

Food councils form differently in each community; and these groups often follow a similar arc to becoming an established group. Community Food Strategies names that process in these four stages of food council development to support growing interest and to share lessons learned. This is not a one-size-fits-all approach, but does offer some best practices and a general order in which activities might happen.

Four Stages of Food Council Development

 <p>SEED</p>	<p>SEED Stage: a community considers whether a food council might be worthwhile.</p>	<p>During this phase, the idea of a council takes formation in a community. Key stakeholders express interest in initiating a cross-sector group to address food and farm issues and form an organizing group or task force to consider the feasibility of council development.</p>
 <p>START-UP</p>	<p>START-UP Stage: a task force begins to design the council while engaging the community.</p>	<p>The organizing group learns more about food councils and engages the community to hear their experiences. By the end of this phase, the community at-large, including its local government, has provided feedback and shown support for the council. A group has worked to create a structure for the council, members are identified, and the council is born.</p>
 <p>GROWTH</p>	<p>GROWTH Stage: new council members finalize their structure and prioritize issues.</p>	<p>Newly formed councils finalize or refine their council structure, finalize and/or approve their council charter, and initiate public communications. They build support systems and identify community priorities. During this phase, the council is beginning to take action together and develop more strategic partnerships.</p>
 <p>MATURE</p>	<p>MATURE Stage: the council develops strategic plans and collaborates with other councils.</p>	<p>Typically, after the first 3 years, a council has developed systems to support changing membership, leadership, and priorities over time. Evaluation and assessment become critical aspects of this phase. Is the council doing what it set out to do? How can it improve? Mature councils update their strategic plans, make adjustments to their systems, and both contribute to and rely on the network of food councils for support.</p>

The Stages of Food Council Development

Components of Success by Development Stage				
	 Phase I: Seed	 Phase II: Start-up	 Phase III: Growth	 Phase IV: Mature
Governance & Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with local government and key stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit members • Draft charter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affirm purpose • Finalize charter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support leadership transitions
Strategic Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify community assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get educated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify priorities • Expand partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update strategic plans
Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host a meeting to gauge interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information learned • Define opportunities for community engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information with community • Create community engagement opportunities • Build social capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to the network • Continue relationship building
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn about past efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect feedback from the community • Assess assets & needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create metrics or success indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect data and evaluate progress • Make adjustments
Food Council Actions by Development Stage				
Assess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn and document the history of past collaborative food system efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support baseline community food assessment or local food inventory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to learn from the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support ongoing data collection and assessment of the food system
Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene community stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create communication systems to keep everyone informed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to convene stakeholders with work groups and events • Build partnerships and collaborate with other organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with neighboring food councils • Collaborate with partners on initiatives
Educate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information at stakeholder meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host forums to learn from each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information with community • Create community engagement opportunities • Build social capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create fact sheets and information sessions to share with the community, decision makers, and other leaders
Recommend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine if there is consensus to move forward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend establishment of food council • Release a food council charter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss local policies, practices, and procedures that impact the food system and provide input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give input on policy decisions