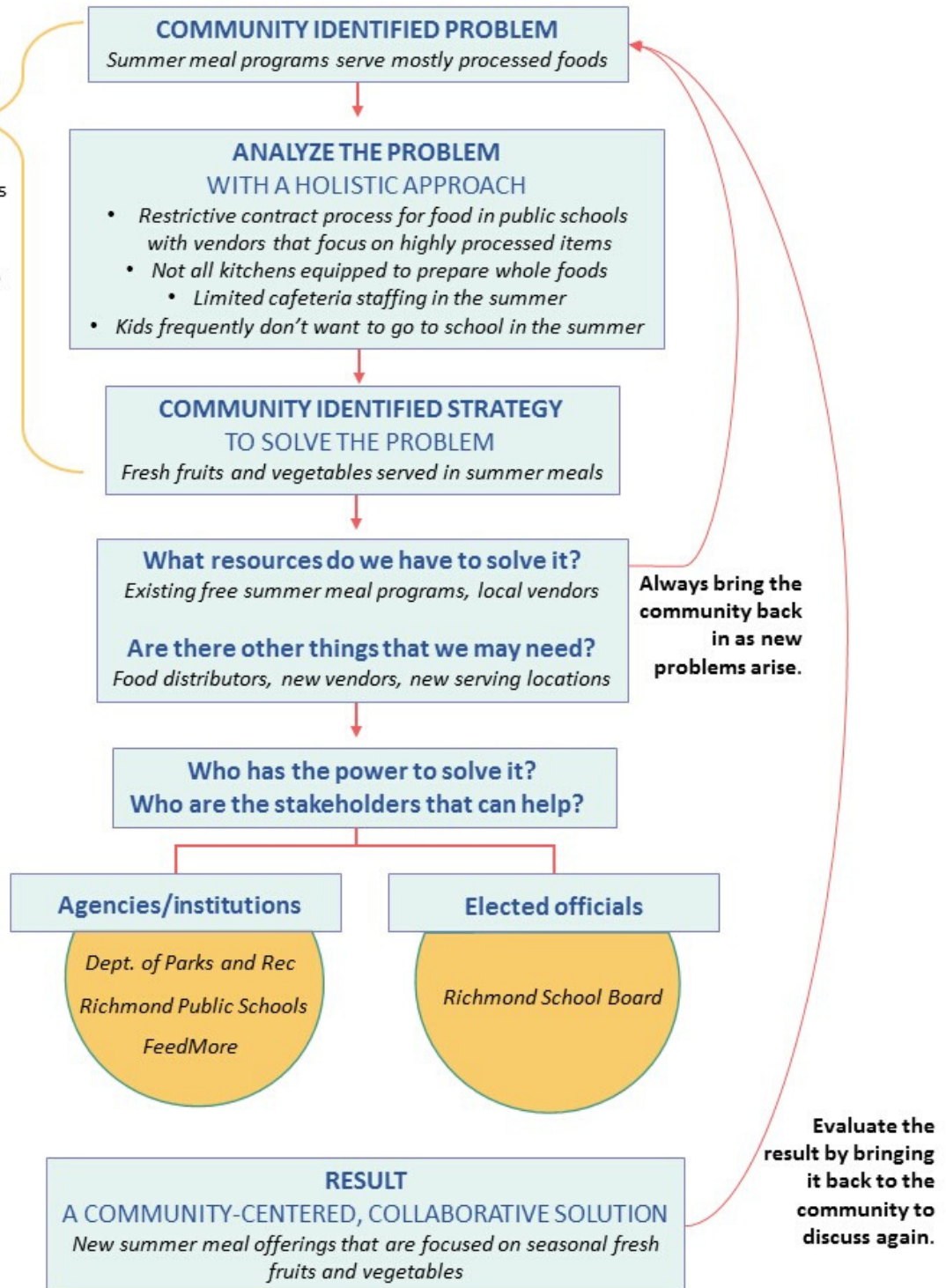


Graphic 2

IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

**Feed Empower
Engage Develop
the Culture**

F.E.E.D. the Culture organized these steps with Richmond residents. As the framework suggests, change should begin with community leading this portion. Then the work shifts to collaborate with stakeholders and decision-makers.





EXPLANATION OF HOLISTIC SOLUTIONS

Solving the problems that residents face starts with the residents themselves. Internal subject matter experts [residents] should be met with external resources [organizational support] to collaborate on solutions, but leadership must come from within the affected community. Organizational support can come in the form of funding, staff, expertise, or space. F.E.E.D. the Culture provided community members opportunities to be more than just heard, but rather to lead, empower, engage, and develop, offering the people most impacted by low food access secure organizational leverage. A holistic approach establishes an inclusive environment where community-driven solutions can thrive for current and future communities, neighborhoods, and generations.

Solutions developed outside of and/or without those impacted are often founded on a lack of experience with the actual problem. This disconnect can lead to a lack of community participation, ultimately resulting in the low impact of the preconceived solution. This continues a false narrative that these communities are not personally invested. The reality being they were never considered in the development of solutions to begin with.

Systemic oppression is at fault for the current state of food access in the City of Richmond. With a history of intentional setbacks and separations, marginalized communities were created through redlining practices and the ultimate construction of the I-95 highway. Within the past and current capitalistic societies, this made these areas undesirable for quality consumer options, causing decades-long nutrient droughts. This has resulted in neighborhoods being targeted for their lower property value instead of the needs of the residents. Development has brought resources and opportunities to these areas which are not attainable nor accessible for the residents that most need them. Instead it increases property values and brings in less affordable and culturally incompetent options. Gentrification is never the way to increase food access.

Community members can, and will, lead when they are served justice. Holistic decision-making approaches are required to produce sustained change and create a just future.



MAKING THE CHANGE

This report serves as an important step in the process of F.E.E.D. the Culture, but it is not the end of the work. The feedback included in this report will now be brought back into the communities that made the suggestions, and utilized to inform, educate, and collaborate on tangible solutions. In the spirit of this work, this report serves as part of the larger collaborative circle that brings community members, decision makers, and organizational leadership together to address community identified problems, in search of long-term solutions.

We expect decision makers to: take these suggestions seriously, keep these priorities in mind as they make decisions, work to make change throughout our communities, and work holistically in their approaches. Along with getting feedback from different community members on what change they would like to see, F.E.E.D. the Culture was designed to be a testimony to the power of community driven initiatives. As a partnership between municipal entities and community driven grassroots organizing, F.E.E.D. the Culture worked hard to include community members throughout every step of the process, and to put their voices at the forefront of every initiative.

We hope that decision makers and organizations will see the value in this endeavor and replicate it in their own work. Community members are the experts on community problems, and so only through this sort of collaboration, where community voices are elevated and taken seriously, can sustainable change be made.



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Organizations/Businesses

- American Heart Association
- Bizport Printing
- Greater Richmond Fit4Kids
- Nomad Deli & Catering Co.
- Richmond City Health District
- R.I.S.E. Up
- Virginia Correctional Enterprises**



Outreach Sites/Events

- Arthur Ashe Junior Athletic Center
- Birdhouse Farmers' Market
- Brookland Park Community Celebration
- Celebration Church & Outreach Ministry
- East End National Night Out
- Faith Community Baptist Church
- Heart & Soul Brew Fest
- New Bethel Christian Fellowship
- Peter Paul Development Center
- Providence Park Baptist Church
- Richmond City Resource Centers
- Richmond Public Libraries
- Robinson Theater Community Arts Center
- Sacred Heart Center
- Shalom Farms' Healthy Corner Stores
- Six Points Innovation Center
- Social Services
- The HEALing Hub
- Urban Hang Suite
- WeCare Community Festival
- Wesley Memorial United Methodist
- Various public transit stops and shopping centers



Training Sites

- Six Points Innovation Center
- Richmond Public Libraries
- VCU Health Hub

Technical Support

- Richmond City Health District
 - Chronic Disease Prevention Team
 - Data Analysis, Jared Wright
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 - Graphics, Cheyenne Varner

Financial

- Feedmore
- American Heart Association



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