

NIAGARA



Security Network

A collaborative partnership among organizations, community groups and community members with a shared interest in improving food security across the Niagara region.

OVERVIEW

WHO WE ARE: The Network is composed of community members, community groups, networks, non-profit agencies, charitable organizations, faith groups, individuals with lived/living experience, government, public health, business and agricultural sectors, and others working to address food insecurity in Niagara.

We are collaborating to strengthen and improve the food security system, especially for vulnerable, marginalized and at-risk individuals in the Niagara region.

INTENDED IMPACT

Within ten years, 80 per cent of food insecure households in Niagara will have access to affordable, healthy, culturally appropriate food, at the right time and in the right place.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE:

DEVELOPED BY, AND IN CONSULTATION WITH, COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND PARTNERS

ACTIVITIES & STRATEGIES

ACCESSING: Ensuring people have the right food, at the right time, in the right place.

- Identify gaps, service needs and opportunities
- Develop a pathway to appropriate food when, where and how people need it

**GROWING,
HARVESTING &
SECURING**

Diversification of food
Cultural inclusion

- Enhance food growth, harvesting and preservation
- Grow and/or secure culturally diverse food

**LOGISTICS,
DISTRIBUTION &
STORAGE**

Advance systems
collaboration and
opportunities

- Identify systems collaboration opportunities
- Pilot logistics, distribution and storage collaboration

**PREPARING
& EATING**

Person centred supports
Food literacy, education
& skill development

- Co-create a collective education program
- Enhance understanding, knowledge and skills

OUTCOMES

AFFORDABILITY

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
& ENGAGEMENT

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE
FOOD

LOCAL, NUTRITIONALLY
COMPLETE FOOD

ADVOCACY

FOOD LITERACY, EDUCATION
& KNOWLEDGE

TIMELINESS

COLLABORATIVE &
INCLUSIVE FOOD SYSTEMS

PATHWAYS TO FOOD

IT'S ALL CONNECTED

The Collective recognizes the **significant interconnectedness** of the strategies and activities within the Theory of Change. We attribute this to the reality that the way people grow, access, store, distribute, share, use and eat are all intertwined.

A coordinated effort to address these areas offers a great opportunity to make the systemic changes needed to reduce food insecurity. We are interested to hear about how others work aligns with the outcomes of increased food security.

Many of the people, agencies, groups, networks, partners and community working to address food insecurity are already aligned with one or more of the **Theory of Change strategies**; and through the validation process they shared that they saw a role for their programs, supports and services in the proposed strategies and activities.

Everyone has an important role to play in building a stronger food system in Niagara. For more information about our work and how you can get involved, please contact a member of the planning team.



KEY ACTIVITIES over the next 12 months aligned with the THEORY OF CHANGE

ACTIVITY	GOALS
1 Knowledge Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Network and community members remain up to date on the progress of the Collective's work • Raise awareness of issues and the Collective's work to address the issues facing Niagara
2 Community Partnerships and Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the engagement and reach of the broader network • Identify, engage and nurture community partners, in particular those relevant to the food system in the Niagara Region, as defined by the Food Systems in Niagara Map*
3 Pathways to Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage individuals experiencing food insecurity to understand the pathways to food in the community • Identify and develop appropriate pathways to food programs, services and supports • Update and maintain Niagara's Food Asset Map
4 Strengthen Food Literacy, Education and Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase community food literacy opportunities related to growing, preserving, and cooking, in particular for marginalized and vulnerable populations • Co-create a regional food literacy education program • Engage and educate donors and community members to shift from a charity model towards a collaborative social justice model
5 Research and Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize varying sources of data for measurement, including, but not limited to, Public Health Ontario, the Canadian Community Health Survey, the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System, Canadian Income Survey - Food insecurity and unmet health care needs report from the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM), Statistics Canada data and local Niagara data to inform the Collective's work and future progress
6 Develop Shared Measurement Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and use of a shared measurement framework and shared measures (gathering, synthesizing and acting) to inform the Collective's work and future progress • Use locally relevant and disaggregated data to help identify priorities and opportunities, and to uncover structural inequities and root causes
7 Strengthen Collaboration Among Food Security Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify food systems collaboration opportunities • Co-create with service providers, Network and community members and Niagara Food System players, a collaborative and inclusive food system • Identify and support grassroots food security initiatives
8 Develop and Implement Pilot Projects to Improve Food Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and develop pilot projects including criteria and key learning opportunities • Determine feasibility of pilot project opportunities and plan for project implementation • Evaluate pilot projects and future scalability
9 Explore Culturally Appropriate Food Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and support grassroots and culturally appropriate growing initiatives • Identify opportunities to grow and/or secure diverse and culturally appropriate food for Niagara • Ensure that no matter where, when or how, culturally appropriate food is available in Niagara
10 Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for policy change related to income security • Advocate for food systems changes that improve food security, justice and food access overall

*https://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/03/NiagaraConnects_FoodSystemPlacemat2017.pdf

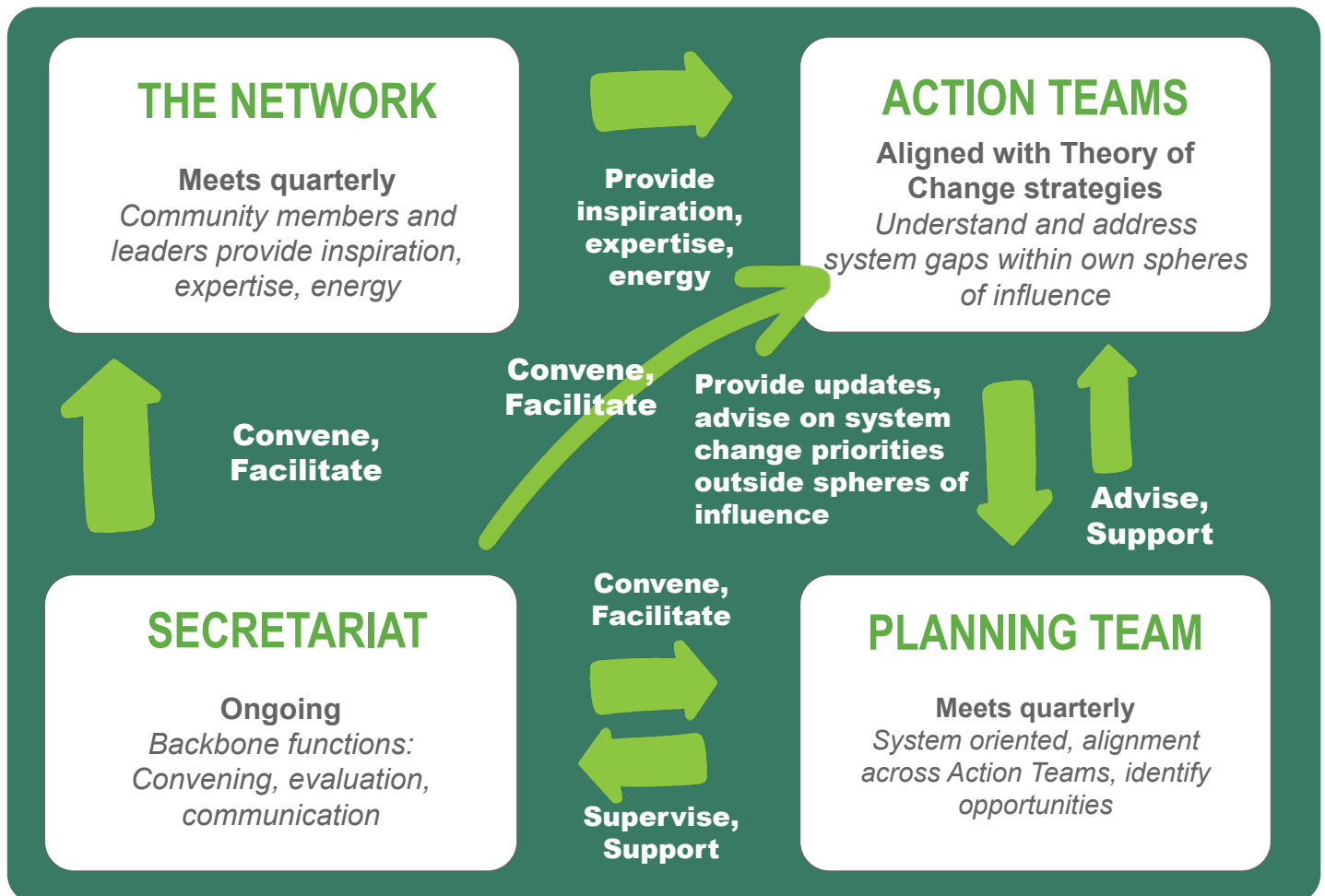
GOVERNANCE MODEL: HOW WE WORK TOGETHER

All members and teams in the governance structure operate on a consensus basis in a culture that fosters relationships, trust, respect, and generative learning. The principles of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility will inform authentic and responsive engagement with the broader community to ensure all voices are heard and included.

THE COLLECTIVE represents all members within the Network. Members may be any individual, group, agency, representative or community partner who is interested in improving food security and food justice. The Network has a broad mandate to represent community voices in the work of the collective and to support its goals. The Collective meets quarterly, in person and virtually, to share updates on strategies, activities, projects and emerging issues and opportunities.

ACTION TEAMS are aligned with the four strategies of the Collective's Theory of Change. Action teams are groups of people from the Collective working on specific strategies and activities to achieve outcomes. Action teams meet monthly, in person and virtually, to share updates and work on specific activities relating to the overall strategy.

THE PLANNING TEAM are Collective members who take an active leadership role in steering the work of the Network and provides leadership and guidance to achieve strategic goals. The Planning Team meets quarterly, in person and virtually, to share their knowledge of changes and emerging trends in the broader ecosystem, hear updates from Action Teams, other experts, and key informants, and advise and support new opportunities. The Planning Team is a system-level strategic planning body that sets the strategic direction and provides oversight of the Network and its progress toward its goals.



NETWORK COMMITMENTS

- Placing food security, justice and sovereignty at the forefront of all that we do (*definitions are included in the appendices*);
- Building a culture that fosters relationships on integrity, trust, inclusivity, equity and diversity for all;
- Working towards a strengthened Niagara Food System¹; and
- Co-developing and co-implementing innovative and sustainable solutions with people we serve and our partners.

KEY FINDINGS, LEARNINGS AND INSIGHTS

1. Recognition that **income is directly tied to food insecurity** and there will be limitations to what we can directly affect.

The Collective recognizes that income is directly linked to food insecurity - people simply don't have enough money to be food secure, in particular people who are vulnerable and marginalized. Household food insecurity is strongly linked to poverty in Canada. **70% of households who rely on social assistance in Canada are food insecure. But it also greatly affects a significant portion of the Canadian workforce. 60% of food insecure households rely on wages and salaries as their main source of income².** Individuals and families working low-wage jobs simply can't earn enough to put good food on the table. We will monitor local income and economic reports such as the Cost of Living Niagara report to understand how income impacts food insecurity.

2. The language used and interpretation are important to consider (i.e. food insecurity).
3. Developing knowledge through communication and education is key to ensuring people know how to access supports.
4. We must maintain a person-centred approach.
5. The system is complex and may require focus in one or more areas.
6. Education for donors and the general public is important.
7. Transportation in Niagara continues to be a barrier.
8. Other barriers can affect food insecurity.
9. Listen to community members.
10. **'Do with, not for'** Co-create solutions for food security with community members.



GET INVOLVED IN THE NETWORK

We invite you to learn more and to get involved in the Network and our work to make the Niagara region a food secure community for everyone.

JOIN THE NETWORK Network members are always welcome. Members and volunteers are encouraged from all sectors, and is open to anyone interested in achieving food security in the Niagara region. Members may be individuals, community agencies, groups, faith groups, partners, funders, agricultural, government or business representatives and are encouraged to participate in a way that is meaningful to them.

JOIN AN ACTION OR PLANNING TEAM Network members are encouraged to actively participate on a Network Action Team or Planning Team. Action Team members are focused on, and aligned with, the four strategies of the Collective's Theory of Change and are working on specific strategies and activities to achieve outcomes. The Planning Team members take an active leadership role in steering the work of the Network and provides leadership and guidance to achieve strategic goals.

VOLUNTEER Volunteers play a key role in the community and with many food programs, supports and services. If you are interested in volunteering with community gardens, kitchens, meal programs or food programs, we can help connect you to a local food security service provider.

Learn more about food insecurity, justice and sovereignty, the role food plays in community and with community members, and how it affects the broader ecosystem and our overall health and wellbeing.

Contact a planning team member below to learn more, or online:



NIAGARA FOOD SECURITY NETWORK

[unitedwayniagara.org/community-initiatives/
niagara-food-security-network](http://unitedwayniagara.org/community-initiatives/niagara-food-security-network)



FOOD SECURE CANADA

foodsecurecanada.org



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NIAGARA FOOD SECURITY NETWORK PLANNING TEAM MEMBERS

Amanda Ali

United Way Niagara

amanda@unitedwayniagara.org

Callie Anderson

Niagara Region Public Health

Callie.Anderson@niagararegion.ca

Carolyn Askeland

Community Support Services of Niagara

caskeland@cssn.ca

Christine Pritchard

Niagara Chapter Native Women Inc.

wh.ncnw@gmail.com

Erin Riseing

Niagara Community Garden Network

erin@niagaracommunitygardens.ca

Kavalpreet Grewal

Niagara Region Public Health

Kavalpreet.Grewal@niagararegion.ca

Helen Castonguay

Cultivating Hope Foundation

helen@cultivatinghope.ca

Justin Braet

BGC Niagara

J.Braet@bgcn.ca

Michael Mondloch

St. Barnabas Anglican Church

michael@stbarnabasanglican.ca

Tamara Coleman-Lawrie

United Way Niagara

tamara@unitedwayniagara.org

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

FOOD SECURITY exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. There must be stable availability, access and utilization of food³.

FOOD JUSTICE seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly. Food justice represents a transformation of the current food system, including but not limited to eliminating disparities and inequities⁴.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations⁵.

FOOD INSECURE HOUSEHOLDS Food insecure households are households with inadequate, insecure incomes and limited, if any, financial assets or access to credit. The level of household food insecurity can be categorized into one of three categories:

Marginal - Worry about running out of food and/or limited food selection due to a lack of money for food.

Moderate - Compromise in quality and/or quantity of food due to a lack of money for food.

Severe - Miss meals, reduce food intake and, at the most extreme, go day(s) without food.^{6,7}

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE FOOD itself can be understood a number of different ways, but generally refers to the acknowledgment that food must be considered within a cultural framework. Culturally appropriate food does not only refer to the food itself, but also holds space for the cultural practices around the preparation and consumption of the food, considering where, how, and with whom it is eaten. These factors all further contextualize what culturally appropriate food is, with the recognition, then, that different people have different appreciations for what is and is not culturally appropriate food.

Culturally appropriate food needs to be considered in food systems working towards food security for all. For example, this underscores the importance of bringing in culturally and diverse food into programs and spaces like food banks, nutrition education programs, school lunch programs, community gardens. This makes the procurement of culturally appropriate food potentially challenging and worthy of ample consideration, as it is dynamic, and what is “good” and culturally appropriate food for one person may not be good and culturally appropriate food for another. Working to understand and consider culturally appropriate food is necessary for food system initiatives geared towards ending food insecurity and increasing food sovereignty.⁸

NETWORK COLLECTIVE IMPACT PARTNERS



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3 An Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security - <https://www.fao.org/3/a1936e/a1936e.pdf>

4 Food Secure Canada: Food Justice - <https://foodsecurecanada.org/community-networks/food-justice>

5 Food Security vs. Food Sovereignty - <https://change4children.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Food-Security-vs-Food-Sovereignty.pdf>

6 Household Food Insecurity: Proof- <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/#:~:text=Understanding%20Household%20Food%20Insecurity,a%20matter%20of%20public%20policy>.

7 Canadian Income Survey: Food insecurity and unmet health care needs, 2018 and 2019- <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2021009-eng.htm>

8 Culturally Appropriate Foods: Community Commons - <https://www.communitycommons.org/entities/f9418c94-8118-41a5-8ba2-8619939578e2#:~:text=Culturally%20appropriate%20food%20does%20not,with%20whom%20it%20is%20eaten>.