



# Community Food Conversations

Program Report

October 2018



## Executive Summary

### **Background**

The Maricopa County Food System Coalition (MarCo) conducted a food system assessment. MarCo decided to collect qualitative data from the community in order to improve the food system. The goal of MarCo is to engage community residents to identify opportunities for co-created strategies that support an equitable, healthy, sustainable, and thriving food system. The investigation collected community perspectives and experiences related to gaps, challenges, assets, and values pertaining to three of the most food insecure areas in the local food system.

Food Assessment Coalition Team (FACT) members elected to hire professionals to train MarCo members to conduct the qualitative community assessments. This method incorporates built-in sustainability. MarCo members will have the option to repeat the assessment process independently at a future time. Volunteers had the opportunity to attend up to four qualitative research focused educational workshops and had access to technical assistance from consultants.

### **Methods**

The desired data collection method was designed to promote conversation while engaging a large number of people. The community listening sessions developed for the Maricopa County Food System Coalition are a hybrid model based on community forum and focus group qualitative methods. Qualitative responses from the community listening sessions were the primary form of data collected and analyzed for this report. The second type of data includes responses to an open-ended survey distributed among listening session facilitators and observers.

Community members recruited were adults and/or accompanied minors who reside in the targeted communities of East Tempe, South Phoenix, and Glendale. Ultimately, the connection to a community gatekeeper became instrumental in exact location selection. Two phases of data collection took place. Each site hosted the first community listening session using uniform questions. The second session explored more deeply the themes uncovered in the first session.

FACT members (volunteer researchers) each took on roles of Lead Facilitator, Co-Facilitator, and Observer-Notetaker. FACT members were ultimately responsible for the entirety of the process, as consultants were hired for the roles of training and guidance.

## **Key findings**

There were several themes pervasive throughout the sites, regardless of location:

- Regardless of income, all participants were concerned about the **quality** of the food they eat. They want ripe, seasonal, organic produce. Community members are also eager for more opportunities to learn.
- Respondents want **education** on nutrition, community resources, gardening, and how to cook.
- Overall, **affordability** is an issue for participants, especially when it came to their ability to pay for the quality food, they feel they deserve.
- Listening session participants also did not feel that they had ample **access** to the same grocery stores as in more affluent areas.
- Across community sites, participants spoke about food as being very important in terms of **connection**. They felt that sharing food was a way to show love, and participants also felt that food connected them to their community.

## **Recommendations**

Most importantly, participants are ready for action. They are eager to support community-based activities and were adamant that MarCo should spring into action. They expressed frustration that so many “studies” have taken place in their community and no action comes of it.

The training and preparation design phases should have more consultant-volunteer contact and more practice opportunity. Additionally, often it was agency-based staff that had the greatest capacity to participate; consider using an alternate model that intentionally relies less on unpaid volunteers.

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## Background

The Maricopa County Food System Coalition (MarCo) is a community-based group that exists to support and grow a food system in Maricopa County that is equitable, healthy, sustainable, and thriving. The group meets semi-monthly to share information, education, and advocate for an improved local food system. Membership is comprised of volunteer community members and professionals, including those who work in an industry related to food, as well as those who do not. Network member affiliations include agriculturalists, private corporate firms, governmental agencies, and non-profit organizations. A goal of MarCo is to conduct a comprehensive food system assessment in order to inform coalition action.

MarCo convened the Food Assessment Coordination Team (FACT) to conduct the broader assessment with generous support by the Gila River Indian Community. A balanced, useful assessment is community-driven and employs multiple methods, looking at a range of data points. The goal of this assessment was to identify opportunities to implement strategies that will engage community residents in an ongoing, meaningful way.

FACT members discussed the plethora of existing quantitative data related to Maricopa County's food system. The majority of quantitative information desired by the team already exists. FACT decided that the assessment focus should be original research, qualitative in nature. Qualitative exploration was focused on the end-user, or the consumer.

FACT aimed to learn from the community member's perspective, rather than only using a top-down model. FACT understood that community-based research is both time-consuming and relatively expensive. For this reason, the team elected to hire professionals to train MarCo members to do qualitative community assessments, rather than to conduct the assessments completely by themselves. This method builds-in sustainability, as MarCo members will have the ability to repeat the process independently at a future point in time. MarCo contracted with Community Alliance Consulting to conduct the trainings and to consult regarding data collection methods, processes, and design.

FACT aimed to gather specific information about the community - that is, consumers. As a "learning community", MarCo identified some key realities and challenges related to food from early food assessment results:



Low income residents are disproportionately affected by limited access to food.

Large areas of Maricopa County are considered "food deserts."

The local food system as a whole is fragmented and uncoordinated.

Food banks often cannot meet the demand of families in need.

Over one third of Maricopa County adults are considered overweight or obese.



Many families with young children experience hunger.

## Project Goals

Through a series of conversations, FACT agreed to assess the following elements of the food system, through a series of community food conversations:

### Gaps

The community food conversation assessment design aimed to collect information about what community members felt was missing from how the local community grows, sells, buys, or eats food. While professionals in the food system may have an idea of what they know to be missing, considering the community member's perspective is instrumental to successful improvement of the food system. Community members' perceptions are their reality.

### Challenges

Residents of Maricopa County face obstacles when accessing food for a myriad of reasons. There is no doubt that community members experience difficulty that may not be reflected in the numbers. Professionals working in social services or public health promotion may have an idea of what limits community members, but nothing can substitute the community member's experience in their own words.

### Assets

When improving a system of any kind, it is important to note which parts of that system are strong, healthy, and supportive. These elements can be incorporated into creative solutions to create a strength-based approach. Understanding what's working well can help coalition members to focus their efforts efficiently.

### Values

Finally, MarCo aimed to learn about how community members relate to food, and what about food and the food system they value. The elements of the food system that residents value the most can serve as pillars for community-based efforts solutions. It is important to note what is important to consumers so that strength-focused aspects of a system can be retained. Understanding what is important to community members can also help circumvent wasted efforts on a strategy that may have limited impact on residents.

The end goal of the MarCo Food System Assessment is to have sufficient information for coalition members to engage the community in the development and execution of co-created solutions that address inequitable access to food.

## Methodology

### Purpose

MarCo identified the need for qualitative data, collected directly from community members as consumers. It was important to sample participants from multiple geographical locations throughout the valley. Some geographical areas may have similar characteristics, and therefore some of the data would be applicable to multiple areas.

### Design

As a principle, FACT wanted to ensure inclusion of low-income participants. Seeking contributions from both English and Spanish speakers was also important. Additionally, FACT members discovered that the choice of host agency location may increase or decrease attendance by members from certain age groups, such as young adults versus senior citizens.

Finally, the desired data collection method was meant to promote the conversational intimacy of a discussion, while potentially engaging a large number of people. Each community food conversation was designed to accommodate at least 60 participants.

### Activities

The community listening sessions developed for MarCo are a hybrid model based on focus group and community forum qualitative methods. The focus group model encourages a richness of conversation, due to the interaction between participants. However, focus groups are limited in size; the ideal number of focus group participants is eight to twelve. The town hall style community forum model, however, can accommodate up to 100 participants.

The listening session model allows for exploration of needs and assets through a predetermined set of questions as a guideline, while allowing for flexibility based on participant response. Facilitators use follow up questions, or probes, to delve deeper into concepts and ideas suggested by participants.

Each session started with a group warm up, in order to make participants feel comfortable and to get ideas flowing. Participants then broke into small groups of six to ten participants to answer more focused questions. Community listening questions were designed to meet the program goals, focused on gaps, challenges, assets, and values. See Appendix A for the first session script.

At the conclusion of data collection, volunteer researchers were asked to respond to an open-ended survey, and those responses are included in this report as additional qualitative data.



## Data Collection

Sessions were designed for community members (adults and/or accompanied minors) who reside in the targeted communities of East Tempe, South Phoenix, and Glendale. Ultimately, the connection to a community gatekeeper became instrumental in exact location selection. The ability to recruit participants often depends on the network and influence of the site host. Sites were selected based on existing relationships and the site gatekeeper's perceived ability to assist with outreach strategies. The listening session began with a visioning question that engaged the larger group as a whole. The full group question was verbalized in English only, or English followed by Spanish. Break out groups were conducted separately in both English and Spanish. With larger sessions, natural groupings of participants were allowed to remain. The full group reconvened for ten minutes at the end. All but one of the discussions were recorded for accuracy of information and review; participants agreed to a blanket consent and were alerted both when signing in and again verbally in the session script (see Appendix A).

FACT settled on a data collection design with two phases of data collection. Each site would host the first community listening session with uniform questions, and the second session would explore more deeply the themes uncovered in the first session. Therefore, second session questions would not be developed until first session data analysis took place.

Because qualitative data methods are less about the number of sites or participants, and more about the depth and range of experiences contributed<sup>1</sup>, having a wide geographical reach is not necessarily of major benefit. For this reason, each unique community site was visited twice rather than choosing six sites. Information gathered from a two-phase investigation was given priority over increasing the geographical span.

FACT members each took on roles of Lead Facilitator, Co-Facilitator, and Observer-Notetaker. The Lead was expected to make the first move on site selection and script design and support. The Co-Facilitator's role was to make connections for the Lead and support the Lead by sharing script reading and discussion direction during Community Food Conversations. For a full protocol of data collection, see Appendix B.

FACT members executed original data collection independently. Consultant experts were onsite for set up and oversight but were meant to disappear before too many participants arrived. This was done so there was no "overly administrative" presence for participants. In a few cases, the consultant participated in data collection, but this was because the team needed additional Spanish speaking support. There were no ancillary observers present at the sessions. Everyone present in the room had a role, and no one was left "standing around" to potentially make participants feel uncomfortable. Note takers were introduced to the group so their presence was known, and their purpose understood.

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<sup>1</sup> Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Project consultants distributed the post-data collection survey via email, through an online third-party collector so that responses were treated anonymously.

## Training Design

The training design for FACT facilitators had three components: qualitative data and listening sessions, marketing and recruitment, and qualitative data analysis. Each training was delivered via two separate dates, to accommodate multiple schedules.

### Qualitative Data 101 and Listening Sessions

Community Alliance Consulting (CAC) hosted a dynamic, interactive, and thorough training. The three-hour trainings covered an overview of qualitative data. The consultant hosted a live videographer to record the sessions. The training was edited down into shorter segments and provided to MarCo for members for future access.

The training focused on data methods, how to launch a community listening session, and facilitation practice. FACT volunteers learned how to reduce their own bias and minimize the potential to influence the data or data collection. Finally, taking notes for research is a specific skill, and after a short lesson on the nuances of research notes, FACT members had a chance to practice.

Participants were provided with the following items at the first training session:



FACT Community Listening Session Facilitator Manual

Community Listening Session Questions and Script

Community Listening Session Notetakers' Template

Community Listening Session Sign-in Sheet

### Marketing and Recruitment Strategy

Per the request of MarCo, CAC developed a second training to support the facilitators in their community listening session launch. The primary focus of this two-hour training was to provide a step-by-step guide through site development. Choosing a trusted community gatekeeper is key, a person who has connections to a community. They will typically have links to a host site and have the influence to get community members to show up. Trainers also covered the basics of how to share consistent messaging through a variety of marketing platforms,

including design tips and distribution ideas. Community listening sessions were coined “Community Food Conversations.”

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Subsequent to the first round of community listening sessions, a live three-hour data analysis workshop was conducted. Facilitators and notetakers met as a team with the consultants, who led volunteer researchers through the process of reviewing, summarizing, comparing, and validating data. Qualitative data analysis followed a systematic plan consistent with standard qualitative research protocols which includes a data reduction stage and auditing for trustworthiness. General themes were extracted to satisfy each of the research questions (gaps, challenges, assets, and values).

After each listening session team collectively agreed on general themes and important qualitative outliers, they were led through the process of developing a second set of questions to be asked at the same community location. The intention of the second set of questions was to dive deeper into the emergent themes that were apparent from the first community listening session. When the session concluded, FACT members were asked to complete their script using the questions they just developed, the first session’s template, and their gained experience from the previous session.

## Findings

Findings are comprised of emergent themes and observations from both sets of Community Food Conversations, as well as survey responses from volunteer researchers. Each source of data is presented separately, followed by recommendations blending the three sources with expert evaluator observations. Findings between English and Spanish breakout groups did not significantly differ, therefore the data from all breakout sessions are presented together.

It should be noted that while the trainings were led by the consultant-evaluator team, all other elements of this project were FACT-driven and executed. The Community Food Conversation findings are presented by the evaluator but collected and analyzed by the coalition volunteers.

Word clouds are presented for each section, using the notetakers' data. Word clouds were created in a uniform fashion from wordle.net.



## Key Themes

Some themes were pervasive throughout the sites, regardless of location, and characteristics were also shared between populations. Site-specific themes are shared later in the report.

**Quality** - Regardless of income, all participants were most concerned about the quality of the food they eat. Participants talked about wanting ripe, seasonal, organic produce from medium- to high-end grocery stores.

**Education** - Despite the perception that people “know” what food is healthy to eat, community members are eager for more opportunities to learn. Folks want to know about nutrition, community resources, gardening, and how to cook.

**Affordability** - The ability to afford the food they want was an issue for participants, especially when it came to being able to pay for the quality food they feel they deserve. Respondents talked about the food they were able to afford as low quality.

**Access** - Listening session participants did not feel that they had ample access to the same grocery stores as in more affluent areas. Respondents talked about travelling far distances to shop at Trader Joe’s, Costco, or Sprouts.

**Connection** - Food symbolized much more to participants than just sustenance. Across community sites, participants spoke about food as being very important in terms of family connection. They felt that sharing food was a way to show love, and participants also felt that food connected them to their community.

## Community Food Conversations - Round One

### GLENDALE FOOD CONVERSATION – ROUND ONE



Glendale participants indicated that their three greatest needs were education, awareness of existing community food resources (information), and increased ease and convenience when shopping for food. Specifically, education was desired on gardening, cooking, and food preservation methods.

Session one respondents felt that one of the hardest parts about getting food in the Glendale community is the price and affordability of healthy and organic foods. Respondents felt that quality was important, and related to cost. Some participants felt that while there may be ample grocery stores in the neighborhood, they are not the same quality as in other areas. Some participants felt that making time was one of the hardest parts about getting food.

*"Working with food is becoming a lost art."*

*"The cost of food keeps going up and income isn't keeping pace."*

*"There's plenty of grocery stores, it's just that healthy food is more expensive."*

*"You won't find certain stores in this community like Trader Joe's."*

*- Participant Quotes*

### **Assets**

Participants were asked about what is working well in their community in terms of food. Some participants felt that food selection and availability was plentiful. There was a sense that there are many places to shop and eat in Glendale. The diversity of cultural restaurants was noted as a community asset. Participants were also pleased with the modernized, expanded roles of grocery stores which include online ordering, curbside pickup, and delivery.

Participants expressed appreciation for assistance programs such as Women, Infants, and Children (commonly referred to as WIC), Double Up Food Bucks which matches \$1 for every \$1 of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits spent at area farmers' markets, and emergency food pantries.

### **Values**

The most important things to participants were food quality, taste, and community, as food plays such an important role in family events and connections. The food quality aspect was related to health, source, and growing methodologies.

## EAST TEMPE FOOD CONVERSATION – ROUND ONE



Figure 2. Tempe Community Food Conversation Session One Word Cloud

### **Observations**

The first Tempe Community Food Conversation was hosted at the Escalante Community Center. There were twelve community members present with a wide range of ages, up to approximately 65. There were two more females present than males. Participants were actively engaged in the conversation and the group made appropriate use of time by sticking to the agenda. Two participants were monolingual Spanish speakers. There were several participants present who identified as homeless.

*"It would be nice if they could bring some seafood down here to the lower income communities because I know they don't sell it all in the supermarkets. That's what I know my body needs, and everyone says it's healthy and I should eat it. But I can't afford to buy seafood."*

*– Participant Quote*

### **Needs**

The participants from the Tempe/Mesa border felt there was a general lack of knowledge; participants wanted more information about existing community assets, cooking and food preparation, gardening in the desert, and the origin of the foods they are eating. Also present, was a general sense that participants wanted



more shared, public spaces to cook and prepare food, and to eat communally.

Another challenge described was affordability, as described in the context of lack of jobs, affordable housing, and time spent. Additionally, concern was expressed at the Tempe grocery tax, and the limited food choices based on income. Respondents also mentioned the high cost of prepared, ready-to-eat foods.

*"I would [like to] see more community gardens where people like me can grow and farm their own food, perhaps at the parks, or at the empty lots by the community kitchens...convert the ugly lots in places where food can be grown. Not only vegetables and fruits, but kitchens for meat and eggs, and this food would be cheaper, fresher, healthier and we can enjoy it with others...we can share it and prepare it together and that would make us happier."*

*- Homeless resident of Tempe*

### **Values**

The major social values espoused by the Tempe group included justice, as described by their limited access to food choices based on income. Community cohesion was also a priority, and participants felt that food was a way to increase this phenomenon. Participants would like to see local grocery chains increase their sourcing of local produce. Sustainability and locality were of value, as well as honoring food as a source of energy and life. Conservation of water related to food choices was also mentioned as a concern in this group.

*"[Food] gives me a sense of independence and helps me to express myself through my food choices – how I want to choose to support something that is environmentally friendly, more community-oriented, [healthier] for my body and the world as a whole."*

*- Participant Quote*

### **Assets**

Participants of session one in Tempe struggled to articulate community assets. They spoke of general knowledge regarding assets and indicated that they were not enough to meet the community's needs. Tempe community respondents felt that vulnerable populations (e.g., seniors, the homeless, and those with limited means of transportation) struggled to access community assets in the form of resources.

*"I go to Borderlands...or something...for food. But it's 60 pounds for 1 week. I don't plan meals, it's whatever is available. I wish there was [a] smaller scale farmer's market, fresher stuff that's cheap."*

*"Circle K is the base of our neighborhood."*

*- Participant Quotes*



community-based farmers markets and smaller, neighborhood-based stores. Another need described by this group was space for gardening, whether at home or in a rented, public space like a community garden.

Residents spoke of a shift in development for South Phoenix over the years. South Phoenix used to be an agricultural community. Gardens, produce, and farming was plentiful, and residents just do not see that now.

Participants referred to challenges with transportation when it comes to accessing food. Respondents felt that they had to choose between poor quality produce they can afford, or quality produce at a much higher cost. Overall, South Phoenix contributors felt they had a lack of food options.

### **Assets**

While some respondents pointed out a need for gardening space, ample neighborhood gardening space was also mentioned as a community asset, but only in older neighborhoods. Newer developments lacked ample yard space for gardening. Public garden space is available, although participants would like to see more of it. Mobile food pantries were also named as a community asset.

Neighbors sharing with one another was named as one of the important, beneficial aspects of the South Phoenix community. Participants discussed how if one neighbor has an overflow of citrus, they will share.

*"Food is a way of bringing family together."*

*"It's how we show we care."*

*- Participant Quotes*

*"I'm bored and unhappy with eating bananas."*

*"If you buy [the produce] cheap, they will be bad soon. Before you have a chance to eat them."*

*- Participant Quotes*

### **Values**

Health and good nutrition were very important to the listening session respondents. Enjoyment and good taste were also of utmost importance. Participants did not feel they should have to sacrifice taste on a limited budget. Finally, food was viewed as being a community bridge and unifier of families.

## Community Food Conversations - Round Two






The second round of Food Conversations were designed to delve deeper into the emergent themes extracted from the first round. During the data analysis workshop, each location-based team designed a second set of questions intended to delve deeper in to the next layer of community insight. The goal of MarCo is to effect change in communities. This second set of listening sessions anticipated the co-creation of strategies by residents and MarCo.

Each location-based subsection begins with the questions generated by FACT members based on the previous listening sessions. The word cloud and newly collected data are presented immediately after.

### GLENDALE FOOD CONVERSATIONS – ROUND TWO

#### Key Questions

The questions designed for Glendale’s second Community Food Conversation were based on the values of community and familial connection and high standards of quality:

-  **Introductory Question** - Thinking about the best meal you’ve ever had in your life, describe the experience.
-  **Question 1** - What does “real food” or “quality food” mean to you?
-  **Question 2** - Imagine for a moment that the high cost of food is not a barrier. What does a typical weekday family meal look like for you?
-  **Question 3** - Food plays an important role in family connections. We wish to know what role the greater community plays now, and might play in the future, in your experience with food.
  - What do you know about county food programs (e.g. the emergency food system, nutrition education)?
  - Do you support now (or might you support in the future) local food sources (e.g. community gardens, farmers markets, locally grown food)?
-  **Final Question** - Our organization’s mission is to support and grow a food system in Maricopa County that is equitable, healthy, sustainable and thriving. From your important perspective as a consumer in that food system, what is something that you wish we would work to change so that your experience (and your family’s experience) of food would be improved?



Community members called for opportunities to have meaningful social interactions that center around food.

Participant respondents also saw a need for food reclamation coordination, where food that would otherwise go to waste is redirected to people in need.

### **Assets**

Participants expressed that some community food distribution sites offered meaningful social interaction. This was appreciated. Respondents also indicated that they felt the Community Food Conversations themselves were a part of the solution, and evidence of a high level of public interest.







### **Values**

Quality persisted as one of the highest participant values related to food. Quality to them means fresh food, handmade, made with love, nutritious, natural, and tastes good. Participants wanted quality food with a longer shelf life. Price continued to be an important factor.

Taking the time needed to enjoy food with loved ones was tantamount. Meaningful social interactions surrounded by food was a theme that echoed throughout the session.

### **Next Steps**

Glendale group participants offered some suggestions for next steps on how to engage them in community change. These suggestions were blended with insights from facilitators during the analysis to come up with the following ideas:

-  Bring people together around food.
-  The best way for the Coalition to reach out to community members is via text, mail, email, or social media.
-  Continue ongoing engagement through the promotora network.
-  Explore local partners to host additional community conversations where food is shared.
-  Engage with the agency partners who either attended or hosted the conversations, including Head Start, First Things First, City of Peoria, and the Glendale Library.
-  Share the Maricopa Healthy App with the Coalition and identify opportunities for the Coalition to help with promotion.

## TEMPE FOOD CONVERSATIONS – ROUND TWO

### Key Questions

The questions designed for Tempe's second Community Food Conversation were based on the values of community and familial connection and social justice related to the affordability of food:






-  **Introductory Question-** What type of community food activity, of any size, would you participate in/be a part of here in your area?
-  **Question 1-** The affordability of food came up a lot in our first conversation. What do you see has having the biggest impact on you or your neighbors?
-  **Question 2-** In our first food conversation, we learned about a lot of great food assets available here in the community, but there are still important gaps for those who are most vulnerable, like seniors, the homeless and others. What ideas do you have for organizations, coalitions and city leaders to focus on to address those gaps?
-  **Question 3-** What is the best method for sharing this information with you or your community?
-  **Final Question-** How can the coalition continue to engage with you as we begin to activate and take on these issues?



Figure 5. Tempe Community Food Conversation Session Two Word Cloud

### **Background**

The second Tempe session was hosted at the Tempe Public Library. There were six English speaking participants present, only one of whom was male. All participants were around 50 years old, and some were agency representatives and therefore speaking on behalf of clients and their experience as professionals, rather than a community-based experience.

It was noted by the facilitator observer team that as the demographics changed from the first session to the second, the questions prepared did not perfectly resonate with the participants.

### **Needs**



Participants felt that they needed more culturally appropriate food options and smaller scale stores. Participants wanted food to be incorporated as a central theme into existing events and spaces in order to develop a sense of community around food to support the neighborhood and disseminate information. In order to accomplish this, a convener or coordinator is needed.

Food waste management was also mentioned. Ample time in one's personal or professional life was cited as a need. Participants also were aware of infrastructural limitations inherent in the current food system.

### **Assets**

Faith-based organizations were named for specifically coordinating events and gatherings in the area. Participants also praised the City of Tempe Climate Action Plan, as well as the City's focus on urban agriculture and food equity. The Tempe Community Action Agency was mentioned as an important safety net organization.

School district and water bill mailers were mentioned as effective for information dissemination. The food assessment data available to the community was also viewed as an asset.

*"Our schools are challenged. Our agricultural system in the state is not set up to easily bring in local food to the schools."*

*- Participant Quote*

### **Values**

Sharing food was very important to participants. Quality and timeliness of produce were mentioned. For example, participants agreed that if you go to an affordable store to buy produce, it will not be ripe yet. It was suggested that the more expensive grocery stores get the ready-to-eat but not spoiled foods.

Information dissemination is happening, participants contributed, and they like it. Community residents also praised the use of existing spaces such as neighborhoods and parks to support food system change.

### **Next Steps**

Tempe respondents offered some suggestions on next steps to engage the community in change. These suggestions were blended with insights from facilitators to come up with the following ideas:



Identify existing events and spaces where food conversations action can be incorporated including faith-based organizations, schools, and local organizational meetings.




-  Determine a champion for events - such as the Tempe Community Action Agency - who can provide financial support and act as a convener, as these events are desired but lack a convener.
-  The City of Tempe is interested in exploring their Climate Action Plan through the lens of urban agriculture and equity. Initial contact has been made and they are interested in looking to MarCo for an expert panel to develop their own action plans around food.
-  It was stated multiple times that there is a need to explore high-yield avenues through which to communicate. It may be useful to find local conveners with an established network.



Figure 6. South Phoenix Community Food Conversation Session Two Word Cloud

## **Background**

The second session of community listening sessions in South Phoenix was hosted at the Sagrado Galleria. This partnership was very successful; the community members were familiar with the space and the gallery director had the influence and community reach to get people in the door. There were 36 attendees present, about one third of whom self-selected into the Spanish speaking breakout group. The crowd was generally younger adults (20 to 40 years old). The group was comprised of South Phoenix residents, a few of whom worked in the food service industry as chefs or growers.

## **Needs**

The main needs described by attendees included better quality in grocery stores, healthy fast food options, and access to organic foods. Some participants mentioned transportation as a barrier. Residents felt that stores like Trader Joe's and Sprouts were inaccessible due to their location and lack of transportation. Residents talked about the subtle discrimination inherent in the food options available in South Phoenix grocery stores. Ranch Market and Food City were viewed as having low quality food with a short shelf life. Participants reported that some community members such as teenagers and those without transportation rely on convenience stores, which have very few healthy options.

*"Education [about growing/farming] is critical because it is an entire[ly] different rhythm of life."  
- Participant Quote*

Gardening education and gardening capacity building was desired, to engage both adults and children. Having enough water for gardening projects was a barrier to gardening, as was making the time, finding the space, and personal commitments. Community members thought highly of gardening as a concept, but some respondents felt it was only for people who had the time to give.

*"There is a fine line - I'm not getting enough money for the produce I'm selling, but I understand why people don't want to pay more than they would in grocery stores."  
- Local Grower*

## **Assets**

The community talked about how they appreciate the abundance of local farms in the South Phoenix region, even though they are sometimes expensive. The Produce on Wheels program was mentioned as an important community asset. Spaces of Opportunity and Tiger Mountain Foundation were also mentioned as community players in the gardening scene.

There was a general sense that South Phoenix as a community understood that fast food is not ideally healthy for people, and that was viewed as a knowledge-based asset.






## **Values**

The most highly esteemed values shared in this session were quality, and a future focus. Shoppers felt that quality matters, even when quality is not cost-saving. The youth are very important to shaping the future; their health matters as does the health of the community. Sharing with neighbors was also important.

Community members also clued into issues related to social and economic justice. Residents wanted to see money stay in South Phoenix. They felt that “nicer” grocery stores should be in South Phoenix so they do not have to drive to Tempe or the Biltmore area of Phoenix to spend their money.

## **Next Steps**

South Phoenix residents offered some suggestions on next steps to engage the community in change. These suggestions were blended with insights from facilitators to come up with the following ideas:

-  Host community events around food. Invite food trucks, initiate pot lucks, offer a table for gardeners to exchange excess produce. Invite entertainment such as music or something for kids, like a bouncy house. A cooking competition or celebration event would meet the same community-building purpose.
-  Keeping events “open” was important- that is, not ethnicity-specific. Go block by block.
-  Participants preferred communication through text message, social media, or door-to-door flyers. Some participants mentioned using mobile web-based applications, such as Whatsapp or NextDoor.
-  Provide meaningful opportunities for residents to help change the inequitable systems that determine what kind of food options are available in the community. Community members are ready, willing, and waiting for guidance.
-  Community members felt strongly that any community events should bridge and unite the African American and Hispanic communities that are featured in South Phoenix.



### **Community Impressions**

Volunteer facilitator-observers commented that communities were lacking fresh, quality food. Price and accessibility were barriers, as the nicer grocery stores and farmers' markets were out-of-reach expensive. Survey respondents reported that listening session attendees desired education; suggested classes included how to budget for groceries, meal planning, and nutrition education classes. It was reported that participants wanted workshops for both adults and children. There was a general sense that food has the power to foster feelings of closeness.

### **Major Takeaways**

By far, the most commonly reported suggestion was to launch these kinds of endeavors with a well-connected partner to boost participation. Local champions are a must. Behind the scenes relationship building matters, and that happens long before the sessions are scheduled.

Another insightful comment was a facilitator's frustration with the lack of community member participation continuity from one listening session to the next. This respondent felt that because the questions from session two were based on data from session one, if the demographic shifted significantly for session two, the questions became less relevant.

Volunteers reported that people sincerely want to be involved. Also, there is a palpable history within these communities of agency-based initiatives coming in and collecting information, with no follow through.

Respondents also mentioned the sentiment that the coalition is lacking broader support and participation from its membership, and that was limited. A few people did the majority of the work.

### **Course Recommendations**

Survey respondents mentioned that a refresher course in between sessions would have been helpful. Some volunteers wanted more guidance with developing the second script.

## Recommendations

Several recommendations are presented to MarCo, based on the synthesis of listening session data, volunteer survey responses, and expert evaluator observations.

### Recommendations for MarCo



Quality is as equally important as affordability. Remember and imbed this value in any food-related events and work. Session participants related the quality concept to social justice and felt strongly that they should not have to endure such limited access to certain high-quality foods (organics, seafood, cultural foods, local farm produce) just because they live in a specific part of town.



Education was highly desired by participants. Include educational components in any community events related to food. Promote existing educational opportunities and collaborate with partner agencies to connect community residents to these opportunities. Community members would specifically like gardening support of any kind- spaces to rent gardening plots, gardening related education, and interactive programs for kids.



Re-engage session participants by sharing results. Ask community host sites, such as the Sagrado Galleria, if they would be amenable to hosting a reception where they can learn about the findings in this report.



Create colorful, customized one-page community summaries that feature overall project themes as site-specific data. Use these community data summary sheets to educate consumers about the community food conversations both in-person and digital and print media formats



Work with our partners to host neighborhood “food events,” or ongoing Community Food Conversations. Community members suggested an event where a street is blocked off, and residents join together to share recipes, exchange excess produce, and talk food. Participants were moved emotionally by food and the connections that sharing food can build. Include an attraction specifically for kids to encourage participation.



Involve the community health workers in MarCo. They were eager participants in the Glendale session, and are very enthusiastic about supporting the project goals.

### Recommendations for Qualitative Assessment Program Design

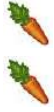


Build in more time for consultant-volunteer contact. Volunteers would have liked an additional workshop, possibly two. Additional technical assistance was desired for practice time, as well. Volunteers suggested an additional workshop between sessions as a refresher course. More guidance in script development would have been useful to some volunteers.



Clarify consultant roles versus volunteer roles. Survey responses indicated that some MarCo members may have expected the trainers’ role to function beyond training, such as recruiting volunteers.





Identify strategies to increase participation from the African American community.

Strengthen the capacity of MarCo Members as volunteers to to plan, coordinate and facilitate Community Food Conversations. If feasible, budget for paid staff support to execute community food conversation activities. It was usually agency-based staff members that stayed until the end of each session and put in extra time between meetings to get things done.

## Appendix A - FACT Community Listening Session One Script

**Instructions:** This tool is intended for you to use as a guide. Depending on your familiarity and confidence level facilitating large groups, you may not need to rely on this guide word-for-word. You may ad-lib the content, but the Blanket Consent and Research Questions must be read exactly as written (or memorized).

F1: Facilitator

F2: Co-Facilitator

N: Notetaker Observer

### Introduction

F1: Good evening! And thank you to everyone who took the time out of their evening to spend some time with us. We really appreciate you showing up and contributing.

My name is [FIRST and LAST NAME] and I'm here with [INTRODUCE CO-FACILITATOR and NOTE TAKER NAMES] to ask you about food. We will be talking about everything that relates to food, from the large systems that affect us, such as farming, restaurants, and local laws, to the choices you make every day in your own kitchen or when shopping. Tonight, we are representing the Maricopa County Food System Coalition. But you are the expert in your community.

That's why we've asked you to be here this evening - to listen to your answers to a series of questions. By learning exactly what you think are the best and most challenging parts of eating and managing food in your life, we can better work with you to develop solutions. The information we learn about tonight will be used to create questions for our next listening session, focused specifically on [INSERT NEIGHBORHOOD AND MUNICIPALITY NAME]. Our goal is to overlap the mission of the Maricopa County Food Systems Coalition with the goals of your community. Tonight is the first part of the conversation. A final report will be available to you upon request.

We'll start off together, do some break out conversations, and then join back together before we leave. You will probably have different points of view, but there are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to share your thoughts even if they are different than someone else's.

*[Read word for word, or memorize.]* Blanket Consent: When you signed the sign-in sheet, you read what we call a "blanket consent". That means that you agree to be listened to, and we will capture your thoughts for the report. This may include note-taking or a digital audio

recording. We will not be asking particularly personal questions, nor will we be including your identity or personally identifying information anywhere in the report. We will not link any answers to a specific person. We just want to make sure we capture things accurately. We will keep the recordings as a reference until we are done writing the report. They will be locked and secured, and destroyed at the report's end. Does anyone have any questions about this part of the session?

[Consultants are on site to support Facilitators with any questions, as needed.]

As previously mentioned, if you stay until the end of the evening, your name will be entered to win one of three \$75 grocery store gift cards.

Please make sure your nametag is visible. If you don't want to use your own name, you may choose another name to be called.

F2: Ok. We plan to be here until [TIME]. Help yourself to refreshments as you need. Please find the restroom at [LOCATION] whenever you need a break. I'd like to remind you to silence your phone, and if there is an urgent matter, please step out if you need to talk or text.

As facilitators, it is our job to remain neutral. We cannot answer questions during the listening question. If you have a burning question that cannot be answered by other session participants, please write it down with the paper and pen provided and we can speak with you directly after the session. At some point, another facilitator or I may redirect the conversation so that we can focus our time. Our goal is for everyone's voice to be heard.

F1: We are here to have a group discussion. I will ask some questions to guide the conversation, but you do not have to respond to only me. You are encouraged to have a group conversation. We would like to hear from all of you. If you are talking a lot, a facilitator may ask you to let others have a chance. If you are quiet, you may be asked to join in. We just want to be sure that everyone is heard.

As far as group rules go, please try not to interrupt when another group member is speaking. Please talk slowly so the notetaker and everyone else can understand you. We also want you to know it is ok to disagree respectfully.

Are there any additional questions before we get started? [When questions are complete, turn on recording device.]

[F1 goes over the following:]

## **Agenda**

- Meal, gathering, and sign in (30 minutes)
- Welcome and introduction (20 minutes) this is where we are now.

- Small group discussions (60 minutes)
- Wrap-up (10 minutes)

## Warm Up

We'd like to get to know more about you. But we'll keep the focus on food. We'll exchange names in our smaller groups, but for now we want to get the blood flowing to your brains! [If you have a small group of 15 or fewer participants you may wish to do first names.]

Please back your chair up a bit so you have room to stand. I'm going to ask a series of questions, and if you identify with the question, stand up to tell us "Yes!".

[F1 introduces next exercise and F1/F2 alternate giving prompts]

- You skipped breakfast this morning...coffee doesn't count for food.
- Your job has to do with food, in a major way.
- You would say that you're a coupon clipper.
- You consider yourself to be an adventurous eater.
- You're a vegetarian.
- You're a meat and potatoes kinda guy or gal.
- You make most of the decisions in your family about food.

## Question #1

F1: Alright, thank you for sharing! Everyone can find a comfortable seat, at least for now. We are going to start with the full-group question part of our evening.

Please take a deep breath. [Speaking slowly] Think about how you meal plan, shop and pay for food, cook, or even grow food. [PAUSE for at least ten seconds] Now, close your eyes and imagine this for two minutes. [PAUSE for at least one minute] Now, fast forward five years and things have gotten better for you or easier for your community. What does this look like? What kind of improvements have been made?

[Record conversation, offer prompts]

→ Going off the visions, connect the positives (assets) and negatives (needs) as relevant to promote conversation. Allow for 15 minutes or so of discussion. Facilitate as needed. F2 chimes in when appropriate/helpful by using eye contact techniques with F1.

→ F2 records large themes on white board and offers a reflection. F1 will use summary to segue into breakout groups.

F1: [Break into groups of 8 to 12 people:

Go around and introduce yourselves by first name. Identify the small group facilitator. Identify the notetaker, whether it's a predetermined program volunteer (preferred) or willing, competent, and possibly skilled community member (in a pinch).

Facilitator begins to ask the questions.]

### **Question #2**

[Reminder to start extra recording device at each small group.]

So, to get started, in your experience, what pieces are missing from how your community grows, sells, buys, or eats food?

[Record conversation, offer prompts]

→ Facilitate as needed.

→ Facilitator and/or notetaker offer a reflection for purposes of thoroughness, clarification, and confirmation.

### **Question #3**

Next, I'd like to know, what is the hardest part of getting food in your community?

[Record conversation, offer generic or any of the following prompts]

- How is the cost?
- What about the types or quality of stores, markets, or other food vendors?
- Are there any issues getting there?
- And the type of food available?

→ Facilitate as needed.

→ Facilitator and/or notetaker offer a reflection for purposes of thoroughness, clarification, and confirmation.

### **Question #4**

Thank you for that. Now, we'd like to spin the conversation a bit more positively. Remember we are talking about the entire system of food in your life. That includes everything that relates to food, from the large systems that affect us, such as farming, restaurants, and local laws, to the choices you make every day in your own kitchen or when shopping. In your experience, what's working well in your community with food?

[Record conversation, offer prompts]

→ Facilitate as needed.

→ Facilitator and/or notetaker offer a reflection for purposes of thoroughness, clarification, and confirmation.

### **Question #5**

This is our last question. Thank you for being so patient and hanging in there. When thinking about the role food plays in your life, what do you value most?

[Record conversation, offer generic or any of the following prompts]

- What is the best part?
- What is your favorite?
- What does 'good' mean to you?

→ Facilitate as needed.

→ Facilitator and/or notetaker offer a reflection for purposes of thoroughness, clarification, and confirmation.

[F1 reconvenes group with support of all small group facilitators]

### **Wrap up**

F1: Thank you so much for sharing your knowledge, experience, and opinion with us today. Be sure you included your email on our sign-in sheet if you'd like to have tonight's summary, or to receive an invitation to our next session. We hope you will come. The follow-up Community Listening Session will focus on co-created solutions between the Maricopa County Food Systems and you all. We'd like you then to tell us what you want to do about it and how you want to be involved. If anyone has closing comments or questions, we will stick around for about 15 minutes and are happy to share our contact information as requested!

F2: And now, to see who will win one of three \$75 gift cards! You must be present to win.  
[draw raffle]

## Appendix B - Full Protocol for MarCo Community Listening Sessions

### Listening Session Design

Sessions will include community members (adults and/or accompanied minors) who reside in the targeted communities of East Tempe, South Phoenix, and Glendale. The session will begin with 20 minutes of all-group participation, and provision of a healthy meal. Next, participants will break into smaller groups of 8 to 12 for the next 60 minutes. Natural groupings of participants will be allowed to remain. Break out groups will be conducted in both English and Spanish, while the full group sessions in English only. The full group will reconvene for 10 minutes at the session's end.

Be sure to note the temperature, lighting, and background of the noise before you get started. Make sure bathrooms are well marked and refreshments are accessible. Blank scrap paper and pens should be at every table; ideally small tables will be throughout the room. Set out the sign in sheet on a table with pens when participants enter the room. Also have name tags or tents and markers available at this station. Ask participants to write their name down for conversational purposes; they may make up a name if they don't feel comfortable using their own. The notetaker or another volunteer can sit there and greet participants and provide instruction.

### Effective Characteristics of Facilitation

1. Reverence for the information provided by participants, regardless of their culture, language, or level of education
2. Clear communication methods
3. Strength in self-management - refrain from providing information, confirmation, or an emotive response
4. Friendly and neutral
5. Professional appearance

### Lead Facilitator

Volunteers for this position will take a leadership role on the project. They will receive training and technical support for coordinating, recruiting participants, and delivering community listening sessions. Lead Facilitators will attend the initial training on program facilitation and data collection, as well as a qualitative data analysis follow-up training. Each training will be about three hours in length. Technical support and online mini-modules of the initial training course will be available, as needed.

Lead Facilitators will be responsible for selecting an appropriate community site within the chosen geographic area. They will gain entrée into the community by leveraging or building relationships to community site gatekeepers. Lead Facilitators will schedule the session, and work with onsite and partner organization staff to recruit participants for the listening session.

During the listening session, Lead Facilitators will partner with Co-Facilitators to administer the session and collect participant data. Lead Facilitators will also be responsible for coordinating snacks and refreshments, as well as onsite child care for participants.

After all phases of the listening sessions are complete, Lead Facilitators will attend a follow-up training to learn how to summarize, analyze, and audit data.

Lead Facilitators should self-select with the intention of continuing to work within the communities that they administer the listening sessions. While collecting data and local perspectives is important, community engagement is a long-term effort. Relationships built during this initial assessment period will be instrumental in the long-term effort of changing and improving community food systems.

This role is a good fit for someone who would like real-time engagement and experience in social science research and community development.

### **Co-Facilitator**

Volunteers for this position will take a supporting leadership role on the project. They will receive training and technical support for coordinating, recruiting participants, and delivering community listening sessions. Co-Facilitators will attend the initial training on program facilitation and data collection, as well as a qualitative data analysis follow-up training. Each training will be about three hours in length. Technical support and online mini-modules of the initial training course will be available, as needed.

Co-Facilitators will be mindful of the Lead Facilitator's list of responsibilities, and offer to support them site identification, relationship building, and coordinating sessions, as available.

During the listening session, Co-Facilitators will partner with Lead Facilitators to administer the session and collect participant data. Data collection and listening session facilitation is the focus of this role.

After all phases of the listening sessions are complete, Co-Facilitators will attend a follow-up training to learn how to summarize, analyze, and audit data with their Lead Facilitator partner.

Co-Facilitators should self-select with the intention of continuing to work within the communities that they administer the listening sessions. While collecting data and local perspectives is important, community engagement is a long-term effort. Relationships built during this initial assessment period will be instrumental in the long-term effort of changing and improving community food systems.

This role is a good fit for someone who would like real-time experience in social science research and community development.

### **Observation Volunteer**

Volunteers for this position will take a supporting role on the project. They will receive training and technical support collecting qualitative data at listening sessions. Observation Volunteers are required to watch a series of online training modules, about one hour in length. They will also be invited (but not required) to attend the initial training on program facilitation and data collection, as well as a qualitative data analysis follow-up training. Technical support will be available to Observers as needed, upon request.

Observation Volunteers will mainly support Facilitators to administer listening sessions and collect participant data. Data collection and listening session support is the focus of this role. Volunteers who choose to attend the second training will have an opportunity to summarize, analyze, and audit data with their Facilitator partners.

Observation volunteers should self-select with the intention learning more about community engagement as a long-term effort. Relationships built during this initial assessment period will be instrumental in the long-term effort of changing and improving community food systems.

This role is a good fit for someone who has an interest in social science research and community development, and is seeking a snapshot of what these projects look like.