



Syracuse-Onondaga
Food Systems Alliance

Strategic Action Plan 2024 - 2029

Report prepared by Kolia Souza Consulting
in collaboration with
Syracuse Onondaga Food Systems Alliance Leadership Team

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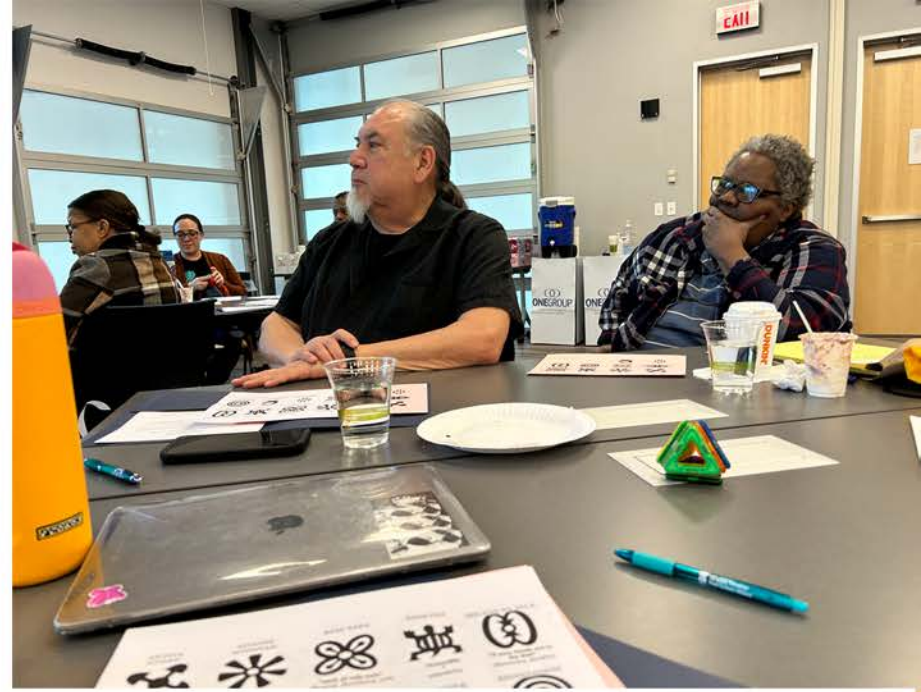
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Established in 2019, the Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance (SOFSA) is an independent food policy council and coalition in Central New York serving the city of Syracuse, surrounding Onondaga County, and neighboring Onondaga Nation.

Mission Statement: Who We Are

The Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance (SOFSA) is a network of changemakers dedicated to reshaping our region's food system. Grounded in principles of transformative justice and reciprocity, we cultivate connection, collaboration, and coordination across sectors to mobilize our collective resources towards a more just and sustainable food future in Syracuse, Onondaga County, and Onondaga Nation.

Grounding Philosophy: Why We Are Here

Rooted in interdependence, responsible stewardship, and ancestral wisdom, SOFSA serves as a seed planted in the rich soil of our community, nourished by values that question authority, value community, and cherish our connection to the Earth and all living beings. Like each of the Three Sisters, we aim not only to grow and thrive ourselves but also to support the growth and wellbeing of all members of our community.



The Journey to Our Next Phase of Growth

With our first five years behind us, we have been reflecting on our story, both of who we have been and who we are becoming. In the fall of 2023, we embarked on a **strategic planning process** to further solidify our commitment to community and food system transformation. We kicked off our first annual Food Justice Gathering that October, holding space for diverse community voices to share about their efforts and ideas to create a more just and equitable food system future. These experiences and stories converged with those shared by individuals on the SOFSA Leadership Team - Board members, Community Connectors, and staff - over the next several months to inform our first leadership retreat in February 2024. During the retreat, the SOFSA Leadership Team engaged in an action storytelling process known as Public Narrative, where Leadership Team members shared personal accounts illustrating transformational food system values. Through this collective experience, we identified our shared values and beliefs to form a collaboratively defined set of choices, challenges, and outcomes. The result was our Theory of Changemaking, outlined on the following page.

Accomplishments

Since beginning this process in the fall of 2023, we have accomplished and are working on a number of goals, including:

- Updated our mission statement, grounding philosophy, and action orientation
- Currently assessing Board capacity and future development needs
- Incorporated into an independent nonprofit organization and are working toward IRS designation for 501(c)3 tax-exempt status
- Developed and engaged in an annual performance evaluation of SOFSA's Director as an accountability mechanism
- Restructured SOFSA's Leadership Team (including staff, Board, and Community Connectors) to meet the organization's needs in this next chapter
- Gained national recognition as part of a cohort of leading food policy councils across the country awarded pilot, unrestricted grant funds from the Better Food Policy Fund

Theory of Changemaking

The truth we face is one of a broken, disconnected food system that maintains uneven distribution of power, wealth, and resources through policies that reinforce a lack of accountability. Competing truths in this system determine what is urgent - and therefore prioritized - or what is not, magnifying tensions. The sense of urgency that does exist perpetuates reactive, unsustainable solutions that are extractive, lacking a natural element of reciprocity. And so, these broken systems disengage us from our core humanity.

However, if we ground our practices in integrity and a sense of shared responsibility that is justified by our lived and learned experiences, we can press for “power of choice,” exercising agency in decision-making with a collective eye toward healing and wholeness. This is a call to...

- 1) Prioritize solutions that promote reciprocity and lead to connection
- 2) Reframe ‘investment’ as ‘re-centering reciprocal and abundant approaches and solutions’
- 3) Advocate for meaningful, holistic access to and stewardship of community resources in order that they be leveraged as tools for achieving sovereignty with dignity
- 4) Reinforce commitment among food system actors through accountability, particularly among those with disproportionate power

In doing so, we ‘go back to go forward,’ remembering the collective implications and humanity of our decisions.”

How We Flourish

We ground ourselves in a commitment to advance equity and justice.

All of SOFSA's work is rooted in uplifting people, communities, and the environment we share. Core to this work is advancing food justice which is inextricably interconnected with combatting inequities across dimensions of race, class, gender, disability status, health, neighborhood, and more. SOFSA's work in this area includes:

- Executing ongoing needs assessments through Community Listening Sessions
- Cultivating community-engaged governance and accountability mechanisms
- Maintaining affinity groups to engage and support individuals within the SOFSA network who, because of their identity, have been systematically excluded and/or disproportionately impacted by systemic inequity
- Continuing and strengthening the role of the EIA Committee to uphold community values and standards in SOFSA practices
- Modeling inclusive practices in organizational operations and event execution

We strive to address the root causes of food injustice and recognize their interconnectedness with all kinds of systemic oppression. We are building a responsive movement to transform our food system and understand that to do so we must be adaptive, exercising creativity as we share in the risks, responsibilities, resources, and rewards of our collective strategies.

Through our network's shared actions, SOFSA works to enact principles of transformative justice and collective impact via the following practices:

Aligning resources and capacity

SOFSA works with our partners to ensure access to the resources they need to be effective in their individual areas of impact across the region's food system – including access to land, equipment, human capital, knowledge, and funding. Grounded in Indigenous principles of reciprocity and abundance, this area of work includes maintaining communications channels for network partners to share resources, regranteeing funds, offering training, sharing job postings and professional development opportunities, and supporting partners' grant writing efforts.

Fostering relationships

SOFSA cultivates key partnerships with and among food systems stakeholders across the region to enhance coordination and collaboration. This activity is led by SOFSA's staff, but is a shared effort inclusive of Board members, Community Connectors, and the whole of our network.

Promoting civic engagement and policy development

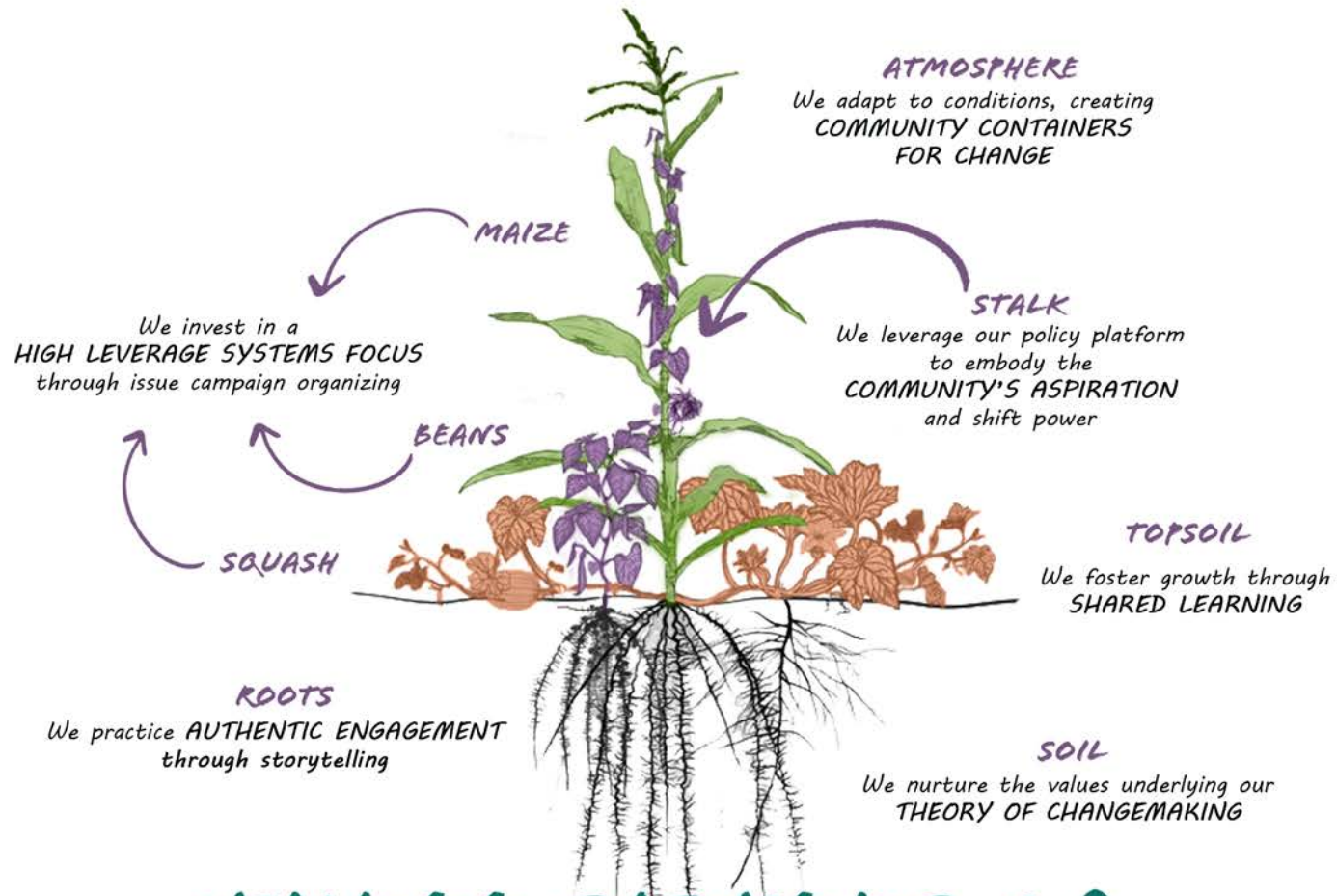
As a food policy council, SOFSA acts as an intermediary between civic society and our elected officials/government institutions. SOFSA works alongside organizational partners to understand and reframe policy issues in ways that are accessible to the communities we serve. The training, nonpartisan voter education, issue area awareness-building, advocacy and lobbying SOFSA provides builds overall community capacity for change and is informed by our community listening sessions. SOFSA does not promote or oppose the candidacy of any individual for public office but provides well-rounded information and forums for residents to learn about and make informed decisions about who is representing them.

Cultivating food system innovation

As a catalyst for change within our region's food system, SOFSA supports innovation by piloting and incubating emergent projects that respond to identified community needs. We continually assess our food system's landscape to more deeply understand both assets and opportunities, so that the projects we co-develop can have the greatest impact.

Building a Movement: How We Go Forward

Transformation, equity, and justice each are outcome and action grounded in intentional commitment. Just as the Three Sisters work harmoniously within an interdependent ecosystem, we seek to foster the conditions under which these outcomes and actions emerge and flourish.



**THREE SISTERS OF
TRANSFORMATION, EQUITY, AND JUSTICE**

Collective Impact is a model for organizing large-scale social change across multiple groups of committed actors. Organizations that operate in silos, have disparate agendas, and only sometimes keep one another informed can be considered the “1.0 version” of tackling complex, systemic problems. Intentional collaboration and coordination to amplify efforts is Collective Impact 2.0. Initiatives rooted in this model often share five conditions: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, continuous communication, mutually reinforcing activities, and a backbone support organization. Every model, however, has its limitations. While collective impact is effective, it emphasizes a “management” approach that seeks to improve the existing system by operating on the conditions illustrated by the model on the following page.

Collective Impact 3.0, focuses on “movement building” to reform and transform systems where “improvements alone will not make a difference” (Kania & Kramer, 2011, p. 4). Movement building creates the environment that systemic change can be seeded in and thrive, touching hearts and minds along the way. **There are five conditions for the framework:**

Authentic Community Engagement or inclusive, broad engagement of those most affected by the issues at hand that cultivates ownership and long-term commitment

Shared Aspiration or an ambitious outcome rooted in community values that allows diverse stakeholders to tackle interdependent systemic challenges

Strategic Learning or applying shared measurement as strategy for learning and evaluation

Focus on high-leverage and loose/tight working relationships which offers a “systemic reading” of complex systems change to strategically apply the stakeholder resources, knowledge, and networks needed to make a difference

Containers for Change which mobilize diverse stakeholders and facilitates their “change journey” through collective trust, empathy, and creative tension (Cabaj & Weaver, 2016)

Management

Movement Building



Our work will focus on positioning SOFSA as a catalyst for transformative change within the Syracuse, Onondaga County, and Onondaga Nation food system, mobilizing the community and partners around issue campaigns that leverage our workgroups as intersectional organizing spaces. We recognize that throughout the life of any campaign, conditions change. We strive to make space for emerging issues, and our workgroups adapt their strategies in response.

Currently, SOFSA organizes for transformational change through its workgroups focusing on:



Farm to
School



Urban
Agriculture



Health
Justice



Food &
Environment



Policy &
Planning

The following pages outline our four goals to reshape our region's food system, the rationale for each goal and underlying strategy, as well as corresponding tactics.

The SOFSA 5-Year Strategic Action Plan is the result of a collaborative effort among SOFSA staff, interns, Board Members, and Community Connectors to articulate a shared vision for SOFSA’s approach to food system transformation, equity, and justice. Since our inception, we have strived to authentically engage community and partner voices to guide our efforts and support theirs. As we seek to build a movement, our efforts will focus on grounding ourselves in deeper understanding to energize, mobilize, and sustain our collective voice through the following goals and strategies.

Goal #1: Community values are centered in the development of just, equitable, local food systems.

Rationale: As residents learn from one another, they develop shared language for their values and foster shared understanding. In turn, shared understanding provides the necessary platform for shared practice. When these concepts act in unison, they lead the way to community-defined solutions that are more diverse, representative, and relevant, addressing the most pressing needs.

Strategy		
Practice authentic community engagement for transformational learning and strategic communications		
Tactic 1.1	Community listening sessions	Sustain and deepen Community Listening sessions to ground the Theory of Changemaking in diverse contexts and experiences
Tactic 1.2	Community workshops	Organize community workshops to disseminate the newly operationalized Theory of Changemaking and identify food system transformation opportunities
Tactic 1.3	Food system plan/charter	Develop a food system plan or charter outlining a shared community aspiration, corresponding goals, and strategies

Goal #2: Commitment to just, equitable, local food systems is fostered through community self-determination and ownership.

Rationale: Exercising choice is inherent to justice and sovereignty. Engaged, informed communities that are empowered to make decisions - and act on them - can shape their food system future. By cultivating leadership skills and pathways, communities are equipped with relevant knowledge and resources that increase the likelihood of solutions being adopted and implemented.

Strategy		
Develop the food systems leadership pipeline		
Tactic 2.1	Increase incubator project capacity	Develop project workflows alongside leads and build a diverse network of support to share resources, making the way for future community-led initiatives
Tactic 2.2	Expand Food Justice Fund	Connect to incubator projects and Community Connector initiative and broaden its reach/impact through targeted funder engagement
Tactic 2.3	Restructure Community Connector initiative	Identify, build the capacity of, and connect community champions to lead local campaigns/ initiatives

Goal #3: Promote development of equity-centered policy and justice-oriented systems to achieve sustainable and equitable access.

Rationale: Systems function as they are designed, including food systems. Our food system was built on racism and discrimination that is reinforced by law and policy. Advocating for systemic change through these levers is essential to the creation of just food systems that are transparent, accessible, and resilient, removing barriers to full participation.

Strategy		
Reinforce commitment among food system actors through accountability mechanisms focused on those holding disproportionate power		
Tactic 3.1	Co-create a People’s Policy Platform	Cross-analyze key baseline data from FoodPlan CNY with community listening sessions, community workshops, and resulting food system plan/charter to articulate a “People’s Policy Platform,” identify potential policy actions, and curate annual policy priorities
Tactic 3.2	Conduct stakeholder/ network analysis	Conduct a stakeholder/network analysis to map the Syracuse-Onondaga power structure and identify allies, opponents, and targets to advance policy agenda
Tactic 3.3	Invest in integrated voter engagement	Invest in voter education and capacity building for decision maker engagement, empowering residents to influence local politics
Tactic 3.4	Educate elected officials	Educate elected officials on food system policy barriers and opportunities in collaboration with community advocates

Goal #4: Power, wealth, and resources are redistributed to those who are disproportionately impacted by food system inequities.

Rationale: Uneven distribution of resources disrupts all community systems - including food systems - and adversely impacts sustainability. An assets-based approach to development builds on existing and potential social, cultural, human, natural, built, political, and financial resources. Applied with an equity lens, residents can mobilize these assets across the community power spectrum to enact lasting food systems change.

Strategy		
Shift power (e.g., access to resources, knowledge, networks, etc.) through community organizing		
Tactic 4.1	Challenge dominant narratives	Launch a storytelling campaign that amplifies community voice and advocates for change (as told through the community Theory of Changemaking process)
Tactic 4.2	Launch campaigns	Mobilize SOFSA partners through campaign issue organizing
Tactic 4.3	Streamline workgroups	Improve workgroup operations and enhance tangible outcomes by developing clear goals, objectives, and work plans
Tactic 4.4	Communications planning	Develop a comprehensive strategic communications plan to amplify, mobilize, and coordinate advocacy strategies
Tactic 4.5	Close the assets gap	Leverage reputation/increasing legitimacy to increase disproportionately impacted communities' access to capital resources (e.g., financial – philanthropy, public and private funding mechanisms)

Principles

Our sustainability strategy seeks to create long-term value by strengthening our institutional, fiscal, and ethical practices in alignment with the spirit of SOFSA - our Mission, Grounding Philosophy, Theory of Changemaking, and Principles of Equity and Justice. We recognize that the context we operate in necessitates adaptability and that our strategies must be grounded in equitable evaluation and monitoring to replicate successful efforts across our food system. The following provides a high-level overview of our guiding organizational sustainability principles and will be incorporated as part of Strategic Action Plan implementation.

Institutional Position: SOFSA builds upon its public-facing position as a legitimate, collaborative leader and becomes well positioned to build community leadership capacity for food system transformation.

As SOFSA seeks to support movement building and transformational policy and systems change, our own practices, processes, and procedures must align to be responsive. Organizational development focuses on continual improvement in order to adapt to change. Infrastructure establishes the systems to support organizational development and SOFSA's overall positioning to influence change. We will focus on strategies that continue to build our infrastructure - including staffing and staff development, evaluation, communications, and organizational overall structure - to position SOFSA as a collaborative community leader.



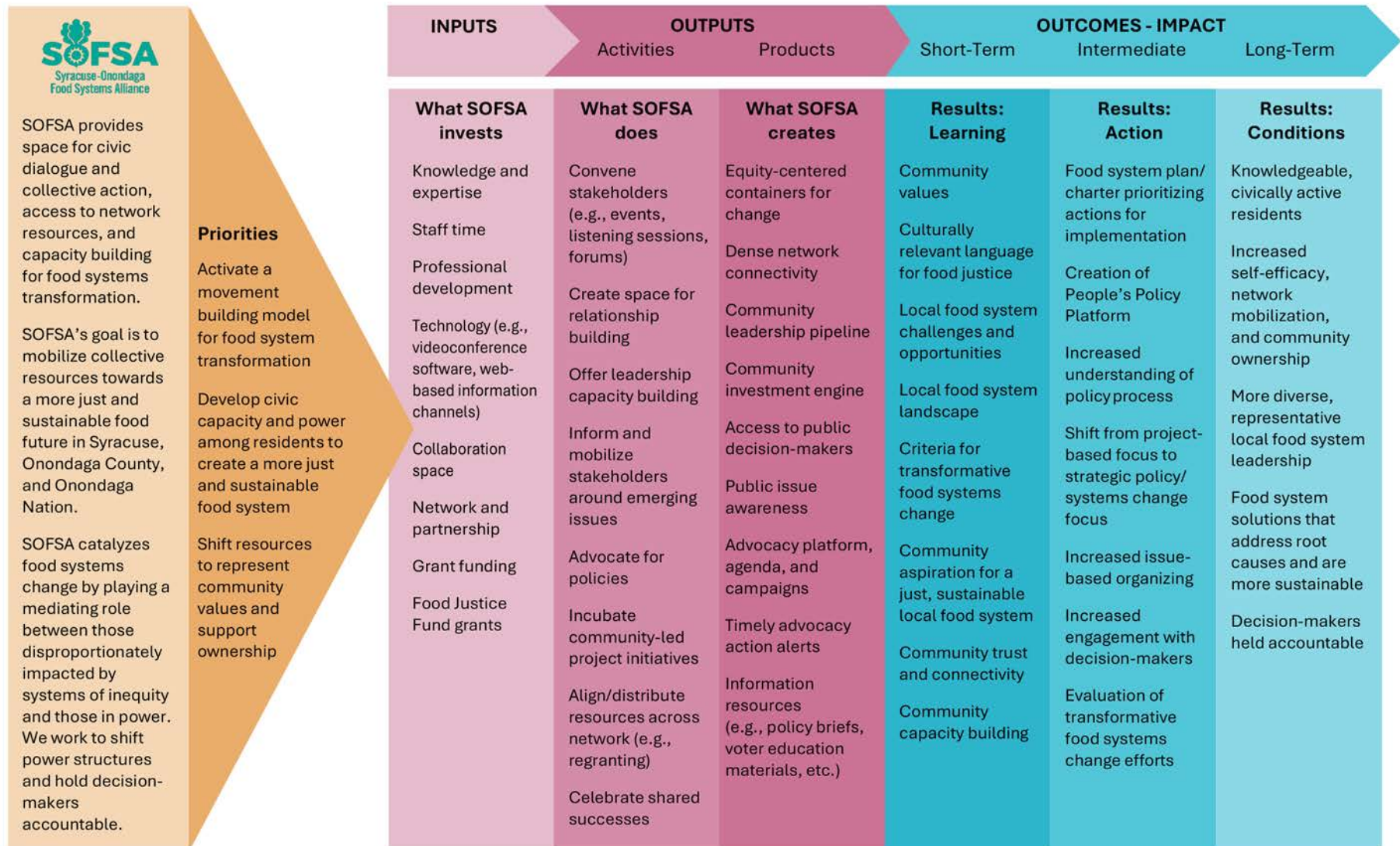
Fiscal Position: SOFSA diversifies its funding portfolio to support multi-level food system transformation efforts, centering stewardship and community empowerment.

As SOFSA seeks to ensure community-focused and -driven efforts are well-resourced, our financial priorities and practices must both reflect and seek to shift the system within which we operate. With an overall goal to reframe ‘investment’ as ‘re-centering reciprocal and abundant solutions’, our fiscal management and fund development efforts will converge to support short- and mid-term development initiatives and long-term structural change. We will focus on strategies addressing our organization’s fiscal management and fund development as well as broader structural change across the investment community.

Ethical Position: SOFSA actively demonstrates accountability to its Leadership Team, ecosystem of partners, and the local/ regional food system.

As SOFSA seeks to advance food system transformation, equity, and justice, we are committed to creating a “container for change,” where trust is the engine for movement building. Accountability and transparency are critical to the development of trustworthy, resilient relationships. Aligning our public-facing identity to enact our internal values facilitates and reinforces this. We will focus on strategies that establish internal accountability mechanisms within SOFSA’s leadership and governance alongside our ongoing organizational operations; connect to our organizational modeling efforts, including how we support accountability to shared values across the network as a whole and healing when harm occurs (whether between SOFSA and its partners, as well as between/among partners); and hold those in positions of power accountable to constituents and campaign promises.

As we enter our next phase of growth and development, we are guided by our Mission, Grounding Philosophy, Theory of Change, and Principles of Equity and Justice, which altogether capture the “spirit” of SOFSA. Our logic model further illustrates how we work toward transformational change, bridging our Strategic Goals and Principles of Sustainability to our Implementation Plan. We recognize that each component of this logic model extends from a set of assumptions by which it is impacted by. Each component must also respond to externalities including environmental factors, market conditions, policy decisions, and information channels.



In addition to organizing annual initiatives such as the Food Justice Gathering and Food Justice Fund, SOFSA will implement new initiatives outlined in the following Implementation Plan.

Year 1: Grounding & Recentering September 2024 - December 2025

The first year of the SOFSA Strategic Action Plan will emphasize:

- Establishing Leadership Team, volunteer, and workgroup expectations; internal workflows and onboarding materials; evaluation criteria, processes, and tools to pilot; and Leadership Team training and development plan, including annual Leadership Retreat. Hiring new staff and developing a leadership succession plan.
- Developing/operationalizing a Strategic Communications Plan (including a website update).
- Working with a local fund development consultant to analyze current fiscal standing, project funding needs, and outline an appropriate fundraising strategy. Developing new and existing funder relationships and prospecting for new grant opportunities.
- Working with Food Justice Fund Leadership Committee (FJFLC) to conduct SOAR analysis of Food Justice Fund (FJF). Plan a gathering of FJF recipients to share retrospective, learn about one another's work, build support for SOFSA campaign organizing, and engage in visioning for future of FJF.
- Outlining capacity building needs, goals, and benchmarks with incubator projects; monitoring progress and then adapting goals/strategies as needed; and identifying "transition" partners to fortify incubator projects.
- Beginning the food system plan/charter development process by establishing a coordinating team to outline a process; planning for and conducting community listening sessions; and aggregating and ground truthing existing data to synthesize with new community data.



Year 2: Strategic Positioning

January - December 2026

- Monitoring and refining internal evaluation criteria, processes, and tools.
- Developing selection criteria for incubator projects based on insights gained during Y1; creating a process for onboarding new projects, including how to set partnership expectations; and continuing to develop strategic relationships with “transition partners” to fortify projects.
- Continuing community listening sessions and aggregating/ground truthing existing data to synthesize with new community data; analyzing all data for public dissemination through community workshops; identifying potential organizing opportunities and community champions to collaborate with; and finalizing the food system plan/charter.
- Creating a People’s Policy Platform and prioritizing a policy agenda; developing and aligning issue campaigns with workgroups; and power mapping SOFSA food system to identify allies and targets to inform campaign organizing.

Year 3: Energizing & Mobilizing

January - December 2027

- Continuing monitoring and, as needed, refining evaluation criterias, processes, and tools.
- Prospect FJF recipients who may become incubator projects and develop structure for community leadership modeling (e.g., learning labs) among those who are interested.
- Convene FJF recipients for gathering; analyze insights from FJF gathering to develop, prioritize, and select strategies for implementation; and launch a small pilot of FJF expansion, tracking outcomes. Plan for a gathering of funders to share results.
- Food system plan/charter implementation through policy platform/agenda and issue campaign alignment.

Year 4: Growing the Movement

January - December 2028

- Continuing monitoring and, as needed, refining evaluation criterias, processes, and tools.
- Onboard new incubator projects and, upon interest, launch a community of practice including strategic partners as appropriate; offer TA & capacity-building; and track project outcomes.
- Gather funders to share the vision for FJF trajectory and FJF success stories; hear funder vision/priorities; engage FJF recipients & funders in dialogue. Prospect funders to invest in scaling FJF.
- Provide capacity building opportunities for and technical assistance to Community Connector initiative aligning to campaign organizing and tracking progress to adapt/refine strategies as needed.

Year 5: Building Momentum & Planning for the Next Chapter

January - December 2029

The final year of the SOFSA Strategic Action Plan will emphasize the results of comprehensive evaluation conducted during the previous four years, assessing progress toward food system transformation and informing SOFSA's strategy for the next five years to launch the Leadership Team into a collaborative strategic planning process.

In Solidarity

We recognize that systems change in and of itself is ambitious. It is a lifelong, evolving process that requires those involved to evolve with it. For the past five years, SOFSA has worked to build an inclusive network that is positioned to challenge the way things are to make way for what can and should be. We are committed to learning and evolving alongside partners, operating at the speed of trust for long lasting change.

In Appreciation

We would like to thank the New York Health Foundation for their generous support of our strategic planning process.

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Page 2: Public Narrative

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Page 6: Three Sisters of Transformation, Equity & Justice

Image adapted from Lopez-Ridauro, S., Barba-Escoto, L., Reyna-Ramirez, C. A., Sum, C., Palacios-Rojas, N., & Gerard, B. under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). Retrieved from <https://www.nal.usda.gov/collections/stories/three-sisters>

Page 7: Collective Impact

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Page 8: Collective Impact 2.0 to 3.0

Image adapted from Cabaj, M. & Weaver, L. Collective Impact 3.0. YouTube, uploaded by The Tamarack Institute, 14 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZcUrPbzRE0>.

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