

ACT Region- Food Council

DRAFT Terms of Reference and Governance Principles (rev. 10 October 2016)



Contents

Background	2
Role	2
Scope, Aims and the Objectives	3
<i>Establishing relationships and networks through engagement.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Policies and directions.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Information and research</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Education and awareness</i>	<i>4</i>
Evidence from best practices	4
Possible approach for financing	6
<i>Possible financial needs</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Sources of finance</i>	<i>6</i>
Works Cited	6

Background

The ACT region is a home to many producers, retailers and consumers who are passionate about introducing new and alternative ways to serve food to this region. Their concerns are understood in terms of ‘food sovereignty’. ¹

The Conservation Council, in collaboration with other ACT Region organisations, has instigated an initiative to introduce a ‘Food Council’ in the region to work collectively to bring about a strong, sustainable food system that furthers food equity within the ACT region.

Role

The role of the ACT Region Food Council is to connect and empower the participants of the Australian Capital Region’s food system to engage and identify opportunities that facilitate, strengthen and build on a local food system within the region that provides healthy food at affordable rates and promotes food sovereignty and environmental sustainability within the region.

¹ *Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food that is produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. It extends their right to define their own food and agricultural system. Declaration of Nyéléni, the first global forum on food sovereignty, Mali, 2007*

The Food Council's objective is to support sustainable practices to be introduced within the food system, and encourage communities to participate in building an ecologically robust and resilient food network across the Australian Capital Region. The Food Council will examine food related issues within the ACT region, and work in a collaborative fashion to develop food system solutions and foster coordination across food sectors.

Scope, Aims and the Objectives

The scope, aims and objectives of the council is to support sustainable practices to be introduced within the food system, and encourage communities to participate in building an ecologically robust and resilient food network across the ACT Region.

The council will balance its work on the basis of human and financial resources available to it at any given time. It intends to achieve its role by delivering in the following areas.

Establishing relationships and networks through engagement

The council shall:

- Operate as a voluntary body that utilizes its resources to facilitate research initiatives and provision of support structures.
- Engage stakeholders, including indigenous groups, ACT Government, local government and the NSW state government in order to facilitate joint participation in developing and informing on food management knowledge for establishment of sustainable food plans and systems within the ACT region.
- Engage producers and consumers of the ACT region to work together in stimulating demand for regenerative agricultural practices, and supporting this through education about food wastage, and its repercussions.
- Establish networks with food advocacy groups who can raise consumer awareness in order to reduce food wastage.
- Encourage sustainable local food producers to enter and survive in the market, through supporting programs like farmer incubators, and seeking to establish food hubs within the ACT region
- Establish networks with the ACT and the federal government to support the transition to a 'barrier-free' local food production model, and ensuring that the labeling requirements include details about the carbon footprint and food origin known on the packaging of the item itself.
- Support alternative organizational structures for new and evolving entities that facilitate local food consumption, e.g. co-operatives like food co-op shop along the food supply chain.

Policies and directions

The Council shall:

ACT and Region Food Council: DRAFT Terms of Reference and Governance Principles

- Facilitate drafting of a time-bound consumption target for local food from the ACT region. This target should result from a collective dialogue sharing between the relevant food stakeholders, and should be specific, measurable, realistic and appropriate in the circumstance.
- Support discussions between the ACT food producers and the government such that regional produce targets are set for the government's procurement policy.
- Advocate policies that deliver biodiversity outcomes and achieve a balance between the food production and conservation values.
- Support programs that promote and establish ACT region food brands, divert wastage from landfill to compost, and make such compost available to producers at minimal rates.
- Facilitate access to local produce for consumers.
- Recognize the potential to export gourmet produce to regions with geographical proximity.

Information and research

The Council shall:

- Support a comprehensive study about the food production and consumption patterns within the region, to identify knowledge gaps within the ACT food systems that act as an impediment to a locally driven, sustainable food system.
- Research and evaluate the sustainability risks embedded within the current food system of the ACT, and recommending measures that can potentially reduce such immanent risks from materializing.
- Potentially support technological systems that connect interested customers with local farmers, thus fostering the demand for local farmers' produce.

Education and awareness

The Council shall:

- Continue to support food literacy in the ACT region to improve public awareness about issues such as ecological footprint.
- Advocate policies that eliminate food wastages.
- Support integrating sustainable food practices and food literacy within curriculum.

Evidence from best practices

Literature pertaining to the operational and strategic management of Food Councils across the globe indicates structures and complexities. The research assessment conducted collaboratively between Food First and the Community Food Security Coalition in 'Food Policy Councils- Lessons Learned' drew on evidence from extensive literature reviews and testimony from 48 interviews with the people most involved in Food Policy Councils. (Alethea Harper, 2009)

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The following are some of the best practices recommended for Food Councils that are either already established, or seeking to come into existence:

- The Councils should include participants representing all five sectors of the food system (production, consumption, processing, distribution and waste recycling). Other participants that could represent include: food justice advocates, educators, nonprofit organizations, concerned citizens, government officials, farmers, grocers, chefs, workers, food processors and food distributors.
- The councils facilitate an overarching assessment of the food systems as soon as they are established.²
- The new councils should establish critical success factors, and the key performing indicators that can be used as metrics for evaluation of the performance in different areas. Some of these can include, e.g. the overall impact of the council on public health (social) and job creation (economic).
- The member base of the council should be drawn from different sectors of the food economy, and should be representative of different socio-economic backgrounds.
- Advising policies that are practically based rather than idealistic in nature; e.g. suggestions relating to the re-routing of weekly bus lines to farmers markets in order to improve access to fresh healthy food.
- Not overly depending on one strong personality, organization, or political figure to represent the council, nor one source of finance. As a general rule, no more than 25% of the funding should come from one source. This ensures objectivity and independence of the council.
- Working collectively to encourage participation from the under representative communities, and acting as a liaison between food system stakeholders.

Additionally, the ACT Region Food Council can adopt number of ways in which it can seek to engage community participation in order to facilitate its objectives. Some of the best and recommended practices include:

- a) Gathering public input through organizing communing listening sessions across the region. This will initiate interaction between the participants, and help the food council revise its missions and objectives in light of public opinion.
- b) Council meetings could be structured in a way that furthers public participation. For example, making meetings open for all and conducting these outside the office hours to ensure maximum attendance.
- c) Closely working together with organizations that have strong ties with the community, e.g. other sister organizations and councils, in order to expand the community outreach.

² Overarching assessment involves a comprehensive study of the consumption and production patterns within the ACT region.

ACT and Region Food Council: DRAFT Terms of Reference and Governance Principles

- d) To ensure diversity and equal representation from the community, application process can be included in the later years of the council.
- e) Hosting special educational events and workshops, e.g. food summits or conferences can educate more people about the problems in hand.
- f) Understanding ways that could possibly bring participation from the youth in workgroups, and matters pertaining to the affairs of the food council. This could be through, for example, student internship programs or making a youth sub-council.

The Food Council will aim to adhere to these best practices to the best of its abilities, and to an extent that is practically permitted in view of the regulatory, operational and commercial realities surrounding the Food Council. (Fitzgerald, April 2014)

Possible approach for financing

Possible financial needs

- A. Legal and regulatory fees in setting up the ACT Food Council.
- B. Expenditure for day-to-day operational activities.
- C. Any ad-hoc sitting fee that is incurred in having external advisors on council.
- D. Research costs for assignments undertaken on behalf of the ACT Food Council.
- E. Any other incurred, or to be incurred expenditure that is necessary for conducting the affairs of the ACT Food Council.

Sources of finance

In collaboration with other groups possibly including the Canberra Business Chamber, other business groups and the government, the ACT Food Council intends to prepare a business case for its activities that collectively delivers economic, ecological, social and cultural outcomes without prejudicing or prioritizing one for, or over another. This business case will be used to seek financial support for operations and specific projects from a range of sources noting that no more than 25% of the funding should come from one source to ensure the objectivity and independence of the council.

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Works Cited

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