USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

LOCAL FOOD, LOCAL PLACES

EVALUATING PROCESSES, OUTCOMES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

In Fall of 2020, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service contracted with Washington State University Extension to conduct an evaluation of the Local Food, Local Places (LFLP) technical assistance program. The purpose of the evaluation is to identify the impacts of the LFLP program at the community level, factors that impact success, provide recommendations to improve future programming, and recommend strategies for evaluating the program in the future.

METHODS

To evaluate the program a mixed-methods research design was used. This design included ten Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) sessions with 21 LFLP community members from 17 communities across the United States, and six key informant interviews with USDA and EPA program staff, and LFLP facilitators.

Transcripts of both REM sessions and interviews were analyzed thematically. For REM sessions, the transcripts were coded using the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) to identify community impacts.[1] For the interviews, a grounded, inductive approach is used to identify key themes including factors that impact success and recommendations for improvement.

KEY FINDINGS

The REM analysis reveals that while LFLP communities had successes in each of the seven community capitals, the most impacts were in social, built, and natural capitals. This is due to most projects focusing on creating community gardens (natural capital) and farmers markets (built capital) early in the process. To successfully develop these projects the communities leverage the social capital generated through the LFLP workshop to identify key partners for collaboration. The communities also successfully generated considerable financial capital both early in the process and throughout LFLP activities. Communities have received over $4.3 million to support their LFLP activities from funders external to the LFLP program. This includes grants, donations and other funding mechanisms that are needed to establish community gardens and farmers markets early in the process, and longer-term revitalization projects focused on downtown restoration and infrastructure improvement. However, many early efforts rely on volunteer efforts and depending on how they are structured and what incentives are in place, they may not be sustainable in the long-term, especially community gardens.

This analysis also reveals factors that impact success such as bonding social capital (community networks), bridging social capital (collaborations with external networks and across groups within communities), strong leadership, and how the LFLP facilitation process helps generate both social and cultural capital that is leveraged for success.

The interview analysis also reveals several factors that impact success according to interviewees, including a strong steering committee (strong leadership), scope and scale of goals, geography, and collective sense of place for LFLP projects, and community connectedness. Common challenges identified by interviewees were a misalignment between community expectations and the output of the LFLP process, loss of resources, and unforeseen loss of leadership.

1 The Community Capitals Framework (CCF) is a systems approach to analyzing community and economic development. The framework examines community assets across seven capitals: natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial and built capitals.

Both REM and interview analysis show that communities often start small and leverage early successes for bigger wins later in the process. In fact, starting small and celebrating early successes is encouraged by the LFLP facilitators. Based on both REM and interview results, this suggestion is key to community success as many communities start with small wins which then helps generate enthusiasm for larger efforts. This is especially apparent when analyzing financial capital as many communities are awarded smaller grants and donations from outside funders for short-term projects following the LFLP workshop, but they are able to leverage these early awards for more substantial grants and funding later in the process for their larger infrastructure projects.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Several program recommendations are suggested based on interviews and REM analysis.

- Establishing a stronger online community of practice for LFLP graduates.
    - This community of practice will enable communities to share their experiences, provide regular updates on their progress, and share resources and technical assistance to help them achieve their goals and maintain enthusiasm for their projects.[2]
- Providing technical assistance to help communities find other resources for building and maintaining activities.
    - Bringing external partners to the LFLP workshop is a great start but many communities need help identifying additional resources and funding to implement their projects, especially projects involving transportation and other aspects of infrastructure.
- Revising evaluation criteria for applicants around factors of success.
    - Ensuring the application criteria can evaluate whether the community has a strong steering committee, strong leadership, and applicants have a strong connection to the community for which they are seeking funding, such as being located in that community, will enhance the likelihood of success for those communities ultimately selected by hopefully avoiding issues that have hindered progress in the past.
- Formalizing a three-tiered category system for workshop applicants
    - This tiered structure can help categorize communities by their readiness to participate in LFLP and provide resources for communities based on this status. Tier 1 would include communities who are not ready for LFLP and need advice and resources to make them better candidates. Tier 2 would include the communities who are ideal for the current LFLP process; they have a strong steering committee and need to develop an action plan. Lastly, Tier 3 would include communities that already have an action plan, but are well-positioned to receive more technical resources to support their planning.

2 LFLP does have a Facebook presence. While this can provide a setting for a community of practice, social media on its own is not a community of practice. A community of practice that is specifically designed for sharing resources, tools, experiences among LFLP participants is recommended.

LFLP EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Future evaluations of the LFLP program should be mixed-methods due to the complexity and diversity of LFLP activities and goals. Some potential recommendations for analysis include:

- Analysis of secondary data created by communities
    - From REM sessions, it is clear that many communities create reports and other documents on their activities. The participants were also excited to share this information with the researchers. These items can be collected and analyzed by researchers to examine program impacts. This includes content analysis and potentially quantitative analysis depending on what data is maintained by communities.
- Surveys of LFLP members
    - As LFLP maintains contact information for steering committee members, a regular survey of steering committee members across communities could routinely collect activities and impacts. This survey could easily be distributed through an online community of practice.
- Community Specific Ripple Effects Mapping Case Studies
    - This project completed several sessions of Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) of the LFLP program with representatives of LFLP communities across the United States in a single session. A single session of REM for this evaluation included only one or two members of a single community. Typically, an REM session is conducted with multiple community members to obtain the full story of the program and its impacts. The approach used in this evaluation has limitations when trying to evaluate distinct communities or activities. To fully capture the impacts of the program and the specific links between activities and impacts, REM sessions with the entire Steering Committee (or most of the Steering Committee) of a community is needed to provide an in-depth analysis of specific successful communities and activities which would provide more insights into factors that impact success.
- Steering Committee Interviews with All LFLP Communities
    - As many of the previous methods will have selection bias issues (as less successful communities are less likely to respond), an effort to interview points of contacts or steering committee members in these other communities will provide valuable information on program success and how to improve the program in the future.

INTRODUCTION

LFLP is sponsored by the USDA and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and assists communities in the United States to cultivate local food systems through collaboration across federal, regional, state, and local organizations. LFLP strives to "protect air and water quality, preserve open space and farmland, boost economic opportunities for local farmers and businesses, improve access to healthy local food, and promote childhood wellness" (EPA, 2022). The LFLP program was born out of EPA's focus on smart growth which emphasizes development and revitalization that encourages work with local, state, and national organizations to "encourage development strategies that protect human health and the environment, create economic opportunities, and provide attractive and affordable neighborhoods for people of all income levels" (EPA, 2022). Smart Growth led to the development of the Local Foods Local Places program and was instrumental in shaping the LFLP process and goals, which helps develop action plans that link food system needs and goals to various aspects of economic development, downtown revitalization, infrastructure development, community health and accessibility and much more.

The purpose of the LFLP evaluation is to better understand how the current LFLP process and program work for communities, identify steps that can be taken to improve the process and program, and establish community related outcomes from the program. Additionally, the research team will provide recommendations for future evaluations of the program and assessments of the potential economic impacts for communities. To assess the impacts of the program, the research team led by WSU developed a multi-method research protocol that included semi-structured interviews with key informants and Ripple Effects Mapping with community members involved with their local LFLP efforts.

This report presents findings from Ripple Effects Mapping sessions with participating communities and semi-structured interviews with key informants involved in the LFLP program (facilitators, EPA staff, and USDA Staff).

CAPTION NEEDED
(Cortland, NY)

METHODS

RIPPLE EFFECTS MAPPING

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is a highly participatory evaluation technique that developed as an extension of the Community Capitals Framework (CCF). CCF analyzes community and economic development "from a systems perspective by identifying the assets in each capital (stock), the types of capital invested (flow), the interaction among the capitals, and the resulting impacts across capitals" (Emery & Flora, 2006, p. 20). The seven capitals in the framework include natural capital, cultural capital, human capital, social capital, political capital, financial capital, and built capital (See Table 1 below). By examining current stores of assets in a community and tracking investments in a particular capital, the CCF is a tool that allows communities to understand the impacts and effectiveness of their activities. For example, Emery and Flora (2006) use the CCF to show how rural communities in Nebraska reversed "a spiral of decline" through investments in specific capitals, identifying social capital as critical to reversal and a community's ability to "spiral up" (p. 20).

Table 1: Community Capitals

Capital	Definition
Natural Capital	Natural assets in a community (natural resources, amenities, etc.)
Cultural Capital	Traditions, languages, knowledge of the world and role within it
Human Capital	Skills and abilities of people
Social Capital	Connections across people and organizations
Political Capital	Access to power, connections to power brokers, ability to use own voice to make change
Financial Capital	Financial resources
Built Capital	Infrastructure

Adapted from (Emery & Flora, 2006, pp. 20-21)

While a powerful tool, it can be difficult to trace the impacts of investments across the CCF capitals for highly complex projects. REM helps communities and evaluators understand the impact of their programs and investments through a highly engaging, participatory approach that brings community members together to discuss and map the impacts of their efforts. Typically, the process involves the following (Sero, Hansen, & Higgins, n.d.):

- A group session with a variety of individuals from the community involved in a program.
- Using Appreciative Inquiry approach, participants are given guiding questions and divided into groups to discuss the stories they may want to share with the REM facilitator.
- After these breakout sessions, the group comes together to share their stories and these stories are "mapped" to track their impacts. Everyone is encouraged to share different stories and experiences, and the map helps illustrate how the effects of the program "ripple" to other projects and areas.
- Following the session, the recording of the group activity is transcribed, and this transcription is used to update the map for accuracy and shared with participants to help them show the impacts of their work in the community.
- Transcribed data is cleaned, coded, and analyzed by REM evaluators thematically.

What data is collected in the map, depends on the REM approach used as there are three primary variations: web mapping, in-depth rippling, and theming and rippling. We used the second approach, in-depth rippling, to collect impacts of the LFLP program.[3] This approach focuses on participants sharing their stories of the program being evaluated. For the map, each of the initial stories is mapped (either in person on butcher paper or via a web tool), and the ripples constitute the details of the story. For instance, who helped (one ripple); the amount grant funds received (another ripple); what happened consequently (another ripple); and did anything change in the community as a result (Chazdon, Emery, Hansen, & Sero, 2017). As an REM session typically has several individuals from the same community, they all contribute to the mapping which helps provide valuable context for tracing causal links between activities. The result is a highly detailed map, which simplifies the complex stories of community project implementation and impact. Figure 1 below is a partial map created during an LFLP REM session to illustrate the mapping process. This map is shared with the REM participants and helps them tell the story of the program and its impacts on the community.

Figure 1: Sample Ripple Map

After the REM session and mapping exercise, the transcripts of the session are coded and analyzed. The focus of this analysis depends on the researcher, evaluation goals, and/or the goals of the program or project. For instance, the analysis can focus on coding for capitals in the CCF framework to examine where most investments were made during the project, coding for the short-term, medium-term, and long-term impacts of the project, or a combination of both approaches.

REM FOR LFLP EVALUATION

As mentioned, for the LFLP REM sessions we used an in-depth rippling approach. To conduct REM sessions, we slightly modified the process from how REM has typically been used in the past. Rather than conduct a session with individuals from the same project, our goal was to broaden participation to include individuals from multiple communities who have implemented their own LFLP projects. This allowed us to collect data from a variety of LFLP programs across the United States with varying levels of success in their programming. However, because we have only one individual from LFLP participating in the process for most of the communities, the full impacts of the process or the causal mechanisms that link the impacts and activities are not necessarily captured as multiple perspectives are often needed to fully understand the program (and ensure spurious linkages are not made). Despite this limitation, this allowed us to capture more impacts of LFLP across the United States than what would have been possible using the standard REM community approach. Additionally, it allows us to see common themes and trends across communities that impact program and project success.

3 For an in-depth manual on how to utilize REM approaches for evaluation, please see *A Field Guide to Ripple Effects Mapping by Chazdon, Emery, Hansen, Higgins and Sero (2017)* at https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/190639.

Due to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19, sessions were conducted via Zoom, using Xmind to map participant stories. Sessions were 1.5 hours and were limited to a maximum of four participants to ensure enough time to capture in-depth stories from each participant on LFLP in their communities. Zoom recordings were transcribed via Rev transcription services.

The research team conducted six REM sessions with LFLP participants (community members involved in the program) in November of 2021, and four sessions in February of 2022. There were 21 total participants from 17 communities across the U.S. This included communities in Alabama, Arizona, Indiana, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. After the mapping sessions, the transcripts were coded and analyzed thematically, examining activities and impacts using the Community Capitals Framework (CCF).

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom throughout July and August 2021 with USDA staff (2), EPA staff (2), and Local Food Local Places contracted facilitators (2) about their experience with the LFLP program delivery. Interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes and were recorded through Zoom and transcribed via Rev transcription services. Interviews were analyzed thematically using a grounded, inductive approach which includes finding themes through thoroughly reviewing the data, coding emergent themes, and grouping related themes.

CAPTION NEEDED (Maine)

RESULTS

RIPPLE EFFECTS MAPPING

A total of 17 communities were represented in Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) sessions: 6 were from the 2020 LFLP cohort, 3 from 2019, 3 from 2018, and 5 from 2017. This allowed for better understanding of not only shared goals across participants in different cohorts, but some limited assessment of potential timelines needed for implementing objectives. It should be noted that this analysis is limited to the sample of participants that participated in the REM sessions. It is likely that those who participated had more success in implementing their LFLP goals than those who did not. Indeed, we received some refusals to participate in the REM sessions because the communities had not made any progress on their LFLP goals, with COVID-19 being mentioned as an impediment. Thus, this analysis should be interpreted carefully as self-selection bias likely impacts these results. Future evaluations of the LFLP program should include multi-method approaches with specific outreach to communities that were less successful implementing their LFLP goals to help mitigate selection bias. Despite this limitation, the communities that participated provide valuable insight into successes and factors that impact the success of LFLP communities in implementing their action plans.

THE COMMUNITY CAPITALS FRAMEWORK: ASSESSING IMPACTS ACROSS CAPITALS

The Community Capitals Framework (CCF) can be useful for examining the activities and impacts of LFLP due to its wholistic approach to understanding community and economic development. As mentioned, the CCF analyzes the stock of and interplay between 7 community capitals (built, natural, cultural, human, social, political, and financial), and how investments in a capital impact stock of the other capitals and community development overall. This framework has been used to examine the impacts of interventions in rural communities, as well as show how communities can reverse a spiral of decline, especially through investment in social capital (See Emery & Flora, 2006). It is also useful to illustrate the comprehensiveness of LFLP action plans and the multi-faceted approaches adopted by communities to address food security, economic development, community engagement, and several other issues.

It should also be noted that these multi-faceted approaches are the goal of LFLP which uses Smart Growth strategies. Smart Growth approaches development from a wholistic perspective and has 10 principles:

- mix land uses
- take advantage of compact building design
- create a range of housing opportunities and choices
- create walkable neighborhoods
- foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
- strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
- provide a variety of transportation choices
- make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective
- encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions. (Smart Growth Network, p. 1)

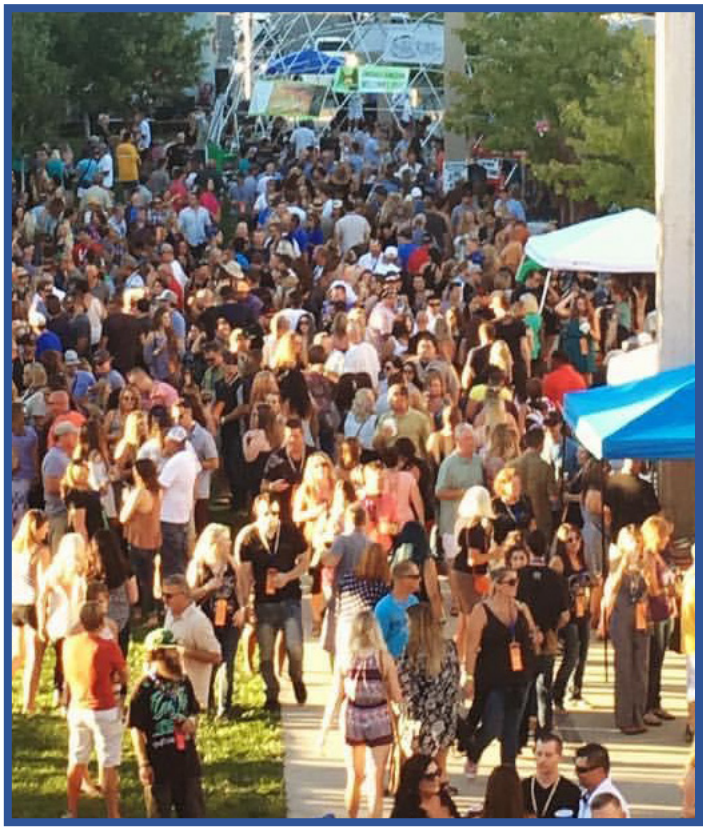
These Smart Growth principles are present throughout the LFLP process and solidified in the final action plans. For instance, many action plans include walkability of neighborhoods in their planning and developing a "strong sense of place". For instance, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, is working on fostering an identity for the South Allison Hill area that focuses on food due to their numerous restaurants with diverse, international cuisines. Many of these principles overlap with one or more capitals in the Community Capitals Framework, as developing a strong sense of place is an investment in cultural capital and potentially other capitals depending on how this goal is achieved, while encouraging community and stakeholder collaboration is an investment in social capital.

The Community Capitals Framework (CCF) provides an effective means to evaluate LFLP activities by pointing to specific mechanisms that constitute an investment in each capital. While communities are unique, and thus Smart Growth strategies are different from place to place, CCF identifies common activities and investments across the seven capitals that allow for effective cross-community evaluation. These common activities and investments can also later be evaluated to determine how well smart growth principles are met, and which capital investments are linked to specific Smart Growth principles. Future evaluation research should take this into consideration.

The overall impacts of LFLP are disbursed across all seven capitals of the CCF; however, initial goals and therefore impacts are primarily focused, at least early in the project timeline, on social, natural and built capitals. As action plans have short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals, short-term planning involves investments in social, natural and built capitals early in the process that help build to larger efforts and impacts across all capitals.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

The LFLP process involves significant investment in social capital, both in the early stages of the project prior to the two-day workshop, but also during and after the two-day workshop to help ensure project success. As Smart Growth includes encouraging community and stakeholder collaboration, the significant investment in social capital is unsurprising. As mentioned, social capital involves connections across people and organizations in a community (Emery & Flora, 2006). Social capital can be measured in various ways but typically involves examining networks within a community, trust, and even social activities that help build a sense of community. In the REM sessions, most impacts in social capital involve developing and maintaining networks and social activities that enhance community bonds, such as community festivals, fairs, and holiday celebrations mentioned by some REM participants. Both activities can lead to significant growth in trust, especially in communities that have lower social capital initially.



CAPTION NEEDED (Viva Event in CA)

Throughout the preworkshop process and during the two-day workshop (workshops were held in virtual format in 2020, spread over 3 to 5 days), communities begin to build and maintain the community networks needed to ensure both short-term and

longer-term goals. Partners vary across communities but often include local schools, churches, non-profits, local governments, and businesses. Communities with higher social capital may be more successful in this process; however, the process itself can be a significant generator of social capital and specifically bridging social capital (connections across different groups within a community) that produces the momentum for longer term impacts across other capitals. For instance, in Duck Hill, Mississippi, a historically segregated community, 125 participants came together in the workshop to frame the action plan, which according to the REM participant was rare in the community and "precedent setting." This initial success led to much larger, community-wide efforts with significant bridging social capital generated, culminating in the community's first-ever Christmas celebration. Thus, even communities with lower social capital initially, can generate significant social capital through the process that increases their success.

The LFLP program also includes another important contribution to bridging social capital by connecting communities to outside experts during the workshops. This initial introduction led to several communities leveraging these resources (financial capital) for medium and long-term goals. Many REM participants stated that they would have had no access to these state and federal partners without LFLP, and many would not have known these resources were available. For instance, the workshop in Duck Hill, Mississippi allowed the community to connect with eleven federal agencies. According to the participant, "we were able to find out, across the board, what these agencies could bring and the value they could add to our process developing an economy around food." A Redding, California participant highlighted the importance of outside state and federal partners for helping "bring more people together than us trying to do it on our own."

Tentatively, the REM data does suggest that communities with higher levels of social capital (both bridging and bonding) may be more successful overall in achieving their LFLP goals and that communities with higher levels at the time of the LFLP workshops may achieve their goals more quickly and may be more able to sustain these efforts. As noted above, social capital can be generated through the process, and it is possible for communities with lower social capital to achieve their goals. However, to successfully generate social capital, communities must make a sustained effort to increase collaboration and engagement, especially across different groups. Further research is needed to determine if a link between existing social capital and time frame of achieving LFLP goals exists.

NATURAL CAPITAL

Many participants in the REM sessions stated their action plans focused on natural capital, the natural assets of a community such as natural resources and amenities (Emery & Flora, 2006), especially in their short-term planning. Natural capital generated through LFLP include a variety of assets and activities such as new community gardens, improved walking/biking trails, green infrastructure, park development and improvement, and even a new boat launch. Many of these activities are also connected to Smart Growth as communities focus on walkable neighborhoods, preserving open space and natural beauty of their communities. Community gardens were by far the most reported generator of natural capital across participants. Over half of the communities (10) included community gardens or urban gardens in

CAPTION NEEDED (Lake Charles, LA))

their LFLP action plan. These communities were also highly successful in building community gardens, as all the participants reported their community successfully building at least one community garden and several communities had more, or more were being planned.

In building or improving community gardens, a frequent collaborator identified by participants were local schools (social capital). In several communities, the gardens were implemented in healthy eating curriculum and some gardens were located at the community school where youth were involved in the entire process (human capital). Much of this work seems to have also been implemented quickly (in the first year of a project). This work has been sustained through partnerships with local organizations, including churches, schools, Extension programs, and the use of volunteers.

However, the long-term success of some of these community gardens is a concern. In addition to the volunteer hours required to develop and maintain a garden, many communities reported that seeds and other materials were also donated. Many of these gardens were set up quickly with relatively low direct costs; however, the indirect costs may be substantial and impact the long-term sustainability of these projects. In fact, an REM participant stated that "the number of community gardens that have started and failed could fill, probably, the ocean with that dirt." Thus, while over half the communities have successfully built community gardens, whether these impacts in natural capital can be maintained remains to be determined. Thus, future evaluations would benefit from conducting case studies of LFLP community garden implementation and impacts over time. This can include developing indicators and recommendations for long-term success that are included in the LFLP action plan.

CULTURAL CAPITAL

Cultural capital involves the traditions, values, and beliefs of a community (Emery & Flora, 2006), and can also include items produced that have historical or cultural significance within a community, such as artwork. It also overlaps with the Smart Growth principle of fostering distinctive communities with a strong sense of place which focuses on "unique, interesting places that reflect the diverse values, culture, and heritage of the people who live there" (Smarth Growth America, 2022). Activities linked to cultural capital can include events that celebrate the cultural heritage or history of a community, music festivals, or other events or activities that focus on a shared community or regional identity. The traditions and history of a community shape their attitudes, beliefs, and preferences. For instance, a history of failed food access programming or neglect of neighborhoods can lead to distrust of new efforts and a lack of motivation and hope to pursue program activities. Social capital and cultural capital overlap as activities that generate social capital also can generate cultural capital, such as festivals and fairs. However, events associated with cultural capital typically are linked to traditions and cultural or historical significance. These activities produce a sense of pride of place, generate community awareness and action on specific issues, and increase hope and positive attitudes within a community.

CAPTION NEEDED (Duck Hill, MS))

For LFLP, many participants reported activities that generate cultural capital. For instance, ten communities had festivals and fairs that were not only related to healthy eating and nutrition but to community history and traditions as well. Perhaps more importantly, several participants reported increased hope in their communities after the workshop and belief that the community could achieve the LFLP goals. Several participants stated that these workshops increased positive attitudes among community members regarding their community. One Aliquippa, Pennsylvania participant stated the LFLP process "brought a lot of hope. A lot of this is possible for us. We can do this...we don't have to settle for how we are now...we can do something about it." A participant from Duck Hill, Mississippi stated that "to see a community that thought they had no hope just come alive...it's very inspiring." This hope can help engage the community in further efforts and sustain progress.

The hope and positive attitudes generated have an impact on the likelihood of long-term success and the ability of a community to "spiral up." It's important to note that nearly all REM participants mentioned that the LFLP workshops created positivity among community members while 7 specifically mentioned generating hope. This indicates that the process generates cultural capital while planned events in the action plan can help sustain and create more cultural capital as the communities implement their plans.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Human capital refers to the skills and abilities of people in a community (Emery & Flora, 2006). Examining human capital often involves assessing activities (education, training) that create increases in knowledge, skills, or improving factors, such as health, which increases individual productivity. Unsurprisingly, much LFLP efforts focus on human capital, as it is not enough to increase food access, these efforts must include various educational activities designed to increase knowledge of nutrition, food preparation, gardening, and other skills to have the desired effect. LFLP communities are pursuing multiple activities to generate human capital, including cooking classes, cooking demonstrations, nutrition classes, gardening training, and much more. From the REM sessions, it is clear that at least 12 communities were pursuing educational efforts to increase these skills. This includes communities like Aliquippa, Pennsylvania who have developed a community garden at the school that is included in Growing Healthy Habits Curriculum, provided Master Gardeners training to multiple community members (funded through grants and a local church), and a local church began cooking classes. Jamestown, New York often has cooking demonstrations and other demonstrations as part of their mobile market. Additionally, numerous communities have developed health-focused fairs and festivals.

Image needed: Mobile Market from Jamesotown, NY

CAPTION NEEDED (Jamestown, NY)

While the overall impact of these efforts on skills and abilities cannot be determined from REM sessions, participants provided numerous examples that suggest these efforts are having an impact. For instance, participants from Jamestown, New York stated that the first time their mobile market appeared in the Tower Park neighborhood they gave a young girl a cucumber. The girl asked where the plastic was. Later, she also asked what a garden was. For some individuals, LFLP efforts are the first time they have seen a vegetable without a wrapper or tried a fresh tomato for the first time as also happened in Jamestown. . Human capital skills can take longer to develop and the impact on a key aspect of human capital, health, will take time to assess. To better evaluate impacts on long term outcomes, such as health, the LFLP project team should work with communities, especially those who are developing classes and training, to develop an initial data collection plan to help evaluate the impacts of their efforts in the future.

BUILT CAPITAL

Built capital refers to the infrastructure that is built to support social activity, such as roads, airports, water treatment facilities, buildings, etc. (Emery & Flora, 2006). It should be noted that many of the Smart Growth strategies link to infrastructure, including mix land uses, existing community development, and transportation variety. Built capital planning is often including in LFLP action plans as often infrastructure improvement is needed to ensure community goals surrounding food access, healthy living, affordable housing, and community revitalization efforts. All participants in REM sessions indicated their action plan had activities related to built capital. One of the most reported generators of built capital by REM participants is the creation of farmers markets and mobile markets (11 communities). The specific goals surrounding a farmers market depends on the community, as some communities are attempting to develop a farmers' market where none exists, while other communities have focused on further developing an already existing farmers market within their community. This work could include moving an existing farmers market to make it more accessible, working with growers to expand the current farmers market, or working with the farmers' market to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

CAPTION NEEDED (Redding, CA))

While several communities have developed farmers markets or improved existing farmers markets, success varies across communities. The communities that have been successful in developing a farmers' market have been able to develop and implement them quickly (averaging about one to two years), unless COVID-19 interfered with the process. The markets often rely on volunteers to run the initial market and a few mentioned AmeriCorps volunteers specifically. The issue with reliance on volunteers is that this may not be sustainable in the long-term. As some participants mentioned concerns on sustainability of their farmers' market when AmeriCorps volunteers were no longer available, the reliance on volunteers for these activities is a critical concern.

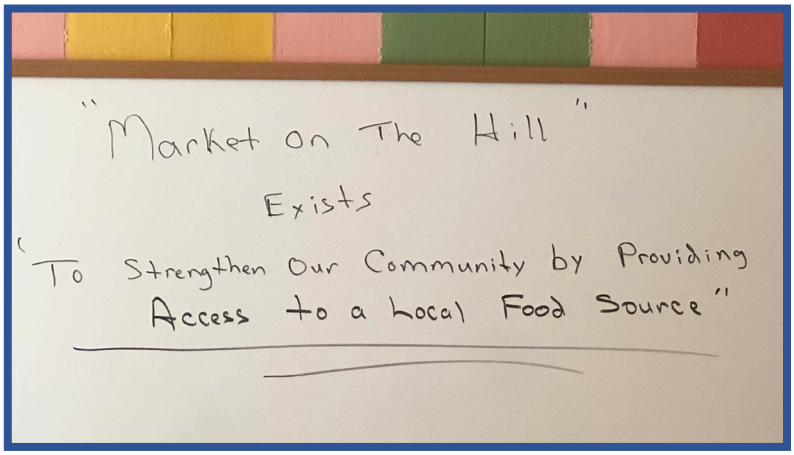
As mentioned, some communities have pursued mobile food markets rather than a farmers' market due to infrastructure constraints, such as lack of a central location for a farmers market, lack of adequate walkways and/or inadequate roadways for access, and other concerns bringing fresh, local food to neighborhoods that have traditionally lacked these resources . These mobile markets appear to take more time to set up and may require more initial resources due to the need for a new vehicle or retrofit an existing vehicle. However, it is difficult to compare the costs of these two market channels considering many of the costs associated with farmers markets were unclear or "hidden" given that they were relying on volunteer labor. Some participants indicated a paid position to ensure farmers market success over time is necessary. Thus, communities have been successful generating built capital through farmers markets and mobile markets, but these require significant financial capital.

Other common built capital activities also require significant financial capital to pursue. Several communities were working on restoring brownfields, increasing housing access, restoring downtown buildings, changing zoning to allow activities such as urban gardens, improvement to water systems and water treatment, and transportation improvements. These projects tend to be longer-term efforts that take many years to develop and implement. Therefore, while communities are generating built capital, several of these efforts take longer to generate impacts than many of the other capitals. Many communities are in the early stages of generating further built capital. For instance, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania has developed a business plan for a food accelerator and are currently looking for funding to support the enterprise. As another example, one of Duck Hill, Mississippi's goals is to repurpose the former Jim Crow high school, the Lloyd T. Binford High School, that has been vacant for 20 to 25 years. They participated in LFLP in 2018 and since the initial workshop completed two phases of a brownfield assessment to officially have the high school designated as a brownfield. In November of 2021, they were applying for a brownfield clean up grant.

CAPTION NEEDED (Duck Hill -- is this the high school??))

The REM sessions indicate that many communities are engaging in multiple efforts that will generate built capital (or improve built capital) over time. Additionally, some communities indicated their states or counties received significant funding from the federal government due to COVID-19, including Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Funding (CARES) funding that they have used to support LFLP efforts, or are actively seeking a portion of the funding to work on improving their infrastructure. The success of these efforts in improving built capital remain to be determined.

FINANCIAL CAPITAL



CAPTION NEEDED (Mt. Pulaski, IL

The REM participants reported being very successful at generating financial capital for their projects and plans. There are limitations with determining the amount of financial capital generated through LFLP due to (1) participants in REM often did not have the grant funding amount at the time of the REM session, and (2) communities often have multiple efforts ongoing which make it difficult to associate the grant award specifically to LFLP in some cases. Thus, this information should be interpreted with caution. Nonetheless, even in cases where the grant funding was not specifically linked to LFLP planning (at least not in the application stage), these funds, at least partially, were used to achieve LFLP action plan goals. The LFLP plan is also often linked to these successes by providing a framework. As one participant noted, "I think the action plan itself is magic, because we use it like a blueprint in our community...this is our guiding document...".

Despite the limitations discussed above, LFLP communities are successfully generating financial capital to support their activities. The communities have been awarded numerous grants from various entities, including the EPA, USDA, private businesses, state-level government agencies, universities, and more. The amount of the grants awarded range from $2,000 to over $3 million. Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, for example, has received $9,000 from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture to build a school garden and support a teacher to serve as the "school garden champion". They also received $25,000 from Penn State Extension to fund multiple community gardens, repair a green house, and other efforts.

Larger grant awards seem to be tied to infrastructure development (built capital) and larger revitalization efforts. Thus, communities may start with "small" grants and funding for their short-term projects and build over time to larger projects and grants for revitalization efforts. Rainelle, West Virginia participated in LFLP in 2017, successfully establishing a farmers market that same year. Since this initial success, they have received $3.2 million in funding ($2.3 million in low-income housing tax credits and over $1 million from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh) for repurposing a school in the community for housing which will start construction in 2022. The representative of the community organization that has been instrumental in receiving the funding stated they made it their mission to implement the LFLP action plan.

Additionally, some communities have raised capital for their projects through other means. For instance, Mount Pulaski, Illinois raised $120,000 in 30 days to replace their closed grocery store with a retail food cooperative by selling stock to over 150 residents. When the food cooperative opened, 50% of the sales were local products from area farmers and other food producers, further generating financial capital for the community. A major goal of this community was also to create a food distribution system in the Central

Illinois region. It took 2.5 years to develop, culminating in the Central Illinois Farm Fed Co-Op. They recently raised $140,000 in stock sales and received a USDA grant for $175,000. At the time of the REM session, they purchased their building and have plans to put in a community kitchen and a flash freeze processing center, which will also generate further financial capital when developed.

Importantly, donations are integral to the success of many LFLP efforts, especially community gardens. These donations are a form of financial capital as these communities would have to purchase these resources to achieve their efforts. Unfortunately, this additional capital cannot be calculated with the REM data. The additional financial capital created through grants, other funding mechanisms, and donations for LFLP communities in REM sessions is at least $4.3 million, and very likely more. (This number does not include sales generated from the multiple efforts to increase food access. This information is difficult to obtain through REM sessions but should be explored in future evaluations.)

POLITICAL CAPITAL

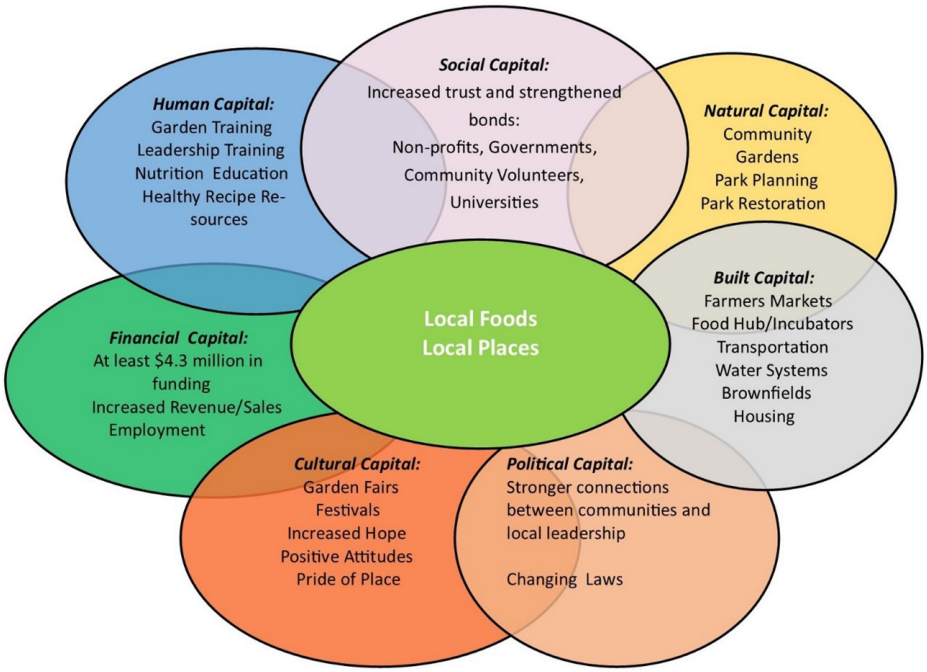
Lastly, political capital involves access to power, connections to power brokers and the ability to use your own voice to make change (Emery & Flora, 2006). Activities that reflect political capital could include running for office, participating in city council debates, voting, and other activities. During the REM discussions, activities and indicators of this capital were the least mentioned across all seven capitals. This does not necessarily mean that political capital was not generated, but since the REM sessions are highly unstructured (where participants choose what to discuss), these efforts may not have come up as much in these discussions. For some communities, stronger connections between LFLP efforts and local leadership were reported. For instance, collaborating with local mayors or other officials to achieve LFLP goals, or these officials were a member of the LFLP team. In Jamestown, New York, those involved with LFLP planning had to work to get laws changed so they could have a mobile market in a key neighborhood, Tower Park. It took approximately four years to achieve this goal which culminated in a city council vote to change the policy. Several individuals wrote letters to city leadership in support of the policy change, another indicator of political capital.

THE COMMUNITY CAPITALS FRAMEWORK: SPIRALING UP

As mentioned, initial LFLP impacts are focused on social, natural and built capitals. Communities have been rather successful in generating outcomes in each of these capitals, especially in the short-term. However, communities have reported successes in each of the seven capitals. Figure 2 illustrates common activities in each of the seven capitals across LFLP communities.

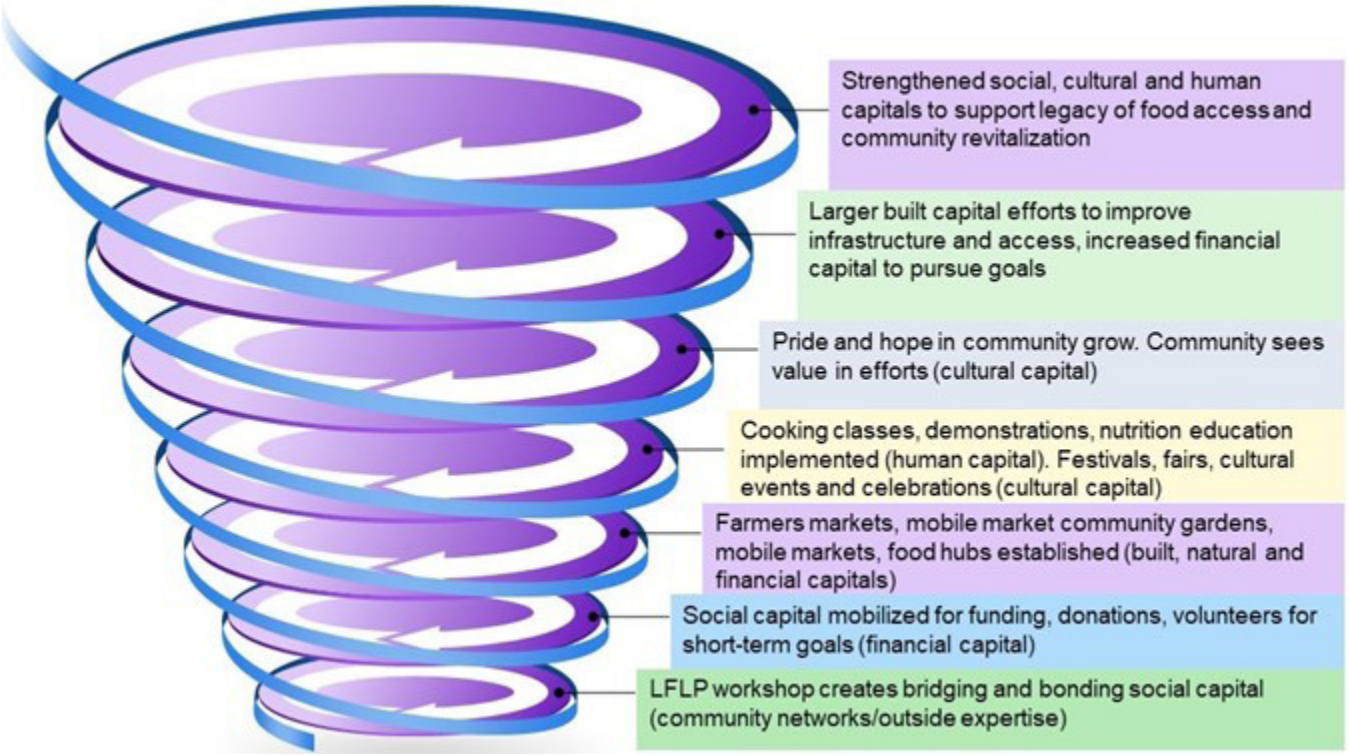
It should be noted that not only do these capitals overlap, the growth in one capital can generate growth

Figure 2: LFLP Impacts Using Community Capitals Framework



in another. As mentioned, efforts to generate built capital require funding (financial capital), networking and collaboration to identify resources and apply for funding (social capital), and development of grant writing skills (human capital). Similar to Emery and Flora (2006), increases in social capital, especially in struggling communities, seem to be particularly important for reversing a downward spiral. This social capital serves as a foundation that can produce increases in the other capitals and success in achieving LFLP goals especially for multi-phase projects. Figure 3 demonstrates how LFLP has contributed to an upward spiral in several communities over time due to leveraging social capital created for and by the LFLP workshop.

Figure 3: LFLP and Spiraling Up



The LFLP workshop creates both bridging and bonding social capital which communities leverage for funding, donations, volunteers and other resources (financial capital) to achieve short-term goals such as developing community gardens and farmers markets. For several communities, the community gardens and farmers markets lead to additional activities, such as cooking classes, nutrition education, cooking demonstrations (human capital), and festivals, fairs, and other events (cultural capital). These short-term and medium-term impacts lead to pride, hope and create a better sense of place (cultural capital). The strengthened social capital, human capital and cultural capital are leveraged for longer-term built capital activities (transportation, building restoration, etc.) which can support a legacy of community revitalization, food access and healthy habits.

Despite LFLP action plans containing similar projects and goals (like farmers markets and community gardens), these plans are tailored to address community-specific issues and concerns and thus activities across communities are highly diversified. The spiraling up process or how investments in one capital flow to others can best be illustrated by focusing on single communities. These community case studies can also provide some insight into the timeline needed to implement certain goals.

Lake Charles, Louisiana

CAPTION NEEDED (Lake Charles, LA))

The Lake Charles LFLP workshop was postponed due to COVID-19 and then again due to hurricanes Laura and Delta until the Spring of 2021. The project focused on North Lake Charles, a low to moderate income Census tract that was a food desert before the natural disasters and suffered the most infrastructure damage from the hurricanes. Both Lake Charles participants that participated in the REM session stated a strength of the LFLP program was the way it brought the community together to collaborate which had never been done before (social capital). One participant stated, "it shed a light for some individuals and organizations that were not aware of the food insecurities in the area...and brought a partner into the community in a way they had not been present in the past." Both participants also mentioned the importance of bringing federal partners to their community, partners they would not meet otherwise: "so that's huge thing that Local Foods, Local Places brings to a community, not just the technical assistance to work through the plan, but then the people that you then connect with." The participants mentioned specifically connecting with the EPA, the National Park Conservation Association, and local organizations such as the local university, McNeese State University, and Second Harvest. The Lake Charles community has, at least initially, been able to successfully leverage this social capital to achieve some of its early goals.

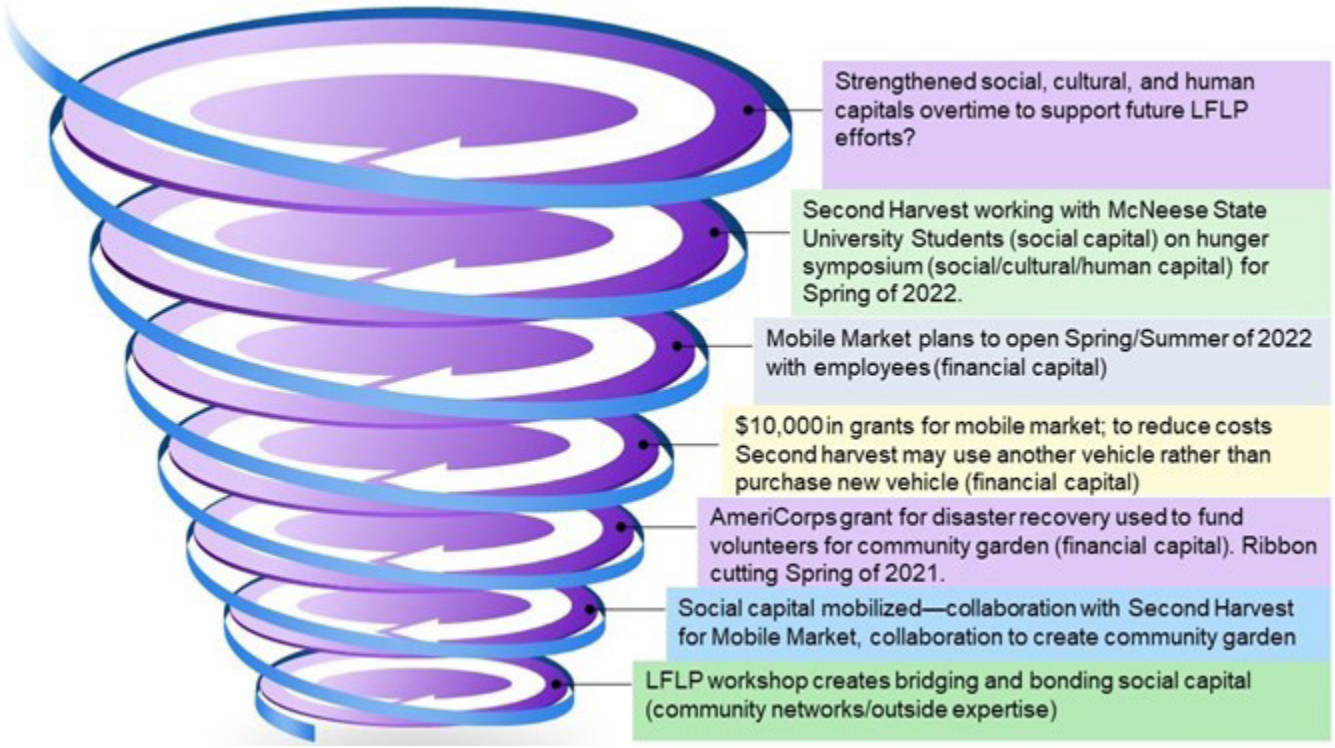
One aspect of LFLP planning was to develop a community garden (natural capital). The community started building a community garden in 2020 but it was destroyed by Hurricane Laura. They began planning for a new community garden in January of 2021 and held the ribbon cutting in Spring of 2021. The establishment of the community garden required support from six AmeriCorps members (the community received an AmeriCorps grant for disaster recovery) who were instrumental in setting up the community garden (financial capital). All food from the community garden is distributed to the community free of charge (financial capital). The reliance on volunteers to set up the garden may lead to sustainability issues in the future as the disaster recovery grant has not been renewed and capacity will be a challenge. The participants from LFLP indicated

that longevity of projects is an issue, especially for community gardens. The big lesson from the process is that you need dedicated employees and cannot rely only on volunteers. A participant stated, "You'd certainly love to have core volunteers and core community leaders, but at the end of the day, someone has to be responsible for the programs to have continuity. And that's what we just face over and over again…You have to have an organization, a person, someone that's going to guarantee the continuity of the program." Thus, while social capital can be leveraged to acquire financial capital and other resources, some of these resources, such as volunteers may have limited long-term sustainability.

Due to infrastructure issues which included outdated infrastructure that has been destroyed by several natural disasters, the main project in the action plan was to create a mobile market (built capital) to increase food access. The community was able to engage with a partner (social capital), Second Harvest, who is now actively involved in developing the mobile market. Second Harvest is currently working with local farmers to establish contracts with the mobile market and received approximately $10,000 in grants to support the market so far (financial capital). However, it is estimated that the mobile market will cost "upwards of $200,000" to run. To help moderate costs, temporarily using a truck they have in another area rather than purchasing a truck has been discussed. As of now, the plan is to launch the mobile market in Spring or early Summer of 2022 with employees, not volunteers to run the market (financial capital). Second Harvest is also planning a Hunger Symposium in April of 2022 and is working with McNeese State University students on both the Symposium (cultural/social capital) and the mobile market.

Figure 4 illustrates the activities of Lake Charles, LA and how this may lead to an upward spiral for community and economic development. At the time of the REM session, this community was less than a year out from its LFLP workshop, yet they have had successes in social, natural, and financial capital. The social capital has been leveraged for success in natural and financial capital. Although not depicted in Figure 4, these early successes can be a significant generator of cultural capital by increasing pride and hope within the community to further implement action plan goals. It will take time to see if these initial successes in the capitals will be maintained and leveraged for further community and economic development, which is why in Figure 4 the last element of the spiral is formatted as a question.

Figure 4: Lake Charles, LA and Spiraling Up



Duck Hill, Mississippi

CAPTION NEEDED (Duck Hill, MS))

Duck Hill, Mississippi residents held their workshops in 2018. Duck Hill is a small town in Montgomery County with a poverty rate higher than the state average, no grocery stores, and it's located in a low income low food access area that stretches approximately 40 to 45 miles. Prior to the workshops, the town experienced severe flooding due to infrastructure and stormwater management issues. The LFLP workshops had approximately 125 participants for framing the action plan (social capital), which according to the REM participant was rare in the community and "precedent setting." They used the LFLP effort as an opportunity to advance racial reconciliation (bridging social capital); LFLP "gave us an opportunity to bring the white community and black community…together around a common cause." As will be seen, these initial social capital efforts have helped produce increases in cultural, built and financial capitals.

The LFLP action plan included four goals: restore Lloyd T. Binford High School, develop a team to propose an area for a community trail, increase community knowledge of local foods, nutrition and health through community events, and increase community engagement and empowerment. The community team had several objectives to address the food desert gap, as well as several community events planned through partnerships with educators, health professionals, Master Gardeners, and community organizations. The community held three or four training workshops and were working on developing the farmers market and community gardens when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. According to the participant, COVID "kind of disrupted the whole process. Everything basically shut down. So, we are now moving into reactivating our action plan." The current plan is to work on partnerships for the farmers market in 2022.

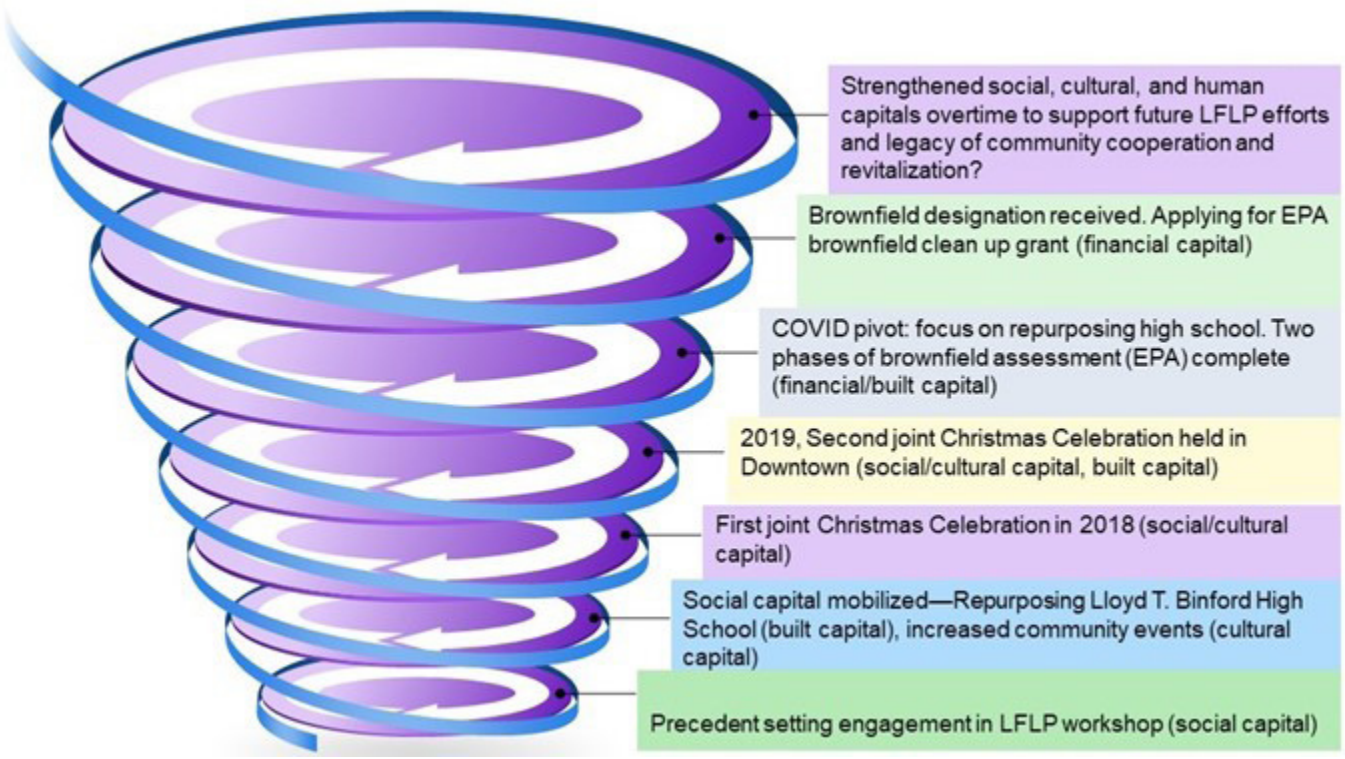
While goals and objectives for addressing the food desert were suspended, the community was able to continue its focus on repurposing the Lloyd T. Binford High School which was a former Jim Crow high school that had been vacant for 20 to 25 years (built capital). This is part of the town's main street redevelopment plan. In Summer of 2021, the town completed two phases of a brownfield assessment and the location is now designated as a brownfield. At the time of the REM session, they were applying for an EPA brownfield clean up grant (financial capital). The plan for the high school includes repurposing the kitchen into a community commercial kitchen for catering and food artisans (built/financial capital), and repurposing the rest into a Center for Arts, Culture, and Social Entrepreneurship (cultural capital).

The REM session participant also discussed the importance of the repurposing project for bringing the community together, especially across racial divides, which had been a challenge in the past. By focusing on the high school, which held sentimental value to many members of the white community as their parents went to the school there, members of Duck Hill's white and black communities were able to come together to "save Binford." Since the workshops, the town has held more events together, culminating in the first joint Christmas celebration in 2018 on the side of town where the population is predominately black (social/cultural capital). The next year, a Christmas celebration was held in the downtown town square with a 25-foot Christmas tree, a parade, and contributions to the celebration from both communities. LFLP and community events across both communities culminated in the creation of a working group called Better Together Duck Hill.

While COVID-19 clearly impacted many of Duck Hills plans, the community has successfully focused on aspects of its action plan it could implement. The community has met many of its needed objectives for repurposing the high school, and plans are currently underway for addressing other aspects of the plan that were halted due to the pandemic. Additionally, the community seems to have successfully increased its social capital, particularly bridging social capital, through events and activities that have brought together a traditionally segregated community. This is a significant success of their LFLP efforts and can have far reaching consequences if this progress continues to advance. As many of the LFLP goals need significant collaboration to be achieved, this increasing social capital can aid future goals and planning if maintained.

The participant also mentioned the importance of LFLP for engaging with outside experts, which is especially important for a small rural community. Eleven federal agencies participated in the workshops which helped participants see how these agencies could help in meeting their objectives. The community has successfully leveraged these contacts, through identification of grants and starting the EPA brownfield process, to help meet their LFLP goals. This success has led to a growth in confidence and hope in this community (cultural capital). Perhaps the best indicator that hope and positivity of this is the following quote: "small towns do big things." This community seems to have overcome many initial hurdles and its initial successes are generating positive results in other capitals (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Duck Hill, MS and Spiraling Up



Jamestown, New York

CAPTION NEEDED (Jamestown, NY -- preferably of mobile market))

In contrast to the previous communities, Jamestown, New York is further along in achieving their LFLP goals. It is also difficult to summarize Jamestown, New York activities using the spiral framework with the data collected as a timeline of events is difficult to determine. There were also some unique issues mentioned by Jamestown participants that were not discussed by other community representatives. Nonetheless, the community is an example of how strong and clear leadership can overcome numerous challenges, including lack of support, to achieve success. The workshop occurred in 2017. One of the goals for the community was to develop a mobile market (built capital) specifically for Tower Park, a high-needs and high-poverty neighborhood. When asked in the workshop to determine what would constitute success, the participants stated, "we just want to sell one cucumber." The Jamestown mobile market started in 2018 and in Summer of 2021 visited five different locations a week, including Tower Park. It took four years to accomplish the goal, but when the mobile market arrived at Tower Park for the first time in Summer 2021, they gave a cucumber to a seven- or eight-year-old girl. When looking at the cucumber, she asked "Where's the plastic?" When explaining that it came from a farmer's garden, this same little girl asked: "what's a garden? Who made it?" A participant noted that children and teenagers in the neighborhood came up to the market last summer and asked, "can I try a tomato?" These are initial successes in human capital, and reinforcing connections to natural capital, as these individuals learn about food they have never tried before and its origins. As noted by one Jamestown participant, "I've been doing this work for a while and it was one of those moments where it was still very shocking to me, the need for education for food access, and the impact we had with this little cucumber".

The Jamestown mobile market is an important success story that shows the impact that Local Foods, Local Places can have in communities. It also required much behind the scenes work to ensure the mobile market could operate at all. This was especially true in the Tower Park neighborhood, in which there were delays in sending the market to Tower Park due to restrictive city regulations and codes. Prior to the project, mobile

markets were not legally allowed in the neighborhood. The team had to advocate for changes to local policies (political capital). In fact, when the city council voted on changing the policy in the Tower Park neighborhood, 50 supporters wrote letters to city leadership in support (political capital). Additionally, the funding required for a mobile market can be burdensome, especially the cost of acquiring and maintaining a vehicle. The community applied for two grants. The first was a downtown revitalization grant from New York state for both a food hub and mobile market. The second was a Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) grant to fund the mobile market program. They did not receive the revitalization grant (they were a finalist) but did receive the FMPP Grant (financial capital). However, the FMPP did not allow them to purchase a vehicle and program leaders had difficulties acquiring support for the mobile market's needs among some key local entities. This required the mobile market team to get inventive. According to a participant, "I just used some of my community building skills and connections and found a church that had this 1960s box truck that they converted to a food truck." The program leased this vehicle for two years until it "inevitably died." After this, she borrowed her grandfather's pick-up truck for two years and was recently awarded a $35,000 grant from Cummins Engines to buy a mobile market vehicle (financial capital). The dedication and tenacity of the mobile market team leadership overcame numerous barriers to meet their objectives.

There is also have some evidence that the market in the Tower Park neighborhood is helping to increase both social capital and human capital in the community. When the mobile market set up in the Tower Park neighborhood for the first time in 2021, the REM participants noted that they simply showed up without advertising and were questioned by a gentleman in the neighborhood as to why they were there. When they explained about the mobile market, the man responded: "Well, nobody cares about us. Nobody cares about this neighborhood." The market was in the neighborhood once a week over 10 weeks, bringing in a SNAP educator from Cornell Cooperative Extension to do recipe demonstrations and give samples (human capital). Over the 10 weeks, excitement for the market grew in the neighborhood, culminating in the busiest day for the market being the last day of the season (financial capital).

Jamestown, New York has several ongoing LFLP efforts, the failing farmers market was moved to a more accessible area (built capital) and sales have increased each year since 2018, increasing 60% in 2019, and 25% from 2020 to 2021 (financial capital). In 2018, the farmers market averaged about $5,000 in SNAP Double Up, and in 2021 averaged over $10,000. The local LFLP team also has several educational activities (human capital), including senior outreach and youth programs, a sprouts tent which has health food activities for kits, and they produce videos about produce (e.g. "how to cook it" video, recipes, etc.).

Jamestown has clearly been successful in achieving its LFLP goals and its LFLP leadership, one of whom is the full-time manager of the Jamestown Public Market (the farmers market), has been instrumental in this success. The leadership has used networking with several organizations, including local churches, to ensure the programming could be implemented and maintained.

REM CONCLUSIONS

The REM analysis reveals several successes across communities in each of the capitals. LFLP communities have been successful in setting up farmers markets, starting community gardens, acquiring grant funding from external funders, and revitalizing neighborhoods through long term projects. According to several participants, the initial LFLP workshop was crucial to this process due to the outside experts brought to these communities (social capital). Some communities seem to have high-social capital prior to the workshop in terms of community networks and engagement (bonding social capital), but still leveraged the contacts with outside expertise to identify, apply for, and obtain external funding for projects. This discussion also highlights shared issues that will impact the sustainability of these initial successes. For arguably the most successful activity across communities, creating community gardens, the costs, and efforts to establish and maintain these gardens are more hidden. Relying on volunteers, as many communities must, increases

the risk of not being sustainable in the long-term and will likely have an impact on the enthusiasm for implementing LFLP in the long-term. As stated by a participant from Rainelle, West Virginia, "the work's hard and the pay is terrible when you're a volunteer...and getting people who are devoted to doing volunteer work has been difficult." Farmers markets also have these hidden costs as many communities also rely on volunteers to both get the markets established and run the market. Thus, although these are initial successes in built and natural capital, ongoing efforts for funding (financial capital) can impact their long-term success. Based on REM data across the communities, the most successful communities have a paid position to support these endeavors (financial capital), such as a farmers market manager.

A paid position for mobile market activities may also be vital to their long-term success. As many communities have infrastructure and/or mobility issues that may prevent a fixed-location market, mobile markets may be an increasingly popular method for increasing outreach in both urban and rural locations. However, getting a vehicle to support these activities can be difficult, especially finding grants and funding that will allow communities to purchase a vehicle. The communities that have successfully started a mobile market, such as Jamestown, NY and Aliquippa, PA, have harnessed much bridging and bonding social capital to identify and acquire the financial capital necessary to implement these activities. The LFLP program can provide more assistance to communities for identifying resources to address these issues, such as grant funding for paid positions until markets can make enough profit to pay staff, funding resources for vehicle and equipment purchases, or identify resources for building a long-term volunteer network.

Not all communities have been able to fully execute their LFLP action plan. Some communities have been stalled in their LFLP efforts for various reasons. Some struggled due to COVID-19 shutdowns which prevented their farmers market planning and other activities, some could not locate the farmers market where they initially planned due to lack of funding for building improvement and other issues, while others lacked the leadership and buy in required to ensure the LFLP program activities were pursued. The communities that have been able to refocus during COVID-19 shared strong leadership and often strong community networks to refocus on other elements of the action plan.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO SUCCESS

LEADERSHIP AND ACTION PLAN OWNERSHIP

The importance of strong community leadership cannot be overstated. The most successful communities had strong leadership (either an individual or organization) who made it their mission to implement the action plan. The most successful of these leaders were often in a paid position that supported their activities. Without a dedicated leader that can leverage networks created through LFLP and further build networks with the community, the success of LFLP programming is unlikely.

SOCIAL CAPITAL: COMMUNITY NETWORKS

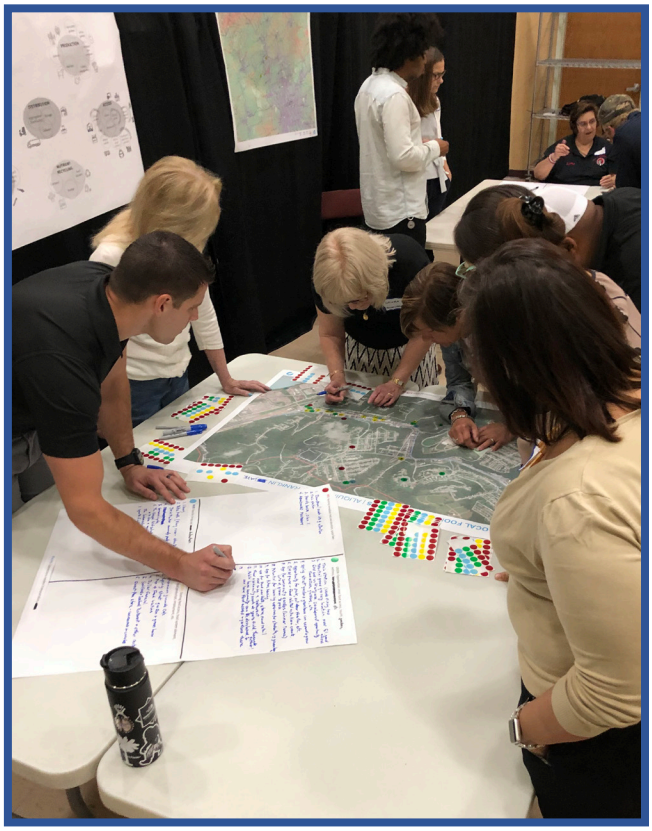
In concert with strong leadership, communities with strong networks or high social capital are more successful in their LFLP activities. A strong leader cannot implement the action plan on their own, much community collaboration across a variety of partners and organizations is needed for all the activities. Communities that have a history of collaboration prior to the LFLP workshops seem to be better able to implement their LFLP action plan. However, for those without this history of collaboration, LFLP workshops serve as a catalyst towards building these community networks, an important success of the LFLP program that will empower communities in the long-term. Communities without a history of collaboration can still be successful but it will likely impact timelines of implementation.

SOCIAL CAPITAL: EXTERNAL PARTNERS

External partners are critical to success in communities. Several successful communities have received additional funding through external partners. While it is difficult to determine how many acquired this funding prior or at the same time as LFLP, many of the participants specifically mentioned the value of bringing the external partners to LFLP workshops. This opens their eyes to the possibilities and lets them know what programs are available to help them meet their needs. Many stated that they would have had no access to these state and federal partners without LFLP. Although focusing on funding received via external partners is a measure of success, many participants stated or intimated that they were surprised these outside actors, with several specifically referencing federal agencies, cared about them. This is another potential link to both social and political capital, empowering communities and building trust with government organizations.

LFLP PROCESS

The LFLP facilitators received high praise from participants, even those from communities that have not been able to fully execute on their action plan. There were many perspectives on what made the facilitation process so successful. Some mentioned the importance of an "outside facilitator" who helped to not only identify action items but established leadership and support to ensure the action items would be completed. Another participant mentioned the facilitation process itself, specifically referencing how facilitators would directly ask every person in the room to provide feedback on goals and planning. Overall, the praise for the process included three general themes, the ability of the facilitators to get the team to think more broadly on food access issues (beyond a farmers' market to address year-round access issues), bringing in outside expertise and helping identify additional potential collaborators (social capital), and the enthusiasm and genuineness of the facilitators.



CAPTION NEEDED (Aliquippa, PA)

Many participants referenced the hope that the LFLP process, and the facilitators brought to communities (cultural capital). For instance, in Aliquippa, distrust was high among community members due to a perception of inaction on key issues. While it has taken much time to build trust among the Aliquippa community, the LFLP facilitation seems to have been the event that helped spark the potential for trust in the community, a nascent trust that has been built over time, especially by a Penn State Extension collaborator on the project (social capital). As noted previously, the LFLP process and facilitation itself can be seen as an investment in both capitals through the efforts to strengthen collaboration both within and outside of the community, the potential to help build trust within the community, and the efficacy developed through the action plan.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

> This program is a great tool for working in the intersection of the food system development and revitalization and community building. It offers great opportunities to help kickstart positive activities in areas that have been slash-and-burn abandoned.

As mentioned, semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom with USDA staff (2), EPA staff (2), and Local Food Local Places contracted facilitators (2) about their experience with the LFLP program delivery. Using a grounded approach in the analysis of the transcripts, 4 main topical themes were identified in the interview content which include: Overall Community Performance, Workshop Impact on Communities, Current Program Design, and Future Program Suggestions. These primary themes and their corresponding sub-themes guide the organizational structure of this analysis.

OVERALL COMMUNITY PERFORMANCE

Interviewees were asked several questions on overall community performance, such as "From, your perspective, were there certain types of communities that appeared to be better situated for success?"; and "From your perspective, what were the greatest strengths that communities brought to the table?" From this discussion, two prominent sub-themes emerged, including factors for success and challenge areas.

FACTORS IMPACTING SUCCESS

Four important factors for success identified from the conversations with interviewees were (1) strong steering committee, (2) scale, geography, and sense of place, (3) aligned expectations of the program, and (4) sense of connectedness.

Strong Steering Committee

The importance of a strong steering committee received much attention among interviewees. These participants also highlighted several sub-factors that impact the strength of a steering committee, including strong leadership, clarity about community needs and desired outcomes, sense of commitment, and diversity of representation. In terms of leadership, respondents emphasized the importance of an individual who has knowledge of project management, respect and credibility and a physical connection to the community. For example, one participant provided an example of a good steering committee leader who "really stayed involved, they were really big proponents of their community, and they knew their community, they were able to reach out to different community organizations to become involved with these workshops, they obviously knew the members of their communities and what they really needed."

Clarity on community needs and outcomes is also imperative for success. The importance of knowing what they want and being clear in these desires was noted by interviewees. These participants also noted the importance of commitment to the program, especially in terms of time, as well as the importance of a broad range of actors involved in the process. Important actors mentioned included food banks, producers, non-profits, government, education organizations and more.

Scale, Geography, and Sense of Place

Interviewees mentioned several factors related to scale, geography and sense of place that impacted success. The identification of a specialized and specific location for the work in which there is already an established relationship aids success. An interview participant indicated that rural places may be more successful because of their isolation and distinctiveness versus projects in urban neighborhoods, where otherwise narrowing a project and focusing stakeholders in larger communities may be more difficult. With larger areas, it may be necessary to narrow the target area to help with the planning process. For instance, focusing on the "...neighborhood level rather than a whole city...makes it a little bit more effective to think about the place element."

Aligning Expectations of the Program

Communities are more successful when they understand what the LFLP process involves and what they will get out of it. For example, communities who recognize the process involves a facilitated conversation and planning rather than funding or highly technical business or marketing advice.

Sense of Connectedness

A community should have some prior connection to each other, and a sketch of a vision for an outcome or a project they are aligned around. Lack of cohesion and vision, increase the likelihood that they will be unable to take full advantage of the LFLP facilitation. On the other hand, being 'too far' along a planning process for an existing project will likewise not maximize the benefits of LFLP facilitation, especially if they need something more advanced and beyond the scope of what LFLP provides (e.g., specific marketing consulting).

CHALLENGE AREAS

Interviewees were asked whether there were common community challenges or roadblocks across multiple locations. Several common challenges were noted, including misaligned applicant expectations from the program, misaligned community member goals, unforeseen loss of resources, leadership turnover, and other challenges with feasibility and implementation. Again, the importance of communities understanding up front what they "are going to get out of the process" was emphasized. Aligning applicant expectations with program process and outcomes is key. An additional common challenge occurs when communities have not had prior conversations "about needs and expectations from the process." Examples include, when the community is meeting for the first time at the workshop, or when there are too many voices or conflicting voices and opinions on the steering committee.

An unforeseen loss of resources was also a common challenge across communities. When key resources fall through it can lead to revamping the entire process. One participant stated, "There was a challenge of not having ownership or decision-making power about a specific property, and the owners said no, so we had to recalibrate the whole process..." Unexpected leadership turnover is also a common challenge whether it is due to a new job, moving or other absences, this causes disruptions to the project's continuation. While the steering committee can sometimes fill in these gaps it can greatly impact implementation.

Lastly, interviewees mentioned other challenges with feasibility and implementation. Specifically, when the steering committees does not live or work in the community where the project is planned, it can lead to being out of touch with community needs and concerns.

WORKSHOP IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES

Several interview questions focused on the impacts of workshops on communities attempting to ascertain short-term, medium-term, and long-term impacts of the workshops. Several of these themes, such as leveraging small wins, fostering communication, and turning ideas into action show up in short-term, medium-term, and long-term impacts which illustrates how the LFLP program can produce long-term momentum to achieve community goals.

CAPTION NEEDED (Gloucester, ME))

Short-Term Impacts

Short-Term impacts included (1) fostering community alignment, (2) building community self-awareness of skills, assets, and challenges, (3) catalyzing the community, and (4) introducing new resources and contacts. Fostering community alignment in terms of introducing people to each other, creating a shared starting point, and a shared body of information was discussed by interviewees. One participant stated, “having an outside facilitator, a third-party facilitator come in with a team of experts, ideally, federal partners...It can help smooth things over and grease the skids for all of these efforts to work more collaboratively.”

Additionally, the process can help communities gain new recognition of their existing skills, assets, and capacity. This enables these communities to get a better sense of their physical and social capital after going through the LFLP process. For one community, the process helped them realize why they did not get a particular grant. In terms of catalyzing the community, participants emphasized the role of LFLP in bringing people together and translating talk to action.

Lastly, introducing new resources and contacts is an important short-term impact of the LFLP program. These workshops teach participants about new resources including other federal grant opportunities and introductions to other federal staff and agencies, such as USDA Rural Development, who can be of assistance to rural communities in the future. These participants also meet others who they previously may not have known even within their own community.

Medium-Term Impacts

Medium-Term impacts included (1) fostering new communication among diverse stakeholders, (2) turning ideas into action, and (3) action plans that leverage initial 'small wins.' First, for fostering new communication, interviewees noted that often the workshop process is the first-time diverse community actors get together for a collective conversation. The workshop planning and implementation sets the stage for that initial conversation and the action plan serves as a mechanism to keep people talking and working together.

The ability of LFLP to help turn ideas into action over time received attention among interviewees. These participants noted that LFLP plans often become relevant tools to be utilized more broadly in communities in other public or municipal initiatives or contexts. This is another way that the plans begin to 'come to life'--even sometimes outside of their specific project. This is supported by REM sessions in which several participants stated that LFLP became part of much wider community planning initiatives.

Lastly, leveraging small wins is an important medium-term impact of LFLP workshops. Sometimes incremental wins or next steps happen, such as using the action planning documents to leverage small amounts of local money, for example, from municipal government to further seed the project. One interview participant mentioned that after the workshop, "the community takes the action plan and the excitement is going, and they can use that a lot of time to get $10,000 of city dollars [for their next steps]."

Long-Term Impacts

Two notable impacts were identified in long-term impacts: (1) small wins 'snowball' to leverage larger wins, and (2) drawing on the LFLP support network in the long-term. Again, the importance of small wins is highlighted by interviewees. Small wins can be critical to boost a community's confidence and build momentum for their project. Small wins may include any of the aforementioned short and medium-term impacts such as receiving additional seed funding, gaining new stakeholders to join the coalition for the project, or having the action plan utilized in broader local or municipal initiatives in the community. As stated by one participant, "That $10,000 [that a community may initially receive from their local government] can be used when they apply for federal grant...and that turns into $100,000...so the long-term impact is almost the snowballing of funding and resources coming in."

Drawing on the LFLP support network is also an important long-term impact. Some communities are not ready for immediate steps of implementation at the time of the workshop's conclusion, but many make use of the plan and support resources in the months and years following the workshop. According to an interviewee, "over 50% of all LFLP projects follow up after the workshops for additional support by working with the USDA architectural team to create next steps for planning their physical infrastructure development."

CURRENT PROGRAM DESIGN

Interviewees were also asked several questions on the program design. Questions included:

- "When thinking about the LFLP program functions, what are the most successful pieces?"
- "Has the LFLP selection process used an effective diversity, equity, and inclusion lens?"
- "Do you have suggestions that would inform the community selection criteria and process?"
- "Can you talk a little about the transition from in-person to online/virtual?"

Under current program design, we focus on perceptions of the virtual workshops. As with any aspect of moving a program from in-person to online, respondents identified pros as well as challenges.

PROS OF VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS

Several pros of the move to virtual workshops were noted. Interviewees mentioned increased participation among some community members as some participants would pull in their spouse or roommate to participate. Additionally, it was stated that virtual workshops provided more streamlined access to some resources and services and enabled greater collaboration..

The virtual workshop also helped participants access additional services. More LFLP participants are reaching out to the USDA for architectural support. This used to be done as in informal 'hand-sketch' fashion in post-workshop meetings between architects and workshop participants but has changed to email requests and digital support in the virtual era. Lastly, the transition to virtual workshops has enabled greater participation of collaborative sharing in a single workspace.

CAPTION NEEDED (Redding, CA))

CHALLENGES OF VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS

Three main challenges of virtual workshops were identified: (1) barriers to digital access, (2) lack of connection to the physical sense of place and people, and (3) community engagement in a virtual setting. Lack of access to broadband, computers, and/or technical knowledge is a big barrier for effective engagement in virtual workshops. This may have an outsized impact on rural communities with noted broadband access gaps and can prevent some community members being engaged in LFLP.

Another challenge is the lack of physical connection to the community. This lack of physical connection makes it more difficult for facilitators to understand the community, necessitating more research and preparation before meeting with the community.

The final challenge, conducting community engagement in a virtual setting, has required adaptations to the process that are less engaging and dynamic. According to a participant, "[Moving virtually to Zoom] just takes a little bit longer, and it's been a little bit of a learning process for us the past year in trying to develop a way to work with the communities like we had."

FUTURE PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS

Based on the discussions with interviewees, we have noted several potential avenues for improving the program. These suggestions align under six larger themes: establish mechanisms for post-workshop support, build in reflection period for program leadership between annual cohorts, revise the evaluation criteria for applicants around factors for success, formalize a three-tiered category system for workshop applicants, incorporating diversity, equity, inclusion and access, and program expansion. We discuss specific recommendations under each of these areas in what follows.

ESTABLISH MECHANISMS FOR POST-WORKSHOP SUPPORT

One method of improving the program includes brainstorming with LFLP facilitators on possible ideas for formalizing one-on-one support offerings, such as 3-, 6-, and 12-month post-workshop consultations. Facilitators expressed the desire to know how communities are doing after the initial work. As mentioned by one interviewee, "So continuing to get together, continuing to staff the plan, it'd be nice to see, we don't have a role in that ongoing hand holding opportunity [currently]". Additionally, formalizing an LFLP graduate community of practice was identified to extend engagement that can aid community success. According to one interview participant, "Without engagement, communities lose steam...I'm an advocate for an actively managed community of practice. This group needs a graduate COP... where they graduate and join a group of those who have gone before. This connects to factors for success described above as more successful communities can leverage LFLP networks. A stronger community of practice can help motivate communities, and help communities help each other. Relatedly, a facilitator mentioned hosting an LFLP reunion every couple of years.

From this discussion, the importance of staying connected with communities after the initial workshop and creating opportunities for community linkages across LFLP programming is clear. Not only can this provide much needed ongoing resources to help drive community success, but it can also create a foundation for motivating, inspiring and energizing these communities in the future.

BUILD IN REFLECTION PERIOD FOR PROGRAM LEADERSHIP BETWEEN ANNUAL COHORTS

Program leadership expressed an interest in having annual evaluation, reflection, and time for discussion for new ideas to improve the program. This could happen by shifting the timeline of the program slightly to make room for an evaluation period, for example, of 1 or 2 months in between cohorts. There is a general sense that this program has been positively adapted over the years from feedback and changes, but still more reflection time would be appreciated. It was noted by an interviewee that previous iterations of reflection created positive changes in the past

Similarly, participants stressed the need for creating dedicated time for reflection on last year's programming. Currently, the timing of the application process gives little time for reflection. For instance, on participant stated, "The period between finishing communities and the next round, is taken up by the selection process. There's not a real lull for the USDA teams.... but it's so important you make time for it. Keeping consistent with the program schedule was also suggested by participants. Specifically, not allowing late starts would be beneficial.

REVISE THE EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR APPLICANTS AROUND FACTORS OF SUCCESS

The interviewees made several suggestions for adjusting the evaluation criteria to better reflect the known factors that impact success across the communities. Several of these suggestions were tailored to situations that have derailed projects or required significant revamping to overcome. For instance, ensuring that the steering committee owns or has decision-making authority of any land, property, or other physical asset that is integral to the project. In terms of the steering committee, evaluating whether they demonstrate "...strong cohesion and / or a willingness to work together and have mutual respect for each other." As personnel changes have significantly impacted some projects, "requiring 'Planned Personnel Changes' plan in place for core steering communities or Point of Contacts, so that information and planning continue despite personnel changes." Lastly, attempting to ensure applicants have a strong connection to the communities.

FORMALIZE A 3-TIERD CATEGORY SYSTEM FOR WORKSHOP APPLICANTS

Several program leaders referenced a 3-Tiered Category system in which communities are either LFLP Planning, Ready for LFLP, or LFLP Implementation/Advanced Technical Assistance depending on their level of planning and group cohesion. We provide suggestions for each of the tiers below.

Tier 1: LFLP Planning

Applicants do not yet have a clear vision on what they want or lack a diverse and representative steering committee. This pre-workshop assistance could help focus on identifying candidates to be steering committee members and leads, narrowing a focus from multiple projects to one, and providing assistance to facilitate initial community interest meetings to apply for the LFLP. One interviewee stated, "So [we could create] more tools potentially for those who didn't get accepted, and/or maybe building a broader network of communities than just the ones that you seek for technical assistance."

Tier 2: LFLP Ready

Best for applicants who have a representative and diverse steering committee, with strong leadership in the Point of Contact roles, consensus around a vision for a particular project, and rooted in a place where steering committee members live and/or work but need help crafting the initial plan for their vision. According to an interview participant, "Some of the communities need a little bit more handholding, and that's okay, because they don't necessarily know what they don't know, especially as far as all these other programs that we have to offer...".

Tier 3: Implementation/Advanced Technical Assistance

This technical assistance can best serve the needs of graduates of the LFLP workshops who have a working action plan and need guidance throughout the phases of implementation and beyond. This could also be relevant for communities who have a pre-existing action plan from another process. One interviewee stated that the process "is really good for communities who kind of have an idea of maybe a few things that they want to do..." For example, "as communities become increasingly sophisticated, they need more than an action plan...they are ready for a business plan not just an action plan...".

INCORPORATING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESS

One recommendation from interviewees was requiring diversity training for LFLP facilitators, USDA, and EPA staff. Some suggestions included Uprooting Racism Training, Soul Fire Farm Training, and Angela Parks from DEI Consulting. Another recommendation was to examine the current language and process in the application for ways in which it may be excluding or biasing certain populations and communities. One participant noted the barriers for indigenous communities: "When it comes to indigenous communities, because they don't necessarily always have the resources, they don't have a grant writer to really make their application shine, and they're some of the communities that really need the program, I'd say more than others do, and they've been generally left behind in years past. This interviewee also noted the need to look at the community as a whole and not necessarily the application as written: "It's really trying to look at the community as a whole and their needs, and not necessarily how the application is written itself. Because sometimes the ones that don't really have a great application are the communities that really need our assistance."

Additionally, it was suggested that once applicants are selected, ensuring that barriers to participation are addressed for most historically undeserved participants. This concern includes both to technical access when going online and the difficulties attending in-person sessions for many community members.

Lastly, incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion and access as a central topic in the workshop structure was recommended.

> "By the nature of where we focus the topic of equity and inclusion and food access, the topic that food is a right-not-a-privilege sort of basic dignity, right of survival over the core pillars of existence is that we all eat, right?"

PROGRAM EXPANSION

If the program were to expand to include additional communities, or multiple tiers of programming, some suggested seeking additional funds for the program and formally establishing partnerships with other agencies to help promote and run the program. Ideas of other agencies whose topical expertise meets the current needs of communities includes HUD, Rural Development, DoT, CDC, and the Federal Reserve. However, more education may be necessary to get agency staff on the same page about the relevance of their role in LFLP support. It was noted that some partners do not know why they have been asked to attend and may need more information to make their role, and importance, clear.

Other suggestions for potential partners include Delta Regional Authority and Appalachian Regional Commission, who are interested in implementation projects and have a historical relationship with Rural Development. The CDC was also mentioned as a potential partner through their Healthy Initiatives work and new interest in infrastructure. However, whoever is brought in as a potential partner, their role in the process and the importance of their expertise for LFLP programming needs to be clearly communicated.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The key informant interviews and REM sessions provide a wealth of information on the LFLP program and how to improve the program in the future. The interviews highlight factors that impact community success as well as identify challenges faced by communities when participating in the LFLP program. Some of these elements, such as strong steering committee, diversity of representation on the committee, and connection to community may be addressed by updating evaluation criteria as suggested by some interviewees. Others, such as access to adequate resources, technology, helping communities better leverage resources, may require more revamping of the program to adequately address. The three-tiered approach recommended by some participants may be a potential way to better serve the needs of communities, help communities better meet their goals under LFLP and help tailor the program to fit community needs. This system may also help in meeting diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, especially as communities who need the program but lack the resources, may benefit from resources developed for Tier 1 applicants.

Many of these suggestions are supported by the REM findings. The REM analysis reveals increases in several communities in social, natural, built, financial and cultural capitals. Most success appears to be in social, natural, and built capitals initially but increases in these capitals leads to increases in others, such as financial, human, and cultural, which aids long-term success. The more successful LFLP communities feature strong leadership and networking structures that are instrumental to their success. It is possible for communities to overcome trust issues and low social capital to achieve their goals, but this process takes time and is difficult. The tiered system approach could help address these concerns. Both the key informant interviews and REM sessions show that motivation and inspiration are key to continued success. In these sessions, we have seen renewed inspiration and motivation when participants from different communities share their stories and successes. This alone highlights how extended engagement and developing a Community of Practice would be beneficial for communities. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when initial plans have proceeded slowly or completely stopped, developing opportunities for extended engagement and networking can be vital to success.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

DEVELOP A STRONGER ONLINE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR LFLP GRADUATES

This community of practice should be easily accessible, broader than the current LFLP members Facebook page, allow for networking across LFLP communities, and allow LFLP communities to submit regular updates on their activities. This resource can help communities identify additional resources, share ideas, and even provide technical assistance across communities not directly available from the current LFLP program. This resource should also be used for evaluation purposes (more discussion of this below).

HELP FINDING OTHER RESOURCES FOR BUILDING AND MAINTAINING ACTIVITIES

While communities are highly successful acquiring grant funding from external partners, additional grant or other financial resources for mobile food markets, food incubators/food hubs and other activities would be beneficial. This should include resources for paid positions or staff (if possible) and resources for developing and maintaining a strong volunteer and contributor network when other financial resources cannot be secured. It should be noted that the Famers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) is a good source for supporting many of these activities. However, identifying helping LFLP communities identify other potential sources, especially for equipment, would be beneficial.

Additionally, one community in the REM sessions has developed co-ops and financed activities partially through shares to great success. This may be a model that LFLP can provide more information on for interested activities. Communities that have used this model could be highlighted in the community of practice or even attend some LFLP events to help share this expertise.

REVISE THE EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR APPLICANTS AROUND FACTORS THAT IMPACT SUCCESS

As noted in the interview analysis, the interviewees made several suggestions for adjusting the evaluation criteria to better reflect the known factors that impact a community's ability to implement their action plan. As many of these factors are supported in the REM sessions, this is a strong recommendation for further improving the program. This includes: (1) ensuring that the steering committee owns or has decision-making authority of any land, property, or other physical asset that is integral to the project; (2) evaluating the steering committee to ensure they have strong cohesion and can work together; (3) avoiding the impacts of leadership loss by requiring a continuity plan for any personnel changes; and (4) attempting to ensure applicants have a strong connection to the communities.

FORMALIZE A 3-TIERD CATEGORY SYSTEM FOR WORKSHOP APPLICANTS

As mentioned in the interviews, a 3-Tiered Category System for Workshop applicants can help improve the program and aid in success. Communities can be categorized as LFLP Planning, LFLP Ready, or Implementation/Advanced Technical Assistance depending on their level of planning and group cohesion. This suggestion is supported by the REM sessions as some communities have more developed resources and tools to engage with LFLP than others. Rather than prevent these communities from participating or setting them up for disenchantment and failure by placing them in the current LFLP program to soon, this structure could better tailor the program for communities at a range of LFLP "readiness". This tiered structure can extend the reach of the LFLP program and address other concerns and recommendations, such as identifying additional resources and assistance needed for implementation of programming.

EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Complex programs are often difficult to evaluate. A multi-method evaluation approach is recommended to fully assess the impacts of the Local Foods Local Places program. The LFLP program can also provide advice to communities to help them evaluate their own impacts.

WORKSHOP SURVEY ANALYSIS

Each LFLP workshop conducts a survey of participants. It is recommended that in addition to descriptive analysis, the team consider conducting bivariate comparisons. These could be done by cohort, or between communities in the same session to see if they rank the workshops differently (although overall reviews are highly positive). Additionally, bivariate comparisons by gender, race, and ethnicity, and potentially age is recommended. This information would provide valuable knowledge on any statistically significant differences in experiences with the LFLP workshops.

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY REPORTS/ POSTS/NEWS

From the REM sessions, many entities, although not necessarily all, are collecting data on their programs. Several individuals referenced reports that were available about their activities and were happy to share the reports with the evaluation team. If community of practice recommendations are adopted, communities should be encouraged to share their reports, activities, news coverage, etc. This information can be analyzed using content analysis and can eventually be used in longitudinal designs as more communities over time share information.

The information contained in these reports and how well they will meet evaluation goals likely varies by community (and the organization publishing the report). However, the LFLP program could provide information to communities on the data to collect and report that both meets EPA/USDA needs and benefits participant communities through helping them show their impacts. There are limitations to this approach, especially that communities with less resources may not produce reports or similar information, or communities with less LFLP achievements will likely not report any activities. Despite these limitations, content analysis in addition in combination with other methods would be a valuable evaluation tool.

SURVEYS OF LFLP MEMBERS

In combination with content analysis, short, periodic surveys focused on data the EPA/USDA need to meet evaluation goals, could be conducted yearly. An online survey posted on a Community of Practice website (or social media) at a similar time each year is one approach. This survey could include questions that ask about their activities in the past 12 months, who they have collaborated with for activities, grant funding and grant sources, estimate of volunteer hours for activities reported, and any donations received. The survey should also be linked to a specific community (by having them identify the community's name and organization filling out the survey) so the data can be analyzed over time.

Response rates for the survey have been dropping over time; however, many participants in the REM session were excited about the LFLP program even if their community was struggling to meet some of their goals. This excitement for LFLP can be leveraged to improve survey responses. The survey will also have selection bias as communities with more achievements will be the most likely to report their results.

RIPPLE EFFECTS MAPPING CASE STUDIES

Ripple Effects Mapping with specific communities can be used to conduct in-depth case studies of the LFLP program. REM with participants from the same community would allow for more in-depth evaluation of activities and their impact. This would also help to establish the causal linkages between activities and impacts which is difficult to ascertain through other methods due to the complexities of the LFLP program. REM should be limited to 8 to 12 individuals and could be conducted with the Steering Committee. This would serve not only an evaluation function, but REM sessions often get participants re-energized and enthusiastic about their programs. Additionally, the REM map is shared with participants and can help them highlight their impacts within their own communities. This dual benefit might lead to higher participation and engagement among selected communities.

It may not be feasible to conduct REM sessions with each participating community. If this is the case, several sampling options are available depending on evaluation goals. I would recommend that initial REM sessions be conducted at least one year after the workshop to give enough time for some activities and impacts to occur. Additionally, communities selected for REM should vary in terms of initial success. With LFLP facilitator feedback, sampling should include a community who facilitators believe will be able to implement their action plan based on their interactions via the workshop and follow up phone calls, and communities

that facilitators believe may struggle to implement their action plan. Over time, additional communities could be selected that are 2, 3 or 4 years out from the LFLP workshop. Although the longer the time frame, the more difficult it is to remember program activities and impacts (thus, other data collection strategies are also needed). Potentially some communities could be selected for multiple REM sessions (at least a year apart) for more longitudinal analysis. REM sessions can be used as a case study; however, over time, the data can be analyzed comparatively to identify common trends.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Understanding what prevented communities from implementing their action plan is also important to capture. Unfortunately, communities that have struggled might be less willing to participate in the other methods described. For those communities, it may be beneficial to conduct interviews with the project point of contact or other key steering committee members to provide valuable insight into why communities struggle to implement their action plan.

FINAL REMARKS

Overall, LFLP has several communities that have been highly successful on many fronts. This is true whether one considers success to be the implementation of the action plan, pivoting in the face of opposition or barriers such as COVID-19, building and maintaining community bonds, or not utilizing community resources (financial or otherwise) when a community is not ready for a particular action. While there are limitations to the REM analysis due to a limited number of participants within communities that leads to less detailed information being collected, communities are clearly routinely generating social, human, cultural, built, natural and financial capital. For many communities, these successes build over time producing even more financial capital (through sales, employment, and other activities) in the long-term. Ongoing events in nutrition and health, and community celebrations generate human and cultural capital which will have long-term impacts that can be evaluated.

The improvements to the program suggested in this report, particularly building a stronger community of practice to help communities leverage ideas and build networks across LFLP communities, will likely enhance an already successful program. Regular evaluation of the program is recommended to better track results over time as well as assess impacts of any changes to the programs in terms of achieving the desired results.

CAPTION NEEDED (Indiana, PA))

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APPENDIX A:
KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Local Foods, Local Places

Evaluating Processes, Outcomes and Future Directions

Key Informant Interview Questions

Facilitator Focused Protocol

INTRODUCTION

As you know / To provide you with context, the Agricultural Marketing Service would like to better understand how the current LFLP process and program work for communities, steps that can be taken to improve the process and program, and community related outcomes from the program. I have a set of questions that examine these issues. Do you have any questions before we get started?

In order to capture all of the information you will share today; I would like to audio record this interview. The recording will be used for transcription purposes only and will be deleted once the transcription is complete. Would you be okay with recording?

Could we start by having you describe what your role is with the Local Foods, Local Places program.

OVERALL COMMUNITY PERFORMANCE
(e.g., Successes and challenges during the workshop engagement)

1. From your perspective, were there certain types of communities that appeared to be better situated for success? (Alternatively: Were there certain types of communities that appeared to be more ready for their workshops?)
    a. If so, what was it about those communities that led you to that conclusion?
    b. What characteristics did they have?
2. From your perspective, what were the greatest strengths that communities brought to the table?
3. Did you find that there were common community challenges or roadblocks across multiple locations?

IMPACTS ON COMMUNITIES
(e.g., Short/Medium/Long actions)

Note: some of these questions may not apply depending upon individual's role

4. Have you engaged with any of the communities following the workshops?
    a. If so, which ones and what have you learned?

5. Are there any community/community outcomes of which you are aware?
    a. Examples might include things the communities have implemented or built or ways the communities are functioning differently than they were prior to the workshop.
6. Have you seen examples of ways in which technical assistance has been useful for communities?
7. Are there any other post-workshop activities or actions that have appeared to be useful for communities?
    a. For example, have you connected with any of the communities using the Facebook page (Follow-up: What success stories have you seen or any communications/activities that seem effective or useful?)

WORKSHOP CONTENT

(e.g., Concerns, topics, content expertise areas)

8. During the community sessions, were there common concerns about implementation expressed by communities?
9. Were certain resources more commonly inquired about than others?
    a. Did it appear as if certain resources were more appealing and if so, which ones?
10. If applicable based on role: As a subject-matter-expert (role specific), did you feel well prepared for the workshop?
    a. Were there any times when you felt out of your comfort zone (pre-workshop, workshop, post-workshop, TA)?
    b. Was there anything you wish you knew ahead of time or a different way you could have been more prepared? (Was training and preparation adequate to be successful?)
11. In what ways did diversity and inclusion play a role while working with communities?
    a. How was diversity and inclusion addressed?

PROGRAM DESIGN

(e.g., Community Selection, Workshop schedule, etc.)

12. When thinking about how the LFLP program functions, what are the most successful pieces?
    a. What aspects don't function as well? What changes would you recommend?
13. Has the LFLP selection process used an effective diversity, equity, and inclusion lens?
14. Do you have suggestions that would inform the community selection criteria and process?
15. Can you talk a little about the transition from in-person to online/virtual?
    a. What impact did you experience?
    b. Was there anything gained because of the transition? Lost? Do you have a preference for in-person versus virtual? Why?

16. What recommendations do you have for planning future LFLP workshops?
17. What recommendations do you have for conducting on future LFLP workshops?
18. And finally, is there anything else that you would like to share that we didn't talk about today?

Thank you again for taking the time to talk with us today! If there is anything additional you think of later related to what we spoke about today, please feel free to reach out at... Do you have any questions or comments before we conclude? Thank you, again!

APPENDIX B: RIPPLE EFFECTS MAPPING PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

MAPPING THE RIPPLE EFFECTS OF YOUR LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES WORK

1. Introduction: Why are we here?
2. Discussion: Answering the guiding questions in Zoom Breakout Rooms
3. Facilitated Activity: Mapping on the screen
4. Closing: How will the information be shared?

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Tell us a story about how Local Foods, Local Places has had an impact on your community.
2. What has been the most effective part of Local Foods, Local Places?
3. Is your organization doing anything differently as a result of the Local Foods, Local Places work?
4. What has been the most helpful part of these programs for your organization or your community?

APPENDIX C: EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Complex programs are often difficult to evaluate. A multi-method evaluation approach is recommended to fully assess the impacts of the Local Foods Local Places program. The LFLP program can also provide advice to communities to help them evaluate their own impacts.

WORKSHOP SURVEY ANALYSIS

Each LFLP workshop conducts a survey of participants. It is recommended that in addition to descriptive analysis, the team consider conducting bivariate comparisons. These could be done by cohort, or between communities in the same session to see if they rank the workshops differently (although overall reviews are highly positive). Additionally, bivariate comparisons by gender, race, and ethnicity, and potentially age is recommended. This information would provide valuable knowledge on any statistically significant differences in experiences with the LFLP workshops.

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY REPORTS/POSTS/NEWS

From the REM sessions, many entities, although not necessarily all, are collecting data on their programs. Several individuals referenced reports that were available about their activities and were happy to share the reports with the evaluation team. If community of practice recommendations are adopted, communities should be encouraged to share their reports, activities, news coverage, etc. This information can be analyzed using content analysis and can eventually be used in longitudinal designs as more communities over time share information.

The information contained in these reports and how well they will meet evaluation goals likely varies by community (and the organization publishing the report). However, the LFLP program could provide information to communities on the data to collect and report that both meets EPA/USDA needs and benefits participant communities through helping them show their impacts. There are limitations to this approach, especially that communities with less resources may not produce reports or similar information, or communities with less LFLP achievements will likely not report any activities. Despite these limitations, content analysis in addition in combination with other methods would be a valuable evaluation tool.

SURVEYS OF LFLP MEMBERS

In combination with content analysis, short, periodic surveys focused on data the EPA/USDA need to meet evaluation goals, could be conducted yearly. An online survey posted on a Community of Practice website (or social media) at a similar time each year is one approach. This survey could include questions that ask about their activities in the past 12 months, who they have collaborated with for activities, grant funding and grant sources, estimate of volunteer hours for activities reported, and any donations received. The survey should also be linked to a specific community (by having them identify the community's name and organization filling out the survey) so the data can be analyzed over time.

Response rates for the survey have been dropping over time; however, many participants in the REM session were excited about the LFLP program even if their community was struggling to meet some of their goals. This excitement for LFLP can be leveraged to improve survey responses. The survey will also have selection bias as communities with more achievements will be the most likely to report their results.

RIPPLE EFFECTS MAPPING CASE STUDIES

Ripple Effects Mapping with specific communities can be used to conduct in-depth case studies of the LFLP program. REM with participants from the same community would allow for more in-depth evaluation of activities and their impact. This would also help to establish the causal linkages between activities and impacts which is difficult to ascertain through other methods due to the complexities of the LFLP program. REM should be limited to 8 to 12 individuals and could be conducted with the Steering Committee. This would serve not only an evaluation function, but REM sessions often get participants re-energized and enthusiastic about their programs. Additionally, the REM map is shared with participants and can help them highlight their impacts within their own communities. This dual benefit might lead to higher participation and engagement among selected communities.

It may not be feasible to conduct REM sessions with each participating community. If this is the case, several sampling options are available depending on evaluation goals. I would recommend that initial REM sessions be conducted at least one year after the workshop to give enough time for some activities and impacts to occur. Additionally, communities selected for REM should vary in terms of initial success. With LFLP facilitator feedback, sampling should include a community who facilitators believe will be able to implement their action plan based on their interactions via the workshop and follow up phone calls, and communities that facilitators believe may struggle to implement their action plan. Over time, additional communities could be selected that are 2, 3 or 4 years out from the LFLP workshop. Although the longer the time frame, the more difficult it is to remember program activities and impacts (thus, other data collection strategies are also needed). Potentially some communities could be selected for multiple REM sessions (at least a year apart) for more longitudinal analysis. REM sessions can be used as a case study; however, over time, the data can be analyzed comparatively to identify common trends.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Understanding what prevented communities from implementing their action plan is also important to capture. Unfortunately, communities that have struggled might be less willing to participate in the other methods described. For those communities, it may be beneficial to conduct interviews with the project point of contact or other key steering committee members to provide valuable insight into why communities struggle to implement their action plan.