

How to Create a Food Council

*Inspired by Michigan State University's Spartan Food
Security Council*

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Introduction to Food Councils

Welcome! Whether you're here to start a food council at your school or just to start thinking deeper about your community, this kit will guide you step-by-step.

Hi! I'm Aditi and I co-founded the Spartan Food Security Council (SFSC) at Michigan State University in October 2021. **We were, and still are, MSU's first and only student organization working to end college student hunger on campus.** We've come a long way in a short amount of time, and I am so proud of my team for their hard work.

What is Food Insecurity?

Great question! Think of food insecurity as a spectrum rather than having a singular definition. It's more than just hunger, it can also refer to having inadequate access to affordable and nutritious foods on a consistent basis. **According to the United States Department of Agriculture*, food security means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.** Consequently, food insecurity can look different depending on your situation and your community.

*<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/definitions-of-food-security/>

This kit is a reflection of all our work at SFSC over the past two years. By condensing this information into an easy-to-follow kit, I hope you feel inspired to lead and create change within your own campus community. We'll start with the **why** behind creating a food council - what impact do you want to create and why? We'll then think about the **how** - how can you start a food council and keep it going? There will be space for you to jot down notes and questions for you to reflect on. Of course, every campus looks different, so this kit can be completely customizable based on your community's unique needs.

Food councils provide a space for students, faculty, and administrators to think critically about community-based food insecurity in an un-bureaucratic way. I learned through my work with SFSC that food can bring people together. **I learned it is possible to make change.** I hope this kit inspires you too, because truly **everyone deserves to be fed and fed well.**

All the best,

Aditi Kulkarni

FIELD Fellow and SFSC Co-Founder



College Food Insecurity is a BIG DEAL

1 in 3 College Students Faces Food Insecurity Nationally

-Swipe out Hunger*

[*https://www.swipehunger.org/hungerfree/](https://www.swipehunger.org/hungerfree/)

Why are Students Facing Food Insecurity?

It's easy to make assumptions that college students are fed well, especially when they are on campus and have access to dining halls. Unfortunately, though, college students are still facing food insecurity due to factors such as financial insecurity and inaccessibility to supportive transportation. Many students have to compromise on purchasing groceries to pay for rent and tuition. We also know that food insecurity disproportionately affects marginalized populations as well, further limiting access for all students to achieve an education.

What about SNAP?

SNAP, also known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and formally known as Food Stamps, is a government-run program to help low-income individuals with food purchasing.

College students, with certain exceptions, can apply for SNAP, but many students don't even realize they are eligible for benefits. Additionally, the application process can be unclear, furthering disincentivizing students to apply. Barriers to SNAP application hurts students and can have negative consequences on their education and health.

What is a Community?

*Establishing who your **community** is, can help you plan your next steps.*

What does **community** mean to you?

Communities can be defined in numerous ways. Is your school's community primarily students or inclusive of local residents? What is the scope of your community?



Who is part of your **community** and why?

Identify key demographics within your community. For example, at SFSC, we identified students, faculty, staff, and local residents as key community members at MSU, focusing on our on- and off-campus students.



What are your **community's** needs?

There is no straightforward answer to ending food insecurity - your solution depends on your community's needs! Listening to and engaging with your community can determine localized solutions that best fit your unique campus.



Who is Part of your Community?

Use this space to brainstorm ideas about your community. These questions can help guide your thinking, but don't forget that every campus is unique: what (and who!) makes your campus special?

Questions to Consider

What resources does your campus provide for food insecure students? Who is most likely to be using these resources?

Where is your campus located? How does location affect how locals access groceries and meals? Is transportation a barrier to food access?

Does your campus have dining halls or other food establishments? Who has access and who does not? What types of food are served at these dining establishments?

What do your school's demographics look like? What makes your student body unique?



Brainstorm Here!



You determined your community! Next step...

Creating the Council

Food Councils are as unique as the students that form them

Therefore, how you start is up to you! SFSC was started by hosting small weekly meetings with groups of friends in our residence hall. All we had was a goal: to feed our community. Similarly, you may not have a plan to action just yet. That's okay!

You may start by determining who should be part of the council. Are you exclusive to students? Interested in hosting faculty? Additionally, will you have a specific leadership structure? SFSC operates on a co-president model with specific leadership positions created based on our mission.

It's equally important to set your core values when you start your council. For example, openness, flexibility, and authenticity have been at the core of our work since Day 1.

Tips for a Successful Council

- **Find a Faculty or Administrative Mentor**
 - While the council may be student-led, it can be beneficial to have a supportive mentor when starting out.
- **Draft a Council Constitution and Be Open to Change**
 - A constitution can set the framework for your mission and organization. View it as an ever-evolving document: as community needs change, your organization's mission might change as well.
- **Organization is Key**
 - As you start your council, you may find yourself cluttered with emails, names, and ideas. Create a shareable space to jot down ideas and organize connections. For example, a shared calendar can help other members plan ahead.



What Will Your **Council** Look Like?

Use this space to brainstorm ideas about your council. These questions can be used to guide your thinking.

**Who are your intended
Council Members?**

**How will you keep your
plans organized?**

**What are the core values
of your council?**

**On your campus, who
would be interested in
joining your council?**



You started a Food Council! Next step...

Connect and Plan Ahead

You have identified your community and have crafted a mission for your council. Now, it's time to take action! It's important to plan for the short-term and long-term while also being flexible to changes. The types of events you host and the connections you make will depend on your unique campus, and a community map can help identify your campus's strengths and weaknesses.

Step 1: Identify On- and Off-Campus Groups to Connect with

What groups are already addressing food insecurity in your community? How can you work with them? For example, think of local organizations, small businesses, and student groups.

Step 2: Create Plans based on Community Needs

How can you contribute to the work being done in your community, and what new ideas can you brainstorm? For example, if you find that students don't know where to use their SNAP benefits, you could create a resource guide with SNAP-accepting local businesses to share with peers.

Project Examples:

Volunteer with Local Organizations to Plant Community Gardens

Create Guides on SNAP Enrollment

Organize a Food Drive for a Local Food Bank

Meet with your University's Dining Services Committee

Hold Roundtable Discussions on Cultural Dietary Practices

Success at SFSC



Highlights of the past two years at the Spartan Food Security Council

Advocacy

In 2022, SFSC partnered with Swipe Out Hunger to bring the Hunger Free Campus Bill to Michigan

Over a year later, we started a grassroots movement in our state, built a coalition with seven Michigan universities, and introduced the Hunger Free Campus Bill to the state government!

Education

We have hosted numerous events on campus to reduce food insecurity-related stigma

Whether through tabling or collaborative events, SFSC has worked with students to address stigma and food access issues. We have created resource guides for students to find local food banks as well as planned interactive cooking demonstrations.

Service

Volunteering in our community has led to great connections and even better experiences

We have passed out bagged lunches to students, hosted food drives for our local food bank, and created food donation baskets for student parents! Working alongside community members leads to great memories for the whole team.

Starting a food pantry in our residence hall

In Spring of 2023, SFSC partnered with the James Madison College at MSU to create a satellite food pantry in their residence hall. Students, through a college-wide survey, expressed a need for food-related assistance, so we took action. By stocking the James Madison College Food Pantry with easily accessible non-perishable items, we are offering students a resource to help them eat better and focus more on their education!



Benefits of a Campus Food Council

Student Leadership and Empowerment

Networking with Community Members

Implementing Local Food System Solutions

Connecting with your peers!

Local Policy Change

Event Planning and Team Leading Experience

FAQs to Running a Food Council

What are potential challenges I might face while running a food council?

One challenge might be transitioning leadership. Due to students graduating or changing plans, it is important to have a plan for how to transition leadership. Make sure to write down as much information as you can and host leadership trainings for your new leaders!

I don't know which direction to take my council! How do I know what to do?

This is a common feeling when starting a new organization. When in doubt, start connecting! Meeting new people and organizations can lead to new ideas. Also, say yes to any and every opportunity - you never know what might happen!

I can't create a Campus Food Council right now. What else can I do to end student hunger?

Work with your local food bank to host a food drive or volunteer at your local community gardens! Encourage others to donate funds and food to those in need. A little goes a long way!

When I co-founded the Spartan Food Security Council, I had little idea of what to actually do. How could I, an undergraduate student, make any difference? Now, two years later, I look back on my experience with SFSC and realize how much change I have actually created. It has been a pleasure to work alongside a team of fantastic students, and I hope this guide inspires you to create change within your own community. When it seems impossible, remember your mission! **Everyone deserves to be fed and fed well.**

**All the best,
Aditi Kulkarni**

Questions? Comments? Rso.sfsc@msu.edu