



GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT

A guide to SFC Network membership

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1. Introduction

Throughout the UK, pioneering communities at every scale - from individual institutions through to entire city-regions - have recognized the key role food can play in dealing with some of today's most pressing social, economic and environmental problems. From obesity and diet-related ill-health to food poverty and waste, climate change and biodiversity loss to declining prosperity and social dislocation, food is not only at the heart of some of our greatest problems, but also a vital part of the solution.

The Sustainable Food Cities (SFC) Network is a rapidly growing movement of 48 towns, cities, boroughs and counties who share a belief in the power of food as a vehicle for driving positive change.

1.1 The Sustainable Food Cities approach

The SFC approach is a tried and tested model for transforming food culture that includes:

- Establishing an effective cross-sector food partnership of key stakeholders (public agencies, businesses, NGOs, academics) willing to work together for positive change.
- Incorporating healthy and sustainable food into local policy, strategy and planning to drive and embed longer term systemic change.
- Developing and delivering an ambitious but achievable food strategy and action plan through which partners can successfully tackle key food challenges in a collaborative way.

To provide a framework for our work - including our resources, campaigns and awards - we have structured the Sustainable Food Cities programme around six key food issues:

1. Promoting healthy and sustainable food to the public.
2. Tackling food poverty, diet-related ill health and access to healthy food.
3. Building community food knowledge, skills, resources and projects.
4. Promoting a vibrant and diverse sustainable food economy.
5. Transforming catering and food procurement.
6. Reducing waste and the ecological footprint of the food system.

This guide has been produced by the Sustainable Food Cities Support Team as part of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funded programme to support the development of the Sustainable Food Cities Network.

To find out more about the Sustainable Food Cities Network visit our [website](#) and have a look at this [presentation](#).

1.2 Why join?

The SFC Network helps people and places to share challenges, explore practical solutions and develop best practice in all aspects of sustainable food.

Membership of the Network offers many benefits:

- Opportunity to attain a [Bronze, Silver or Gold SFC award](#) in recognition of your achievements under the SFC's six themes.
- Opportunities to regularly exchange knowledge and offer peer to peer support via the annual national conference and regional events.
- Opportunities to receive advice, guidance and support in the form of meetings, training and event facilitation from the SFC team ([Soil Association](#), [Sustain](#), [Food Matters](#)).
- Join in with high profile national campaigns, such as [Sugar Smart](#), to add value and impact locally. Members joining our campaigns receive support and guidance on local delivery and can apply for small grants towards activity.
- Opportunity to apply for our food partnership Coordinator Grants.
- Profile your food partnership on the SFC website.
- Increase your local profile and leverage by being part of a national network.

1.3 SFC membership criteria

To become a member of the SFC Network a place must:

- Have a cross sectoral food partnership with terms of reference that clearly shows how the partnership has been established to work across all six key food issues.
- Have developed and be delivering a food action plan aimed at making healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of where they live. This action plan should be based on a strategic vision and aims and a collaborative partnership ethos.

These are explained in more detail in section two and three below.

1.4 Guide structure

This guide provides an overview of the process of setting up a food partnership and developing a food action plan. It is specifically focused on achieving the key elements required to meet the SFC Network membership criteria. Section two starts with a focus on 'Setting up a food partnership' including looking at: stakeholder representation, steering groups, terms of reference, joint vision and food partnership structure. Section three then looks at three basic steps: Scope; Consult; Launch, to achieving a food action plan. Finally section four outlines the process for applying for SFC membership. We recommend that this guide is read in conjunction with the [Food Partnership Structure Guide](#) and the [Food Partnership Start-up Checklist](#).

1.5 A guide not a blueprint

At the outset it is worth stating that there is no 'correct' way to set up a food partnership. Each city or place is different, with its own set of circumstances that will influence the process. The

community's issues, needs and priorities will be different; there will be different starting points and routes into the journey of becoming a Sustainable Food City. The lens through which you view a sustainable food system could be based on the SFC's 6 themes or you may choose to frame it around the 3 pillars of sustainability (environment, economic, social) or a different framework. It is important that whichever approach you take there is a sense of ownership of the process and the way the partnership works. This guide is not intended as a blueprint for developing a food partnership and action plan. You may decide that in your case, additional steps need to be added in, or indeed that some can be skipped over. This is simply a guide to the steps that could be taken.

1.6 Who is it for?

This guide is aimed at newly emerging food partnerships that are at the early stages of setting up and wish to become a member of the SFC Network. It may also be useful to food partnerships that have been dormant or operating at reduced capacity for a while that are now being reinvigorated.

2. Setting up a food partnership

A food partnership can have many functions, and there is certainly no one size that fits all. One of the most important things it can do is to demonstrate the connections between food, health, community, social equity, the environment and economic prosperity, and how this approach can deliver a sustainable food system. An integrated, joined-up, whole food system approach can bring together people and organisations with diverse interests for the mutual benefit of all.

2.1 Stakeholder representation

The starting point for most food partnerships is to bring stakeholders together to share thinking and explore a common vision or purpose and aims. To become a member of the SFC Network the food partnership needs to include representatives from the public sector, third sector and business sector*.

Public sector representatives tend to come from a range of local authority departments (e.g. public health, economy, communities, environment, and equalities) or from the NHS (hospital trusts, clinical commissioning groups, and community health services). You may also want to engage with local universities. Third sector representatives should come from a wide range of organisations either food related (e.g. food coops, food banks, growing groups, cookery groups, city farms) or from infrastructure organisations (e.g. council for voluntary service) or networks representing food projects or environmental concerns (community food growing networks, Transition movement etc.). Social enterprises fall into this sector and are useful members to have on board too. Business sector representatives could come from farming, catering, retail, food distribution etc.

Any partnership, especially an emerging one, will be unlikely to have a 'perfect' membership with high-level influential members from the public, third and business sectors. This should always be the aim but membership will vary as priorities, people and politics change. A new partnership may well be best having a handful of committed members that can drive action forward rather than a large less committed group. Experience shows it takes time to develop the trust needed for strong partnerships.

Comment

- Initial meetings are about establishing relationships between the key individuals.
- They can be fairly informal but focused on sharing: information; perspectives on issues and suggestions on overall vision and actions.
- *Engaging with businesses is an area that many food partnerships struggle with. SFC Network is therefore happy to accept food partnerships with no or little business representation so long as there is a commitment to engage businesses as the partnership develops and this is reflected in the action plan and terms of reference.
- Emerging food partnerships may find it useful to look at the SFC '[Food Partnership Structure Guide](#)' which captures the stories of how existing SFC members have evolved along with guidance on choosing your structure.

2.2 Steering group

Once a broad range of stakeholders have been engaged, the next step for many food partnerships is to nominate a smaller group of people who are going to actively work to take the partnership forward. This group could be called the steering group, steering committee or management committee for example. The process for developing a steering group along with top tips has been covered in detail in our [Food Partnership Structure Guide](#).

2.3 Creating a joint vision

At the heart of any successful food partnership is a strong vision that stakeholders buy into. The food partnership needs to be about people working together and collaborating rather than things happening ad hoc and independently. Begin by asking 'What are the key issues for us?' What are the key outcomes that we want to see in order to achieve our vision? Time spent building a common understanding of what you are about will pay dividends later on and is the 'glue' that holds the partnership together as it matures. Partnerships that are 're-starting' after a period of inactivity may also find it useful to hold a visioning event to ensure buy in of key stakeholders.

Many SFC Network members have found it useful to present their vision in the form of a food charter. A clearly written food charter can be a great communication tool for your partnership. Look at these examples of [Food Charters](#) to get some ideas.

Food Charter top tips:

- Make it broad in scope to allow for changing priorities further down the line
- Reflect the range of key issues identified locally (these often tally with the 6 SFC areas)
- Keep it short and easy to communicate to a wide audience
- It's a good idea to include your Food Charter vision statement in your terms of reference

2.4 Food partnership structure

Any newly emerging food partnership soon has to address issues of structure. Considerations include: whether to have a formal membership structure or not; to what extent the partnership is democratically accountable; whether to become a service delivery organisation or to be more of a collaborative forum convened to ensure a strategic approach to action by partners in the local food system (backbone organisation); where to house the partnership and whether it takes a legal form or not. These issues have been addressed in detail in the [Food Partnership Structures Guide](#) and will not be looked at here. The main message that is worth emphasising though is that it's important to try and avoid getting bogged down! Getting absorbed in worrying about governance, especially legal structures can slow you down for years! Remember that your food partnership will need to evolve as it develops and will likely change structure at several points in its lifetime. The priority in the early days is to create a strong joint vision that stakeholders buy into. Once this has happened it will be clearer what type of structure will be needed. Accepting uncertainty is required in the early days.

2.5 Terms of reference

Your 'terms of reference' document simply describes how your group operates. Your terms of reference can be developed by your steering group and doesn't need to be consulted on beyond this. To apply for SFC Network membership it is recommended that your terms of reference include: name of food partnership; list of named stakeholders; vision statement and process for appointing a chair. You may find it helpful to look through these [examples of terms of reference](#) from other SFC Network cities. For further guidance on writing your terms of reference see the [Food Partnership Structures Guide](#).

Comment

- For membership of the SFC Network your food partnership will need to meet at least quarterly.
- Your vision statement may just be a couple of sentences or a bullet point list describing how your approach aligns with the SFC 6 key areas, but it's important that your stakeholders buy into it.
- Your terms of reference will need to demonstrate that you are committed to the SFC ethos and intend to be active across all 6 areas of sustainable food systems.

3. Developing aims, objectives and an action plan

Once you have your vision and the beginnings of your partnership in place it is time to work on developing a clear set of aims and objectives that will contribute to achieving this vision. Spending time working with stakeholders to draft, consult and confirm aims and objectives will help ensure buy in to your partnership at a strategic level.

Some food partnerships decide to publish their vision, aims and objectives in a separate 'food strategy' document and have found this to be a useful process. Unlike an action plan which needs regular updating, achieving stakeholder buy in to your vision and aims is more likely to stand the test of time.

Other food partnerships have decided to focus purely on the creation of an action plan. If you decide to go with this approach it will still be necessary to clearly link your action plan back to your vision either through your aims and objectives or by taking an outcomes based approach.

3.1 Step 1 - Scope: get to know your local food system

A useful starting point is to gather as much information as you can about your local food system and the political context. This will help to build evidence of why a food partnership and action plan is needed and further identify who the key stakeholders are.

This might include any or all of the following:

- Exploring and mapping current projects and partners
- Assessing needs and food access issues
- Reviewing local strategies and policies to consider where food fits
- Food system mapping
- Gathering and reviewing evidence of food related issues
- Reviewing existing literature and data e.g. health statistics

3.2 Local food system mapping

You may simply want to run a session with your steering group to do a 'brain download' of who is doing what, where and why under different food activity themes. Some food partnerships have found it useful to use the [SFC Awards framework](#) as the basis for collating information on what is happening in their area and identifying stakeholders. This may provide enough information to create a draft map of the food system (which could be used at stakeholder events) and a list of invitees to a food summit (see below).

Alternatively you may want to carry out a more comprehensive local food web mapping exercise. This can include mapping food producers, distributors, retailers, food consumers (the local community). It can be a useful way of both understanding your local food system and helping to galvanise and stimulate collaboration between partner organisations. You may find it useful to consult the [Local Food Web Mapping Toolkit](#), written by Food Matters for the Campaign to Protect Rural England. This is a useful guide to the range of workshops, surveys and interviews that can be used. Some food partnerships have conducted extensive mapping exercises (see ['Who Feeds](#)

[Bristol](#) or [Portsmouth Food System Survey](#)), but it is also possible to gain useful insight using just a few simple tools if resources are tight.

3.3 Review of local strategies

A review might include identifying and linking with a range of local authority strategies including:

- Sustainability
- Climate Change
- Economic Development
- Health and Wellbeing / Obesity
- Community Development
- Local Plan
- Social Value

3.4 Local food summit

If funds and time allow you could bring your mapping to life by holding a Local Food Summit so that stakeholders can get to know the food system and build relationships. The event could also launch the concept of the food partnership and action plan and begin to identify key themes to work on. Have a look at an example of a [plan for a food summit](#) and get in touch with the Sustainable Food Cities team for further help and support.

Questions:

- Who is doing what, where?
- Who are the key stakeholders?
- What are the key local issues / concerns?
- How well connected is the local food system?
- Where is food grown locally?
- How is food grown, processed, sold, consumed and disposed of?
- How does food fit into the current local development agendas, strategies and policies?
- What could a food action plan and partnership contribute to your city/place?
- What might the aims and objectives of your food action plan be?

3.5 Step 2: Consult: share understand and confirm local needs, issues

The purpose of this step is to understand the community's needs issues and concerns; consult on the draft aims and objectives and begin building a food action plan. The consultation could take the form of themed participatory workshops with groups of stakeholders and /or public consultation in different communities and neighbourhoods (e.g. at events or on busy streets and gathering places).

3.6 Participatory workshops (e.g. food businesses)

The aim of the workshop is to listen to and understand the local food businesses' opinions on the local food system, and how to make it more sustainable.

Questions:

- Where is your business?
- Who supplies produce to your business
- Sustainable food locally – what do you think are the key issues for your business?
- Why are these issues important?
- How could these issues be addressed?
- How easy is it for you to operate as a sustainable business locally?
- Why is it easy / difficult?
- What would make it easier?
- Do you agree with the concept, ethos and aims of the Food Partnership?
- How should your business be best represented in the Food Partnership?

3.7 Participatory community appraisal

It is helpful to carry out community-wide consultation throughout the development of the aims, objectives and action plan but particularly when identifying and confirming key issues and ways in which the Plan could address them. This is about listening to and understanding the local communities' opinions on food, sustainability and health. This will help to encourage engagement in the process and the development of a sense of ownership for communities and stakeholders.

Questions:

- What do you think are the key local food issues?
- How easy is it for you to get the food you want?
- How important is it for you to eat healthily?
- How easy is it for you to eat healthily?
- How important is it for you to eat local produce?
- How easy is it for you to eat local produce?
- What would you consider to be a healthy diet?
- Which issues are priorities and how could they be addressed?
- Do you agree with the draft aims and objectives?

3.8 Step 3: Launch: confirm, agree and initiate the food action plan and partnership

This step will again bring together potential delivery partners, present the draft action plan, promote membership (if you have one), and launch the food partnership. If you have reached this stage, you may be ready to apply for SFC Network membership.

3.9 Partnership launch event

The launch event is an important opportunity to publicise the partnership, vision and draft action plan and to begin growing your influence. The event also allows partners to continue to contribute to a more detailed action planning process – really beginning to determine and decide upon a prioritisation of objectives, identification of specific activities aimed at delivering them and deciding on approaches that can be adopted to implement the activities. This is best achieved through a well-designed and facilitated launch event that could also include the launch of the partnership’s website and logo.

Questions:

- Who are potential members of the partnership?
- How clear are people about the Food Partnerships vision and aims?
- How important is the Food Partnership?
- Do you agree with the vision / aims/ objectives / approaches?
- What should be the highest priority activities to deliver the objectives and support the approaches?
- Who should be doing what – leading the activities?
- What are the opinions / perspectives of key strategic partners?

3.10 Action plan

The action plan sets out what you are going to do over the next 12 months or more in each of the six key areas outlined in section one. There are many [examples of action plans](#) on the SFC website that will be useful to get an idea of the [type of actions](#) SFC Network members are working on. Remember; actions could include facilitating, consulting and networking as well as practical delivery. Your action plan will be unique to your place; enjoy the process of creating it and keep it achievable.

3.11 Example action plan format

Aim 1: Increase access to for all residents to nutritious, safe, affordable food		
Objective: Ensure that adults have the skills and confidence to cook from scratch		
Action	Lead Organisation	Priority
Develop cookery programme to enhance skills of community cookery leaders	Adult Education Providers, Food Partnership	High
Deliver training course on food hygiene	Food Safety Team	Medium
Conduct feasibility study on establishing community kitchen	Food Partnership	Medium
Objective: Enhance access to fresh food outlets		
Action	Lead Organisation	Priority
Map existing fresh food outlets	Food Partnership	Medium
Support increased provision of fruit and vegetables in tuck shops, after school clubs, community cafes, breakfast clubs	Healthy Schools Worker Food Partnership	High

4. Applying for SFC Network membership

Now that you have your food partnership and action plan in place you are ready to apply to become a member of the Sustainable Food Cities Network. Membership applications will be considered on a quarterly basis (see the Sustainable Food Cities [website](#) for dates) and should be submitted by email to the SFC Network Manager Leon Ballin at LBallin@soilassociation.org.

Once your application has been reviewed and you are ready to join, a member of our team will be in touch to help you draft your 'shop window' for the Sustainable Food Cities website. This is the last step in the application process. Your shop window will be the first public information page for your food partnership that visitors access through the SFC website (see 'Find a City').

If you have further questions on the process of becoming a member check the Frequently Asked Questions section in Appendix 1 below. If you're still stuck then contact Leon for further advice and support.

4.1 SFC Network membership application checklist

Item	Included
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Named lead person for your food partnership. This will be the main contact between SFC and your food partnership. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms of reference document – this should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Name of your food partnership ○ List of stakeholders (name the organisation or public sector department). This must include representatives from public and third sectors; and from private sectors if possible. Note: If there are no private sector representatives then your action plan will need to clearly show how you intend to engage them. ○ Outline of your vision (could be bullet point list or summary paragraph). Note: It needs to be clear that you intend to work across all 6 key areas of SFC. ○ Decision making process for appointment of food partnership chair. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minutes from last 2 partnership meetings (these are used to evidence that you have a cross sectoral partnership that is actively meeting). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of your action plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Must cover period of next 12 months ○ This can be in draft form if you are still consulting on it. 	

4.2 Frequently asked questions

1. *Who should join our food partnership?*

There is no simple, consistent answer to this question. Generally, a partnership should be cross-sector and be able to represent the local community fairly, independently and effectively. Individual member interests should to a large extent not be brought to the table and members should endeavour to contribute positively to the partnership's overall aims and action plan. It is not a forum to look for individual organisations' funding, or other needs.

We would suggest the three main requirements of members are:

- Enthusiasm and a positive attitude
- Commitment to the ethos and aims of Sustainable Food Cities
- The ability to influence

2. *Do we have to follow the steps in this guide?*

No you don't!

3. *How do we get reluctant stakeholders engaged?*

You might find it useful to look at our [Making the case toolkit](#) to find the evidence of impact of local food partnerships and programmes and how they contribute to achieving key health, economic and environmental outcomes.