



# Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance

## 2022 Evaluation Summary

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The Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance is a network of stakeholders living in the City of Syracuse, Onondaga County, and Onondaga Nation. Together, they work to build a thriving food system that works for everyone. As SOFSA's Program Evaluation Intern, I developed a plan to evaluate SOFSA's processes (i.e. how the network operates) and performance (i.e. the network's progress towards achieving its goals). The evaluation can help SOFSA to understand its capacity for strengthening the local food system and identify where changes may be needed. This summary describes the components of my evaluation plan, some of the results from the 2022 calendar year (**reported in blue**), and recommendations for carrying out similar assessments in the future.

### SOFSA's Processes

Two of the processes at the core of SOFSA's operations are its commitment to equity and justice, and its organizational structure.

To root all its work in equity and justice, SOFSA must clearly communicate its commitment to these principles with leadership, general membership, and the broader community. SOFSA's Bylaws and Action Plan for Equity and Racial Justice are the primary documents that outline this commitment. Both foundational documents are clear and thorough regarding equity and justice, though both are in need of updates in order to stay relevant to all of SOFSA's work. Additionally, these documents outline several important equity and justice precedents that Soul Fire Farm discussed in their 2021 *Uprooting Racism in the Food System* workshop. These include compensation for Community Liaisons, convening social affinity groups, the Advisory Board and staff's continued education on social justice issues, and the presence of a position or committee that holds the organization accountable (i.e. the Equity, Inclusion, Engagement Coordinator and Accountability Team).

For SOFSA's organizational structure, I examined where decision-making authority lies and the diversity of leadership. Since a new membership structure was introduced in February 2023, decision-making authority may have shifted, making it an important component to evaluate in the next year. The diversity of SOFSA Leadership (i.e. Advisory Board, Community Liaisons, staff, and interns) can be assessed using the data collected through SOFSA's Staff Intake Form and its Advisory Board Application. As of September 2022, **57.1% of SOFSA Leadership self-identified as White**, which reflects the racial/ethnic makeup of Syracuse and Onondaga County. SOFSA needs to consider whether it is enough that the Leadership reflects the diversity of the community they live in, or if they need to prioritize centering those who have been most impacted by the food system they are working to transform.

### SOFSA's Performance

To evaluate SOFSA's progress towards achieving its goals, I considered each of the four action areas described in its mission statement: foster relationships, develop projects, align resources, and advocate for policies. For each action area, I designed 3-4 measurable indicators that together illustrate SOFSA's performance. One indicator in each area is specific to SOFSA's commitment to equity and justice.

### **Foster Relationships**

SOFSA's performance in fostering relationships can be measured using the number of meetings or events it (co)hosted and the size of its membership. The size of SOFSA's membership can be approximated via the number of individuals who attend a meeting or event throughout the year (**over 200 people**), and the number of organizations/institutions that have stepped forward as formal partners (**45 organizations**). To foster relationships rooted in equity and justice, SOFSA needs to make sure it uplifts marginalized voices and brings them into conversations around the local food system. One approach is to host events that are specifically designed to engage these communities, such as SOFSA's affinity groups, social justice learning opportunities, and Community Listening Sessions (**a total of 17 events**).

### **Develop Projects**

SOFSA aims to support the development of projects designed to build a resilient community and local food system. I illustrate SOFSA's progress by considering the number of new projects that were started with its support, and the number of partner organizations involved. To make sure these projects are equitable and just, it is important that the communities who are most affected are directly involved in designing and launching the project. **In 2022, SOFSA supported the development of four projects (Valley Plaza Farmers Market, Onondaga Food Rescue Pilot, Regional Farm-to-School, promotion of Double-Up Food Bucks) with 13 Partner Organizations, only one of which (Food Action Healthy Neighborhoods Now) represented an affected community.** In the future, SOFSA should advocate for the inclusion of these groups in the projects they support.

### **Align Resources**

To understand SOFSA's work towards aligning resources with their community partners I examined both monetary and non-monetary resources. Monetary resources include those secured by partners via collaboration with SOFSA (**approximately \$2mil**), as well as the percentage of funds raised by SOFSA that are distributed to Community Partners (**19%**). Non-monetary resources might include grant-writing support, promoting job opportunities, publicizing events, or coordinating people power. Since non-monetary resources are more difficult to define and quantify, I recommend that SOFSA keeps a record of any of these supports provided throughout the year.

### **Advocate for Policies**

SOFSA's performance in advocating for policies can be understood by assessing its strength in developing plans and strategies, its capacity for conducting advocacy, and the number of engagements its members have with decision-makers. Engagements might include writing letters or emails, making phone calls, attending public hearings, participating in Lobby Days, or signing-on to campaigns. It is also important that those who are most affected by each policy area are engaged in SOFSA's advocacy work. Now that SOFSA has a Policy Platform, the Policy & Planning Committee should define what it means to be "successful" in each policy area so that the alliance can understand where progress has been made.

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Overall, my evaluation revealed that SOFSA's work in 2022 aligned with its mission statement. SOFSA has been successful in promoting a thriving and resilient food system through their work to foster relationships, launch community-wide projects, align resources between partners, and advocate for better policies.

Now that SOFSA has been evaluated for 2022, its Leadership can use the results to set specific goals for each action area. I recommend that SOFSA repeat the evaluation every 1-2 years. SOFSA can then track its progress, see if it is meeting its goals, and understand how its work has changed over time.