



**ASHEVILLE BUNCOMBE
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL**

Asheville Buncombe Food Policy Council (ABFPC) Governance Agreement

Objectives

- To provide a structure by which the Asheville Buncombe Food Policy Council can govern itself.
- To provide the material for an orientation by which new members can familiarize themselves with that framework.

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MISSION

To identify, propose and advocate for policies, financial appropriations, and innovative solutions to improve and protect our local food system in order to advance economic development, social justice, environmental sustainability, and community resiliency.

VISION

All residents of Buncombe County have access to and the option to cultivate and prepare nutritious food within a resilient and sovereign foodshed that sustainably harvests and conserves farmland, forests, and water resources, sustains our population, collaborates with neighboring counties, and ensures a thriving agriculture-related economy.

COMMUNITY STANDARDS

These standards will hold the space until the ABFPC can come together to harvest input from the community.

Inclusion - To actively develop leadership and seek participation from the people of Buncombe County, especially those who are most impacted by the lack of access, justice, and sovereignty in the local food system.

Justice - To actively work for equity and healing across diverse demographics including, but not limited to: age, socioeconomic status, gender, abilities, race/ethnicity, culture (including language), areas of residence, interests, and expertise, education, skills and perspective, participation in the food system, and various levels of access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. To challenge institutional and structural systems that perpetuate injustice of all kinds and do not take into account those most adversely affected by inequities in the food system.

Mutual Respect - To honor each person's humanity by recognizing that every individual has value. To actively listen to others, be open-minded and seek common ground in spite of differences. To create safe space where everyone can speak their mind without fear of being ignored, judged, or demeaned. To use a governance model, decision-making process and communication style that support mutual respect, connection, empathy and conflict resolution.

Integrity - To demonstrate consistency between words and actions. To be honest and trustworthy and to act in keeping with our stated values and goals.

Transparency - To conduct ourselves in a transparent manner as follows: provide opportunities to see into and understand our process, engage, report back, and foster opportunities for meaningful participation regarding goals and evaluation; provide opportunities for different people to find multiple ways into our process through collaboration and engagement; foster openness between members about what we represent, what we know about, sharing outcomes/data, and sharing solutions to issues identified in a common agenda.

FRAMEWORK

GOVERNANCE METHOD

The ABFPC uses the Circle Forward method of governance and consent based processes for decision making, whereby all voices are heard and those making decisions are willing to adhere to the decisions made. The ABFPC is invested in forward movement with an interconnected system for achieving performance, purpose, and a collaborative culture.

Circle Forward is a framework and set of tools that people can use to guide complex endeavors. See the [Circle Forward Users Guide](#). The framework rests on three foundational principles:

- Circles
- Consent
- Double-linking

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The governance structure of the ABFPC is based on the Circle Forward method of governance, maintaining a dynamic of flexibility and continuity.

To carry out the work of the ABFPC, the following circles are formed:

- **Clusters**
- **General Council (GC)**
 - **Standing Committees**
 - **Ad-Hoc Focus Groups**
- **Affiliate Focus Group**

Clusters drive development, research, recommendations and action of the ABFPC priorities by focusing community engagement and resources on a specific strategic issue and/or policy area.

The General Council brings representatives from each of the Clusters together to oversee a comprehensive food policy agenda. Standing Committees and Ad-Hoc Focus Groups support the work of the General Council and the Clusters. The Affiliate Focus Group connects the ABFPC to its environment. Clusters, Standing Committees and Ad-Hoc Focus Groups are free to choose their representatives to the GC, provided that the representative is an active member of the ABFPC.

DECISION MAKING

The principle of consent governs decision-making in the GC, Clusters, Standing Committees and Ad-Hoc Focus Groups. Each group creates an agenda and conducts meetings in accordance with the consent decision-making principle as outlined in [ABFPC Policies and Procedures](#). Active members of each group are eligible to participate in the consent process.

GC members who are unable to attend a GC meeting may take a written position on action items prior to the meeting, and must also make arrangements to participate in consent by other means. Consent by email may be utilized by the GC as necessary to handle the volume of business generated by the ABFPC.

Clusters may set their own policies for absentee participation in the consent process. The Cluster's policy and any amendments to it are to be documented in meeting minutes and made available to the Cluster membership. New members will be informed of the policy and where to access it when they join the Cluster. In the event a Cluster does not establish a specific policy on absentee participation in the consensus process, the GC policy is considered applicable.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Roles and Responsibilities of the Cluster

The role of Cluster is to participate in the development and implementation of goals consistent with the ABFPC Food Master Plan and ABFPC priorities, including making appropriate policy recommendations.

Clusters have the flexibility to meet as needed, define their membership criteria, and set flexible priorities and action plans based on overall council policy goal and emergent community needs in alignment with the Food Master Plan.

Active Cluster Member Responsibilities include:

- Maintain active membership in accordance with ABFPC governance documents and related policies.
- Actively participate in the work of the ABFPC as demonstrated by taking on responsibilities and tasks determined by the Cluster.
- Actively participate in communication in a timely manner.
- Attend at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of the Cluster meetings unless specific arrangements are made with the consent of the Cluster.
- Represent the Cluster both publicly and privately in adherence to this Governance Agreement and the Communications Policy.
- Hold fellow Cluster members, including Representatives to the GC, accountable for fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as outlined in the ABFPC Governance Agreement and associated policies.

Termination of membership in a Cluster

Membership is subject to termination for behavior in conflict with this Governance Agreement or any of its parts, or for failure to meet the roles and responsibilities as outlined herein. Reasons for removal must be documented in Cluster meeting minutes, not to be posted publicly, and the removed member must be notified, as well as the General Council. Termination will be decided by consent of at least 75% of the Active Cluster Members, and does not include the consent of the member in question. Each Cluster will determine how best to carry through with this process keeping in mind the sensitive nature of any termination.

Other

Community partners not able to take on Cluster responsibilities may request to be added to Cluster mailing lists for the purpose of keeping abreast of current activities and in the interest of transparency. Clusters can choose to allow or disallow participation in Cluster work from time to time by community partners, according to Cluster needs.

Cluster Formation and Dissolution

Clusters are formed by starting as an ad-hoc focus group, and being folded in as an official Cluster if the momentum, relevance and desire stays active after a period of three months or more, and with consent from the GC.

Clusters are dissolved by the GC when they are unable to meet their Cluster roles and responsibilities including but not limited to inability to represent the Cluster to the General Council. Cluster records will be archived. Clusters can request GC consent for additional time to reorganize or convert to Ad-hoc Focus Groups as necessary.

Cluster Representatives Roles and Responsibilities to the General Council

Cluster Representatives are the link between the work of the Cluster and the GC. They coordinate the alignment of Cluster-specific and overarching GC priorities.

Each Cluster is responsible for electing two Representatives to sit on the GC: an “Uplink” representative and an “Outlink” representative. This ensures the “double linking” of information between Clusters and GC. If a Cluster's capacity only allows for one rep that individual will serve as the Uplink. The Cluster is responsible for defining the length of terms under which its representatives serve.

Uplinks are the communication links from the Clusters to the GC. They are responsible to:

- Engage members in identifying agenda items and determine the Cluster’s views on those items.
- Present these views during GC meetings and participate fully in any resulting decision-making.
- With the Outlink, report the results of GC deliberations back to their Clusters.
- Regularly update the General Council including concerns or challenges regarding the functionality of the Cluster.
- Refer to the Communications Policy regarding communications with the Coordinator and Community Partners.

Outlinks are the communication links from the GC to the Clusters. They are responsible to:

- Foster awareness of the purpose, plans and policies of the GC as they relate to the Clusters.
- Promote a culture of leadership and continuous development within the Cluster.
- Advise the Cluster with regard to seeking and being responsive to feedback from the GC.
- The ABFPC Coordinator may serve as an alternative and co-Outlink from the GC. The Coordinator will attend Cluster meetings periodically or as needed to ensure continuity and a unified vision across Food Policy Clusters. The Coordinator can serve as the primary Outlink if a Cluster decides and Coordinator capacity allows. Clusters also have the option of keeping a second Outlink representative in place.

Preferably, both Uplink and Outlink Representatives are expected to attend the monthly GC meetings, and are responsible to the ABFPC as follows:

- Attend each GC meeting prepared by having read any proposals or documents that are on the agenda.
- Actively participate in communication in a timely manner.
- Ensure that notes are taken at each Cluster meeting and are shared with Cluster members and the ABFPC Coordinator for publication in a shared record system.
- Be prepared to communicate Cluster status including current work and associated recommendations of the Cluster as well as any required support or needs of the Cluster.
- Share contact information with the GC for all Cluster members and update quarterly.
- Communicate to the GC the Cluster's choice of replacement at least one month prior to the end of a term, giving the GC adequate time to review the nomination for consent at a regularly scheduled meeting.

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GENERAL COUNCIL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The GC holds the overall vision and goals of the ABFPC and invites partners who share that vision to engage with the ABFPC. GC sets meeting frequency to allow time for Clusters to work between GC meetings.

Roles and Responsibilities of the GC:

- Hold responsibility for the Food Master Plan ensuring that city and county priorities as well as Food Council priorities remain in line with the Food Master Plan. GC can revise the Food Master Plan at any time as needed.
- Hold a Community Needs Assessment every 3-5 years in order to address fluctuating and dynamic needs in the community and revise the Food Master Plan as needed.
- Determine overall policy priorities including a singular policy priority to cooperatively work on across all Clusters for a designated period of time.
- Encourage community stakeholders to form and/or join Clusters, Standing Committees, and Focus Groups, as appropriate, around identified priorities and focus areas.
- Provide opportunities for all Cluster members to come together with each other and/or with the greater community.
- Publicly announce GC meetings, including notification of any such meetings which are closed to the public, wholly or in part.
- Archive the history and maintain continuity of the Food Policy Council.
- Serve as the mechanism whereby Clusters cross-pollinate for coordinated action.

The GC operates through a process of shared leadership. GC members are responsible to that process as follows:

- Commit to serve a term of no less than one year
- Attend at least 70% of all meetings held.
- Start and end meetings on time.

- Adequately prepare for participation in the meeting. If circumstances are such that a member cannot adequately review materials in advance, the member may abstain from participation in the discussion and consent of those items.
- Meet commitments to one another.
- Actively participate in discussions in a manner that advances the process, builds on ideas and supports questions and concerns.
- Practice active listening by attending to each other's comments and questions with curiosity and the intent to understand without judgment.
- Respect opinions and accompanying stated concerns.
- Maintain a focus on the common purpose as defined by the ABFPC's vision, mission and governance strategies.
- Acknowledge that the work of the ABFPC is dynamic, and commit to inviting innovation and being open to changes.
- Hold GC members accountable to each other, the Clusters and the community.
- Commit to being effective and open to internal/external evaluation.
- Conduct business in a transparent manner, including ensuring minutes of public meeting decisions are taken and key information is stored in a shared record system and available to the public.
- Uphold decisions made by the ABFPC by honoring the consent process.
- Promote leadership among members, recognizing that all members bring expertise, knowledge, passion, and diversity to the table.

Resignation/Removal of Members

A Cluster Representative may resign from the GC through a written resignation to the GC. Resignation may be in the form of a written letter or email. A resignation will be considered complete when it has been confirmed by the GC.

A Cluster representative is subject to termination for behavior in conflict with this Governance Agreement or any of its associated policies. Removal of a member is made by consent of the GC in a closed meeting attended by at least 75% of the active GC membership. The member facing removal will be notified in advance of the meeting and offered an opportunity to explain relevant circumstances. An explanation will be provided in writing. The member need not be present at the meeting to be removed. If present, the member may participate in deliberations but will not have consent in the final decision.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Standing committees can be formed as needed, with the consent of the General Council, to serve the operational needs of the GC.

AD-HOC FOCUS GROUPS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Ad-Hoc Focus Groups are formed with the approval of the GC and as such are members of the ABFPC. They may be initiated by a community member or group, or from within the ABFPC. Members of Ad-Hoc Focus Groups can include existing ABFPC members as well as community partners. At least one GC member is responsible for out-linking to each Focus Group for its duration.

Focus Groups function to address specific issues or community sectors not currently fully engaged by the existing ABFPC Clusters.

Each Focus Group elects a facilitator. The facilitator is responsible for keeping the GC abreast of the Focus Group's activities and progress. A facilitator who is not a current member of the GC serves as an ex-officio, non-consenting representative to the GC for the duration of the Focus Group.

Ad-hoc groups can incorporate into the Food Policy Council as an established Cluster after a period of three months, and with the consent of the GC.

AFFILIATE FOCUS GROUP ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Affiliate Focus Group (AFG) double-links the ABFPC to its environment. In this way power not only circulates within the ABFPC, it circulates between the organization and the outside world. This strategy energizes the organization and keeps it from becoming isolated. Representation in the AFG includes:

- Local government
- Organizations, for profit and nonprofit
- Philanthropy
- Learning institutions
- Residents/patrons/neighborhoods
- Economic and community development professionals

- Growers
- Existing food systems alliances and community networks
- Faith-based
- Food insecure communities

Roles and Responsibilities include:

- Provide expertise and guidance to help ensure the overall relevance and sustainability of the ABFPC in the community.
- Develop strategies to champion the ABFPC, nurture key external relationships, and help the ABFPC connect to funding.
- Influence their own organizations in accordance with the mission and goals of the ABFPC.
- Work with the ABFPC Coordinator, and any other representatives from the GC, to communicate input and advice on the strategic direction of the ABFPC.
- Meet at least twice a year separately from GC
- Follow the policies and procedures of the ABFPC.

The ABFPC Coordinator will coordinate the AFT as a member and may serve as an Outlink to the GC. The Group chooses its own facilitator(s) and representatives to the General Council as Uplinks. The number of AFG General Council representatives may vary and can be determined as needed by the GC. A recommended number of AFG GC representatives is 4. The Outlink(s) and Uplink(s) have consent in the decisions of both circles. All members of the AFG can be invited to attend GC/Cluster meetings but may not have consent in those meetings unless they are GC reps or part of the clusters they are observing.

The Clusters and Coordinator nominate potential AFG members, with consent from the GC and AFG, to serve on the Affiliate Focus Group. They may be, but are not necessarily, affiliated with a Cluster or Ad-Hoc Focus Group. To ensure a broad sampling of community members, a Committee so designated by the GC (or in the absence of such a committee, the GC itself) periodically reviews representation for appropriateness and diversity across sectors and demographics. The AFG member terms are for 2 or 3 years, and staggered.

MEETINGS

To provide time for concentrated efforts on moving forward within the ABFPC, the ABFPC intends to hold two meetings a year, serving two separate purposes, in addition to GC and Cluster meetings, and internal meetings called as necessary.

One yearly public meeting may include ABFPC members, partners and the general public interested in the work of the ABFPC. It functions as a tool for building collaboration, including components such as celebrating the year's accomplishments across sectors, gathering input from the larger community, setting priorities for the upcoming year, drafting agreements, etc.

The second yearly meeting may be open only to Cluster Members and the Affiliate Focus Group. It will serve the purpose of connecting the Affiliate Focus Group to the Clusters to evaluate the year's priorities, work and determine forward movement of the Food Policy Council.

Community Access and Transparency

The ABFPC encourages community members to observe regularly scheduled open meetings. A few minutes for introductions of visitors from the community at large will be allotted at the beginning of each meeting. Public concerns, proposals, comments and issues may be offered for consideration by contacting the ABFPC through the website on the "Contact Us" page. The ABFPC welcomes public input. However, participation, consent and/or action to be taken on recommendations and work activities for the ABFPC is limited to active ABFPC members.

GOVERNANCE AGREEMENT REVIEW AND AMENDMENTS

This Governance Agreement shall be a living document, and can be adapted, changed and modified as needed with consent of the GC. It supersedes recorded documents dated prior to the consent date of this agreement. It will be reviewed no less than every four years to maintain alignment with the ABFPC Mission, Vision and Values.

Consent on 9/19/2016

Updated on 4/26/2018