



Setting up a Governance Body

A key component of the Sustainable Food Cities approach is the establishment of a cross-sector body which owns and drives forward the sustainable food agenda in a city, town or borough. This is the place where food becomes 'visible', and eventually that organisation will become recognised as the 'go to' place for all food related issues.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to how this body is organised or how it functions, and each place will develop a model which suits its circumstances. However, there are characteristics which the Partners within the SFC programme, based on their experience, feel are fundamental to the long term delivery of the sustainable food agenda, and encourage cities to look at how these might be built in to their organisational model, if not in the immediate but perhaps as a longer term target.

- **Engaging key stakeholders**

The governance body should represent all stakeholders in the local food system – e.g. business, residents, community organisations, producers, public sector organisations, caterers etc. It is important that people come together in recognition of a shared vision that is more than their own particular agenda and work to a common aim, which ultimately benefits their particular work. It may not be possible to get comprehensive representation at the table at the outset, or perhaps ever, but the vision will recognise the need to engage everyone who has a stake in the food system in one way or another. It is useful to try and aim for a balance on the governing body of stakeholders who are passionate about food or who have influence, and ideally both. Consider other ways of engaging stakeholders and the wider network through developing joint projects or setting up working groups to look at particular issues.

- **Independence**

Because of the diversity of stakeholder interests it is important that the body is as independent as possible and works to a common agenda rather than the interests of a particular sector. Independence also means that there will be more opportunity to secure diverse funding, and the body is less likely to fall victim to the changing agenda or situation of a 'host' organisation. Developing an independent identity will also make the organisation more accessible to the widest range of stakeholders. An independent structure would mean that it has its own constitution, bank accounts, management systems, etc. This may not be possible from the outset, but our advice is to work towards this independent structure and have it in mind from the beginning.

- **Multi-functional**

In order to secure the long term sustainability of the governance body it is important that it is flexible, and prepared to undertake a variety of functions to achieve its aims. This can include delivering services, running campaigns, advocacy and lobbying, creating policy change, developing projects and working in partnership projects, undertaking research and development, offering consultancy services etc. If it goes down the route of becoming an independent organisation, it has the added flexibility of access to diverse income streams to help provide financial sustainability. Considering the functions of the governance body from the outset is important to determine what organisational structure is most appropriate. However, nothing need be cast in stone and there is always room for review and change as the programme evolves.

- **Influence and activity**

A governance body should be aware of its ability to influence change and focus activity on where it can have the most impact. Many bodies have fallen victim to discussing matters over which they have no influence, resulting in a lack of direction and action, and a waste of resources. Change will only come about by the actions of the people around the table, so it is best to utilise their skills and particular sphere of influence. Whilst this sounds like it is stating the obvious, there is often a presumption that someone else, or one particular person around the table is going to do all the work, which from our experience, doesn't work. Be realistic and pragmatic, set achievable targets for activity, whilst at the same time recognising the need to push forward and be ambitious.

- **Democratic accountability**

It is important that the organisation has credibility with the widest number of stakeholders, as well as potential funders and supporters, and that it reflects the views and issues of the community it represents. Building democratic systems into the ethos of the organisation from the outset is important, and there are various ways of achieving this through consultation, membership, elections etc. The organisation must ensure that it is transparent and accountable in all that it does.

- **Leadership**

Strong leadership is crucial in bringing together diverse stakeholders and encouraging their involvement. Leadership has a key role in maintaining the vision and purpose of the body, ensuring that it acts within its remit, and is aware of where it can make a difference. There may be more than one leadership role, as different skills are needed to chair, or to act as champion and public face of the body. Both are crucial, as advocating for healthy and sustainable food standards is a key role of the body. How the leadership relates to the political leadership of your town, city or borough should also be considered. It is prudent for governance bodies to be balanced in their political links, as the food agenda should be above party politics.