

Municipal Election Engagement Toolkit for Food Security Advocates



Created by:

Joyce de Boer

Member of Golden, BC's Local Food Matters Society

jnot_deboer@hotmail.com



Melissa Hemphill

Food Security Coordinator for Community Connections (Revelstoke) Society

melissa.lei.hemphill@gmail.com



Meghan Molnar

Community Dietitian on the Sunshine Coast and Powell River

meghan.molnar@vch.ca

Maurita Prato

Executive Director of the LUSH Valley Food Action Society

maurita@lushvalley.org



Aaren Topley

Co-Chair of the Victoria Urban Food Table

aaren.topley@gmail.com



Jill Worboys

Board Member and Treasurer for the Central Okanagan Food Policy Council

jill.worboys@interiorhealth.ca



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INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLKIT

Creation

This toolkit was created by a working group of food security advocates to help you find ways to engage with your local constituents around food issues during a municipal election. By researching and pooling information we present you with the what, why, who, when and how to guide you through this endeavour. We hope that you find the toolkit helpful in your efforts to work with local government in regards to your local food system.

Disclaimer

While we have done our best to put together accurate information, this toolkit is a work-in-progress and we encourage your feedback. Please send comments to Melissa Hemphill, Food Security Coordinator in Revelstoke, BC: melissa.lei.hemphill@gmail.com and we will do our best to update this toolkit for future use.

How To Use This Toolkit

Each community will have different key issues around food security.

There are some key questions that are useful to ask so that you can focus your strategy and get the most out of this toolkit. A helpful model is the POP model which asks you to first get clear on your PURPOSE, Desired OUTCOMES and then your PROCESS. Ask yourself or your team:

1. Purpose: Why? Why are we undertaking this? What is the Purpose?
2. Outcome: What are the specific Outcomes we want to accomplish as a result of this action?
3. Process: What steps will we take to achieve the outcome and fulfill the purpose?
4. Other useful questions: What resources (people, partners, money, political structures, organizational reputation....) do we have that can help us?
5. What issues do people in my community care about? Where is the political will? What issues already have momentum?
6. What action could give us the biggest return on investment?
7. What key dates and time frame are important considering the upcoming elections or other policy processes or deadlines?

ELECTION INFORMATION

Important Dates for 2018 Municipal Election

- Candidates Declaring: July - good time to meet with candidates to influence their platforms
- Nomination Period: Sept. 4 - 14
- Campaign Period: Sept. 22- Oct 20
- Withdrawal Deadline: Friday, October 10th
- Election date: Saturday, October 20th
- Ideal window for forums/publications is: September 22nd - October 9th

General Local Election Information

The provincial government website contains helpful information about municipal elections in BC including the election process, election administration, voter eligibility and running for local office:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/local-governments/governance-powers/general-local-elections>

Elections BC administers campaign financing and advertising rules for local elections and assent voting in B.C. under the Local Elections Campaign Financing Act, as well as voter registration information: <https://elections.bc.ca/>

CivicInfo BC assembles all-candidate lists and on election night provides full results to the public and their media partners: <https://www.civicinfo.bc.ca/election>

ELECTION ENGAGEMENT 101

Why engage?

Local elections can have a significant impact on a community's well being. Local governments are responsible for many policies, programs and services that affect the social structure and health of a community. Even though municipal politics can have a huge impact on the well being of a community, Canadians tend to be less interested in municipal politics than they are in federal or provincial politics.

Examples of local government policies and programs that affect well being:

- 

Community Vitality
Neighbourhood planning, Community centres, Festivals, Promoting volunteering, Creating opportunities and safe spaces for informal interactions among diverse groups
- 

Democratic Engagement
Citizen committees, Planning open houses, Maximising use of internet/technology to increase knowledge and participation, Ensuring citizens feel welcome at city hall
- 

Education
School board trustees, Childcare programmes, Providing access to interest courses that support lifelong learning
- 

Environment
Waste management, Public transit, Water supply and quality, Urban design that integrates community gardens and green spaces
- 

Healthy Populations
Public health units, Health inspections, Supporting multi-sectoral initiatives focused on prevention and root causes
- 

Leisure and Culture
Parks and recreation facilities, Libraries, Supporting partnerships that identify local needs and provide access to arts, culture, and recreational opportunities
- 

Living Standards
Living wage policies (like in New Westminster, BC), Affordable housing permits, Supporting policy and initiatives that provide physical and economic access to healthy food
- 

Time Use
Coordinated local transportation network, Mixed residential/commercial urban design, Promoting staggered work times and teleworking — all to address "time crunch"

From: <https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/blog/post/importance-voting-municipal-elections>

How to engage with local candidates during an election campaign

1. **Find out who your candidates are:** Candidates will be declaring during the summer and early fall; July and August would be a good time to meet with candidates to influence their platforms. Nomination Period is September 4-14 and the Campaign Period is September 22- October 20.
2. **If possible, look to engage earlier in a campaign:** Closer to polling day parties will want to focus more on door-to-door campaigning and getting their vote out, so will have less time to engage on policy issues. As such, if you have the time and capacity to offer engagement opportunities earlier in the election, do so.
3. **Tell candidates about what you do, not just what you want:** If you do get to speak to candidates, then by all means do set out any clear policy asks you have at both a local and national level, but it's also really important to get across to them the work you do and how you make a difference to their local community. If candidates understand and appreciate what you do, they're far more likely to listen to you when you want to influence them.
4. **Use the election as a first step, not one-off engagement:** Elections are a great way to get to know politicians, but bear in mind that you will want to develop this further after the election. Remember as well that losing candidates can also be important for your cause, particularly if they are local councillors, so don't feel like you have to focus all your attention on the winner once the campaign is over.

WHY FOOD SECURITY IS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

Background

Food Security exists when all community residents obtain a safe, personally acceptable, nutritious diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes healthy choices, community self-reliance, and equal access for everyone.

Working towards the ultimate goal of food security requires a focus on both food systems and household food insecurity.

A **food system** is understood as the production, harvesting, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management of food. This descriptor of the food system can occur at multiple geographical levels, including (but not limited to) provincial, bio-regional and community levels. It can include social, economic and biophysical processes that influence the food system.

Household food insecurity is when a household worries about or lacks the financial means to buy healthy, safe, personally acceptable food.

Individuals have their own definition of what food security is depending on their experience. Someone who works in a food bank will have a different definition of food security compared to a farmer. It's good to recognize these differences and that they all contribute to the broad definition of food security!

Our current food system which is globally dominant and commodity driven is not sustainable, and is not supporting the health of our community members. In addition, the cost of living in BC is increasing and many people are experiencing food insecurity.

Food security is complex and requires collaboration and commitment across sectors to ensure programs and policies support access to, and availability of, healthy, sustainable food. There is opportunity for citizens across BC to bring forth food security as an important issue for local governments to address. The role that local governments have in addressing food security are outlined in the next section.

Many communities across BC are facing challenges related to rising housing costs, homelessness and the opioid crisis. It is important to recognize these issues alongside the importance of food security.

Food Security Statistics and Evidence for BC

The following section can help you build your case for food security policy work at the local government level, use the statistics and evidence that align with the context of your community.

Population and/or demographics, household income, employment, health status, homelessness, hunger and/or poverty, agriculture: Stats Canada:

<https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/start>

- Stats Canada provides various levels of data, some community specific, others at a provincial level.
- Data categories list on the main page - will have to search for specific information and community.

Local Government Data

- Search your local government website for relevant data. Look for relevant information and data in Agriculture Plans, Official Community Plans and Regional Growth Strategies
- ie. Agriculture: actively farmed land, amount of ALR land, land zoned as agriculture.
Community food security: community garden, community kitchens, urban agriculture

Agriculture Census BC -

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/statistics/census-of-agriculture>

Fisheries and Oceans: <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/stats/stats-eng.htm>

Fruit and Vegetable consumption

<http://communityhealth.phsa.ca/GetTheData/SearchByTopic>

- A provincial health goal is to increase fruit and vegetable consumption. This can be achieved through food security work.
- To find the fruit and vegetable consumption for your area:
 - Choose the topic Health Behaviours
 - Choose Location Type: only Health Service Delivery Area and Health Authority levels are available.
 - Choose Indicator: Fruit & Vegetable consumption

Household Food Insecurity Rates- to be used for poverty reduction

- Provincial Health Services Authority Food Security Resource
 - [Interior Health](#)
 - [Fraser Health](#)
 - [Island Health](#)
 - [Northern Health](#)
 - [Vancouver Coastal Health](#)

Economics of Agriculture

Connect with your local Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Commission, etc. for your local agriculture economic information.

Provincial information:

- Agriculture provides employment - Having an income-earning job provides not only the economic resources to support a healthier lifestyle, but also a sense of identity and purpose and a stronger social framework, resulting in greater physical, mental and social health.
- According to the BC Ministry of Agriculture, employment in agriculture peaked in 2005 at 36,300 and experienced a near steady decline until 2012, when agriculture employed 22,439 people. In 2014, there were 22,937 people in British Columbia directly employed by agriculture
- Agriculture is an economic driver in British Columbia. The total contribution of primary agriculture (production) to British Columbia's GDP has been roughly 0.6% each year for the past 5 years. Total farm cash receipts were \$2.9 billion in 2014 and have been near this level for the past few years. This total is split nearly evenly between crop products and livestock/poultry products with approximate values of \$1.4 billion and \$1.5 billion, respectively.

Agriculture & Health

- Farmland preservation helps to maintain a level of food production that contributes to food self-sufficiency.
- Food self-sufficiency supports healthy eating.
- Greater availability of locally produced fruits and vegetables may increase their consumption.
- Food self-sufficiency in BC is increasingly important as extreme weather will affect production in California, which is currently where 40%–50% of BC’s supply of fruits and vegetables comes from.
- Spending time in green environments, which could include agricultural areas, may contribute to positive mental and physical health outcomes.
- The availability of culturally appropriate/traditional fresh fruits and vegetables can be an important part of healthy eating for immigrant populations.
- Indigenous foods, foodlands and waters contribute to healthy eating and physical health, and are core parts of culture and identity for Indigenous populations.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ROLE IN FOOD SECURITY

Local Government Civic Responsibilities

Local governments role in supporting food security aligns with many of their responsibilities:

- Housing regulation
- Transportation such as street design and public transit (shared with Provincial Government)
- Water
- Wastewater treatment
- Garbage and Waste Removal
- Planning and Zoning By-laws
- Finances and Taxation

For more information about how to navigate the complexities of food policy and local government, please see [*Working with Local Government on Food Policy - A Toolkit for Civil Society*](#)

The following table shows examples of how food security aligns with local government roles:

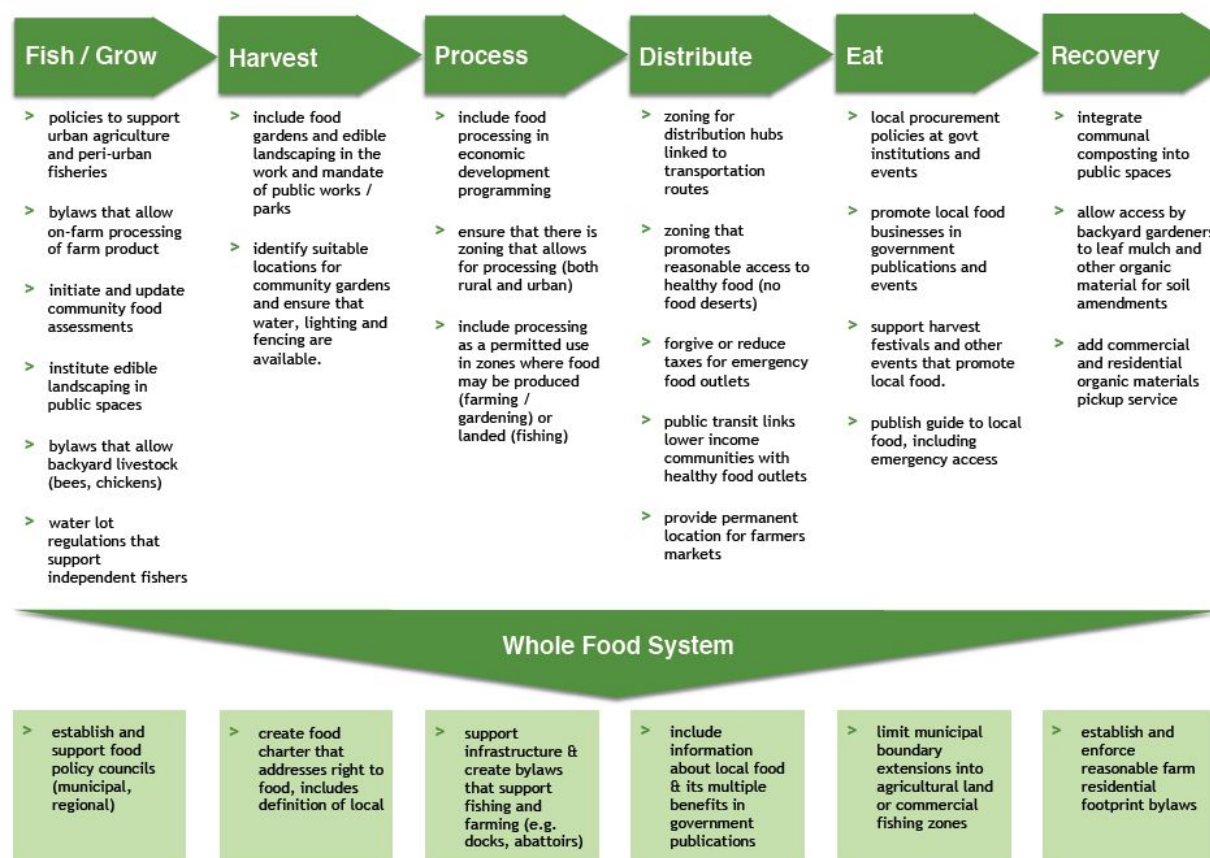


Table is from [Working with Local Government on Food Policy - A Toolkit for Civil Society](#)

For more information about local government's role in food security, see the resource section of this toolkit.

Agricultural Land Reserve

Local Governments have a key role to play in supporting the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). The ALR is overseen by the [Agricultural Land Commission](#). Their purpose includes: to encourage local governments, first nations, the government and its agents to enable and accommodate farm use of agricultural land and uses compatible with agriculture in their plans, bylaws and policies.

Local governments can develop strong policies that ensure protection of ALR. All applications for changes within the ALR (eg. exclusion, non-farm use) have to go through the local government first. They can also develop policies and zoning by-laws to protect farmland, such as house floor size regulation. The Ministry of Agriculture's [Local Government Bylaw Standard and Farm Bylaw](#) has more detailed information on what can be regulated at a local government level.

Kwantlen Polytechnic University's Institute for Sustainable Food System recently released a report: [Protection is not Enough](#). This report highlights policy suggestions for various levels of government to move beyond protection to facilitate and support appropriate use of agricultural land.

Cannabis: With recreational cannabis set for legalization October 17, 2018, local governments have the power to prohibit cement-based, industrial-style, cannabis-production bunkers on ALR. However, they are not able to prohibit outdoor soil based cannabis growing. The potential impact on food security is unknown. Let your local government know that preserving ALR for food production is important and the impacts on food security of growing cannabis in the ALR is not yet known.

Poverty reduction

Household Food insecurity is when a household worries about or lacks the financial means to buy healthy, safe, personally acceptable food. Poverty is the root cause of food insecurity.

Municipalities have the opportunity to engage in poverty reduction efforts including partnerships with organizations such as the Union of BC Municipalities and can influence provincial and federal politics.

Local government can also support community organizations and citizens to combine action on food with advocating for coordinated action on poverty.

They can also advocate the provincial and federal government to move ahead on a basic income guarantee and other policy actions to ensure all British Columbians have the income they need to eat a healthy diet.

Ways to frame food security as an important issue for local governments

- Supporting a local food system contributes to **economic development**.
- An environmentally sustainable food system can reduce **climate change** impacts.
- Advocating for **poverty reduction** supports a healthy and thriving community where everyone can afford to live and support the local food system.

OPPORTUNITIES

Effective Engagement Strategies

Things to be thinking about when creating your engagement strategy:

- Each community will be different in how they approach election engagement.
- Consider collaboration with other groups that have alignment with food security areas. ie. Environmental sustainability, poverty reduction, affordable housing etc...
- Tack onto existing events to highlight election food issues.
- Collect and use stats in your engagement - ie. benefits of purchasing locally, food bank usage, # of local producers, cost of food report, etc.
- Remember that candidates are likely not well-informed on food security issues - engagement with them is an opportunity to increase their knowledge on food security issues and their connectedness with other local issues such as environment, economic development and social wellbeing.
- Consider whether candidates align with established political parties and what impact that might have on how they govern. For example, the topic of poverty can be framed differently, depending on which political party you're engaging with - check out these resources developed by the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition: [Liberal](#), [NDP](#), [Green](#).
- There is an opportunity to engage with candidates prior to the end of the nomination period - find out who they are now and meet with them to try to influence their platforms.
- Building relationships with candidates helps to reinforce the importance of the food security issues that you are highlighting in your community - consider canvassing with candidates that understand the issues.

Examples of Past Platforms that Include Food Issues

Gregor Robertson:

- Add 20 new food truck permits
- Vancouver School Board breakfast program: \$400,000
- Additions to the Greenest City Fund: \$250,000

Olivia Chow:

- Make it easier for friends-of-parks groups to improve parks (ie. use parks for more uses including farmers' markets, food events and pumpkin parades around Halloween)
- In the short term taxes should be made fairer and more progressive — wealthier citizens can afford to contribute more than people living on modest incomes
- Partner with other levels of government, foundations and non-profit organizations to provide an additional 36,000 students with healthy, nutritious food at school
- Renew our 1,200 existing private rental housing towers with new zoning, with an eye to encouraging lively street-level commerce and public spaces. (ie. Farmers Market)

Engagement Actions

1. Host an in-person All Candidate Forum
 - a. Who already does this in your city?
 - b. This can be challenging - limited time for candidates to share their thoughts
2. Questionnaires and written questions for candidates
3. Meet with candidates one-on-one
 - a. Introduce yourself and state your affiliations
 - b. State your issue and why it's important to you - share stats and stories
 - c. Ask their position on this issue
 - d. Provide a "hard ask" - ask them to commit to an action/funding/support
 - e. Publish the meeting in some way to hold them accountable to what they said

Communications

A key part of election engagement is to share the issues and the outcomes of that engagement with members of your organization and community. Build a team of supporters to help you with clear, concise communications throughout your engagement.

- Work with newspaper to print questions and answers (consider setting a word limit)
- Contribute to a Facebook Page where answers to questions are posted
- "Letters to the Editor" can highlight issues and platforms
- Create infographics or score-cards that compare candidate platforms on specific issues
- Urge and remind people to vote, especially those who are like-minded about the issues important to you
- Timely press releases about your engagement actions
- Door-knocking to discuss election issues and urge people to vote
- Organizational newsletter to share issues and engagement opportunities
- Share ideas for small individual actions that supporters can take to help build momentum in your strategy (such as writing letters, attending debates, signing petitions, etc.)

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK CANDIDATES

Depending on your community and your candidates, the following questions could be tailored to have a regional or an urban focus.

Questions that look for action items may be more strategic than those looking for budgetary answers.

If developing your own questions, there is a way you can frame your question so that it provides an education opportunity for the respondent: $A+B=C$, Do you agree with C

A= statistic, B= action, C= impact

For example: 50% of the land within Kelowna city limits is in the ALR, much of which is underutilized. Encouraging landowners of underutilized land to enter into long-term lease agreements can support new entrants who are establishing farm businesses. Do you agree with local governments having a role in advocating for longer lease terms?

Questions from Kamloops 2017 Mayoral Bi-election:

Education, governance and capacity building:

- What do you think the City can do now and in the future to increase awareness of food insecurity and address related issues such as poverty and affordable housing?
- If elected Mayor, what activities would you encourage the City to take to achieve a sustainable local food system (e.g. buying locally, organic food systems, protecting pollinators, etc)?
- How can the City help build neighborhood capacity for food production knowledge?

Food production and land availability: How would your leadership support expanded urban agriculture, community gardens, edible landscaping, etc?

Distribution, retail and access: What part could the City play in helping its residents to have equal access to healthy and local food?

Questions from the 2018 Ontario provincial election:

- Will you set targets to lower rates of diet-related diseases?
- How will you support community-based food security programs, such as community food centres, community kitchens and community gardens?
- How will you support local food and farmers? Will you protect local farmland and preserve the Greenbelt?

Questions from BCFSN 2014 election primer:

- What do you think is the municipalities' role in sustainable food systems?
- What would be your priority project related to food and agriculture over your term?
- A Food Charter sets out a vision for a health oriented, local and equitable food system. If elected, would you support the adoption of a Food Charter for your jurisdiction?
- Is protecting farmland for future generations important to you? Do you agree that all lands in the ALR should remain within the ALR? Are there other ways that we can ensure land is available and accessible for growing food into the future?
- Food production and transportation is a source of greenhouse gas emissions. How do you rate the production of food regionally, in an attempt to mitigate climate change?
- Would you support the use of municipal lands and infrastructure to support the development of local food systems, for example for farmers markets, demonstration sites, farm incubators, leasing land to farmers, community gardens, food hubs?
- Would you support a municipal food purchasing policy, embedding a 10% target for municipal outlets having food being produced from within the region?
- What would you do to ensure that vulnerable populations have access to sufficient, good, local food?

- Would you support the development of a Regional Food Policy Council? What would you see as their most important task?
- Would you advocate for the municipality to work with other levels of government on food security issues? What issues do you see as being a priority for this region to work on with other levels of government?

RESOURCES

[Working with Local Government on Food Policy - A Toolkit for Civil Society](#)

[Filling our Plate with Local Government](#) - Webinar

[Healthy Built Environment Linkages Toolkit](#)

[Supporting Health Equity Through the Built Environment](#)

[Best Practices in Local Food: A Guide for Municipalities](#)

[The Urban Farming Guidebook: Planning for the Business of Growing Food in BC's Towns & Cities](#)

[Plan H: Healthy Eating and Food Security](#)

PROOF - Food Insecurity Policy Research:

- [Fact Sheets on household food insecurity.](#)
- [Implications of a Basic Income Guarantee for Household Food Insecurity](#)

Kwantlen Polytechnic University Institute for Sustainable Food System:

- [Protection is not Enough](#)
- [Food Policy Database](#)

[Seeding the City: Land Use Policies to Promote Urban Agriculture.](#)