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THE ROLE OF A COMMUNITY COACH IN RURAL FOOD COUNCILS IN SIX
MIDWESTERN STATES

BY
KAITLYN TUSHA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science

Major in Nutrition and Exercise Sciences

Specialization in Nutritional Sciences

South Dakota State University

2019

THE ROLE OF A COMMUNITY COACH IN RURAL FOOD COUNCILS IN SIX
MIDWESTERN STATES

KAITLYN TUSHA

This thesis is approved as a credible and independent investigation by a candidate for the Master of Science in Nutrition and Exercise Sciences and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this does not imply that the conclusions reached by this candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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To my loving and supportive family:

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ABBREVIATIONS

FC	Food Council
PSE	Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change
SEM	Social Ecological Model
VFF	Voices for Food

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF A COMMUNITY COACH IN RURAL FOOD COUNCILS IN SIX
MIDWESTERN STATES

KAITLYN TUSHA

2019

Objective: To quantitatively assess perceived coaching confidence of a community coach working with food councils, and to qualitatively determine perceived barriers and facilitators associated with coaching rural food councils.

Design: Two phases were implemented using a mixed methods study design with quantitative (scorecard) and qualitative (key informant interviews) methodologies.

Setting: Six rural, Midwestern states implementing *Voices for Food*.

Participants: *Voices for Food* community coaches (n=9) who coached rural food council(s).

Intervention: A component of the broader *Voices for Food* intervention.

Analysis: Quantitative scorecard data were analyzed with STATA by running paired t-tests. Qualitative key information interview data were analyzed with NVivo by coding transcripts to themes, and then using a query matrix.

Results: Perceived confidence scores of community coaches were found to be significantly different at post-intervention compared to pre-intervention (103.3 vs 68.7, $P=.004$). Key facilitators associated with coaching rural food councils included: community relationships; the coach's past experiences, communication, organizational skills, and open mindedness; use of sub-committees, meeting agendas, and in-person communication; food council environmental and system changes; cooperative extension

presence. The only barrier identified was the creation and/or continuation of a food council advisory board.

Conclusions and Implications: Over the course of time, coaches can expect for their confidence in facilitating a food council to increase, and can be better prepared for barriers and facilitators that may arise. Future research should examine the impact community readiness has on coaching and food council success.

Keywords: rural, food council, Voices for Food, community, facilitators, barriers, community coaching

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
THE ROLE OF A COMMUNITY COACH IN RURAL FOOD COUNCILS IN SIX
MIDWESTERN STATES

Food councils are built on the foundation of bringing together community members from various backgrounds to work on overarching community goals and systematic changes. These councils tend to have many purposes, with most focusing on improving their food system and implementing changes in food policy.¹ Food councils are becoming more popular, both at the local and the state level and have the power to bring about many positive changes within the food system.² To date, research has focused on understanding the function and organizational structure of the councils.³ There is a gap in knowledge regarding whether facilitation of councils by a community coach, is a key component in their effectiveness.

Community coaching is an emerging process that focuses on having an individual coach, guide and motivate a community towards success.⁴ A coach sees barriers and challenges as opportunities for growth and focuses on the deeper meaning behind any troubles at hand.⁵ Community coaches must possess a wide range of skills to guide the entity they are coaching down the path to achievement, such as excellent communication skills, empathy, the ability to listen, a high level of motivation, and a deep commitment.⁵

The use of a community coach was a vital component in the *Voices for Food* project, a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant funded six-state collaboration that developed new or strengthened 12 food councils in rural communities

in Midwestern States.⁶ Each food council was assigned a community coach who was employed by Cooperative Extension. The coach was trained on how to use the *Voices for Food: Food Council Creation Guide*. A key goal asked of each food council was to assist one food pantry in their community with restructuring into a guided client choice model referred to as *MyChoice*. Each community was unique and achieved varying levels of implementation while engaging with a community coach and utilizing *Voices for Food* materials. The overarching difference between treatment and intervention communities was the coach.

Problem Statement

The history of food councils in the United States (U.S.) is short, and there is limited research literature as to what characteristics lead some food councils to produce more outcomes than others. To the best of our knowledge, there is no literature that correlates the increased production of outcomes of food councils paired with a community coach. Furthermore, there is a lack of self-assessment tools that measure the confidence of individual community coaches, and other skills needed by community coaches in order for food councils to produce successful outcomes.

Objectives & Research Questions

The aim of this research is two-fold and seeks to address the following objectives and questions:

Objective 1: To measure self-assessed confidence, over time, of a community coach, working specifically with food councils.

Question 1a: Did the community coach's self-assessed confidence score significantly increase from baseline to post assessment?

Objective 2: To complete key informant interviews with food council community coaches to understand the barriers and facilitators associated with coaching food councils.

Question 2a: What tasks or tools presented themselves as barriers in coaching food councils?

Question 2b: What tasks or tools presented themselves as facilitators in coaching food councils?

Question 2c: What skills, past experiences, or education were facilitators in the coaching role for food councils?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Food Councils

Food councils were originally created to address all sectors of the food system by bringing members together to engage with government programs, non-profits, local businesses and food system workers.⁷ A food system worker is a broad term that refers to anyone ranging from those who grow food to those who distribute the food. These councils create an opportunity for discussion and strategy development regarding the food system within a community.⁸ Some topics that would align with a food council's agenda are: encouraging the production and distribution of locally grown produce within ones community and surrounding communities, assisting farmers or businesses with marketing, or hosting food related events within a community.⁹ Additionally, food councils often offer innovative and creative solutions to improve food systems, whether it be locally, regionally, or state wide.⁸ All food councils should take on comprehensive approaches, pursue long-term tactics, offer solutions, advocate for their community, seek government buy-in, establish membership opportunities for members, and operate regardless of budget status.¹

Organizational Structure and Purpose

Typically, a food council includes at least one representative from each of the six sectors of the food system.⁷ The six sectors include: growing, processing, preparing, eating, retailing, and distributing.¹⁰ Growing refers to the process of producing the food; this can be seen in farms, or gardens.¹⁰ Processing is the second sector and refers to the process of treating or transforming raw goods to prepare them for consumption; this

occurs in factories, restaurants or homes.¹⁰ Preparing refers to the continuation of making the food edible. Examples include: cutting, peeling, washing, or cooking. The next sector, eating, refers to the consumption of food; this is the most relatable sector since everyone must eat.¹⁰ Retailing refers to the sale of food to consumers, whereas distributing refers to the moving or delivering of the food.¹⁰

A food council member can be anyone, however, typically those who participate in a food council have a passion for helping their community and making positive change. Often, a member of a council is an anti-hunger advocate, food justice advocate, educator, concerned citizen, government official, farmer, grocer, chef, food processor or food distributor.⁷ For example, ensuring that the membership is diverse, such as having a representative from the local food pantry, or a food pantry client will ensure that discussions around food insecurity are rich and represent the voices currently experiencing or providing resources to that issue. Food councils may benefit from including youth on their council, as they can bring a different perspective to the table.¹¹ Furthermore, including the next generation in the work that is currently being done within the community, is setting up the community for sustainability. However, in rural food councils there may be a limited variability of professions among members.

There is a great benefit to creating a formal advisory board, sub-committees, or working groups for the established food council. Leadership can either be formal with associate position titles, or leadership can be informal, and include no specific chair positions whatsoever.¹ Advisory boards vary depending on food council location and member preference. The purpose of an advisory board is to provide guidance to other food council members; frequently board members have distinct titles and job descriptions

and typically meet outside of food council meetings. By establishing an advisory board or sub-committee(s) the food council can become much more productive and effective.⁷

Including these components within the organizational structure of the food council, can aid in dividing up specific responsibilities and duties, and issues or tasks can be addressed prior to bringing them to the full council.⁷ Thus, making food council meetings more efficient and shorter in duration.

A mission statement is a great tool for food councils to refer to at any given time. When issues occur, or members become discouraged, a mission statement can guide members back to the purpose of the council.¹² A large piece of the mission statement is understanding whom the food council has as a target audience.¹² Also, there are many benefits to engaging in strategic planning. Strategic planning should align with the mission, vision and goals, and offers the potential for more success in the long term and generates more systematic and perspective thinking.¹³ Ensuring that each meeting's agenda aligns with the mission, vision and goals is a great check point in keeping the group moving forward. Over time things may change, so it is vital to revisit and make updates. Mission, vision and goals should be clearly address the issues brought forth by the community needs assessment.

Implementation Activities

Completing a community foods assessment is a resource for newly established food councils and can provide an avenue for future direction. These types of assessments highlight the issues within the community and indicate where change or help is needed.⁷ Additionally, it can help a food council build momentum, support within the community,

and increase overall success. The results and key findings of an assessment can be shared at any given food council meeting via charts, graphs, or words.

Once community foods assessments are completed they can be paired with action plans to guide a food council towards success. An action plan refers to a set of written steps regarding what must happen to achieve a specific goal set forth by the council.¹⁴ The purpose of an action plan is to clarify what resources are required to reach the goal, formulate a timeline for when specific tasks need to be completed and determine who is required to help.¹³

The frequency of food council meetings depends heavily on the number of action plans, and varies from council to council, each and every food council is different in length and frequency of meetings.¹⁵ Meeting frequency also depends on the strength of outside communication with one another, and availability of members that are on the food council.⁷ Creating meeting agendas that link back to the mission and purpose of the food council help keep members on task. An agenda can also aid in giving members direction and topics to discuss.⁷ Meeting minutes provide members not in attendance an overview of tasks that were reviewed, document important next steps, and provide a clear picture of what boards say and do.¹⁶

Forging partnerships within the community is a vital part of sustaining a food council long term.⁷ Sharing food councils' goals with the community may help a food council grow in size, establish funding, and understand the community more thoroughly. Many food councils have a mission of building an effective partnership with their local food pantry or food bank. This relationship gives them a direct link to addressing food

insecurity and disparities. Once a food council has formed these partnerships, funding should be the next task.

Funding

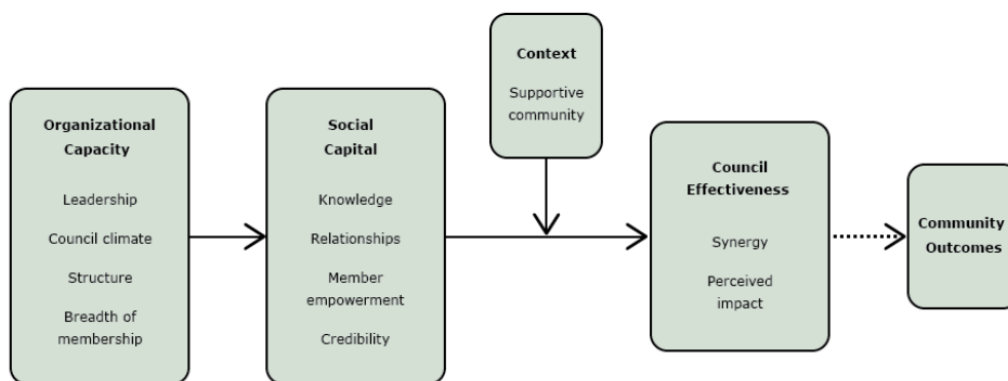
Ultimately, each council is responsible for finding its own leadership, funding, goals, projects, and evaluation techniques. Establishing funding can be a difficult process for many councils, and many function with no funding.⁸ The government is the largest funding source for state level food councils, whereas, individual donations are the largest funding source for county level food councils.⁷ Typically, a local food council relies heavily on grants from private foundations.⁷ A survey administered by John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, found that the two main barriers of implementing food council work were mostly due to a lack of time and financial support.¹⁷ Meaning, time and funding can both positively and negatively affect council implementation.

Evaluation

Hundreds of food councils exist, but no comprehensive guidelines exist that outline a structure that each council must follow, thus the evaluation of a successful food council is very complex.¹⁷ To address this disparity, one study aimed to test a self-assessment tool measuring the effectiveness of food councils. The study measured members' perceptions of organizational capacity, social capital, synergy, and impact on their food system and found that the tool identified specific strengths and areas of improvement within each of these broad categories.³ Figure 1. below displays that progression of an effective group from the beginning of its creation (inputs) to the end (outputs) that come from the work of that group of people.³ However, this tool lacked insight from the leadership of the food council and did not assess councils at different

points in time. Additionally, there was no comparisons of differences amongst all of the councils who filled out the form.

Figure 1. Food Council Framework



Another study interviewed and surveyed 21 council members within one food council, and provided them with feedback regarding their leadership, membership, structure, and impact.¹⁸ Authors of the research found that after providing each food council with constructive feedback there was a significant change and restructuring within their council. First, they presented their findings to the food council briefly on a flier, to raise members interest in attending the formal presentation and discussion of the findings. Then, the authors presented their findings by leading a discussion of the results and where improvements could be made. Following this feedback from the research authors, this food council increased their productivity in the form of number of produced media releases.¹⁸ Therefore, this specific example regarding media releases has a deeper meaning. This example shows how important the evaluation piece of a food council is and how feedback can bring important issues to light. Once a food council receives feedback, they can positively change the areas that need improvement. Thus, making

their council more effective. To date, no studies have looked at providing feedback to food councils via a community coach.

Community Coaching

Coaching comes in many forms, whether it be specific to businesses, relationships, professionally, health and wellness, or even communities. The idea of community coaching is new, upcoming, and gaining popularity. Through this form of coaching, community members learn to see issues and concerns as an opportunity to learn from each other, and to grow from the issues that may arise.¹⁹ A coach can help a community move beyond the conversation of why things will not or cannot work out, to more positive solution-oriented conversations.

Additionally, a community coach can help councils shift from a needs-based to a strengths-based approach. Being very attuned to what to do and how to do so are also critical skills of a community coach.⁵ The purpose of a coach is to learn alongside community members in order to expand their skillset to complete tasks more effectively, rather than doing everything for the community.⁵ Community coaching is very individualized since each community is unique and has their own set of issues or difficulties, and it is the duty of each community to develop their own capacity to complete tasks.¹⁹

Successful Community Coaching

There are certain traits that make a successful community coach stand out. A great community coach should be: deeply committed, culturally competent, know how to create a trusting yet authentic relationship, able to empathize, able to listen deeply, and possess an attitude of appreciation.⁵ Figure 2. from *A Field Guide to Community*

Coaching is a representation of additional skills that are found within many prosperous community coaches, and identifies situations where those skills are important.⁵

Figure 2. Important Coaching Skills

Important Coaching Skills	Examples
Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framing concepts and mindsets so the group can better understand • Framing distinctions • Asking questions • Listening • Engaging in dialogue and discussion for constructive conflict resolution • Providing honest feedback
Assessment and evaluation skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing reflective practices • Using strength and asset-based approaches • Facilitating asset mapping
Networking and relationship building skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting groups to other resources • Modeling collaborative approaches to work • Understanding the process for creating true collaboration
Planning and management skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying tasks • Developing timelines
Engagement and outreach skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding how to create an inclusive planning process • Employing cultural competency
Facilitation skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurturing meaningful conversation and collaboration • Managing group conversations • Designing meetings
Understanding human and group dynamics and group process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting team building • Understanding group interactions
Conflict management skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching people through conflict • Reframing issues • Engaging in dialogue and discussion for constructive conflict resolution

Ultimately, coaching is not a task that can only be only learned from books and trainings but comes with personal growth over time.⁵ To an extent, community coaches need to be able to detach from their personal agenda and completely shift their attention to evolving within their group or community.¹⁹ They need to be on the lookout for coachable moments or reflection opportunities to further a new way of thinking and doing within their community or group.¹⁹ Lastly, an effective coach observes behaviors of others and are analytical and intuitive in nature.²⁰

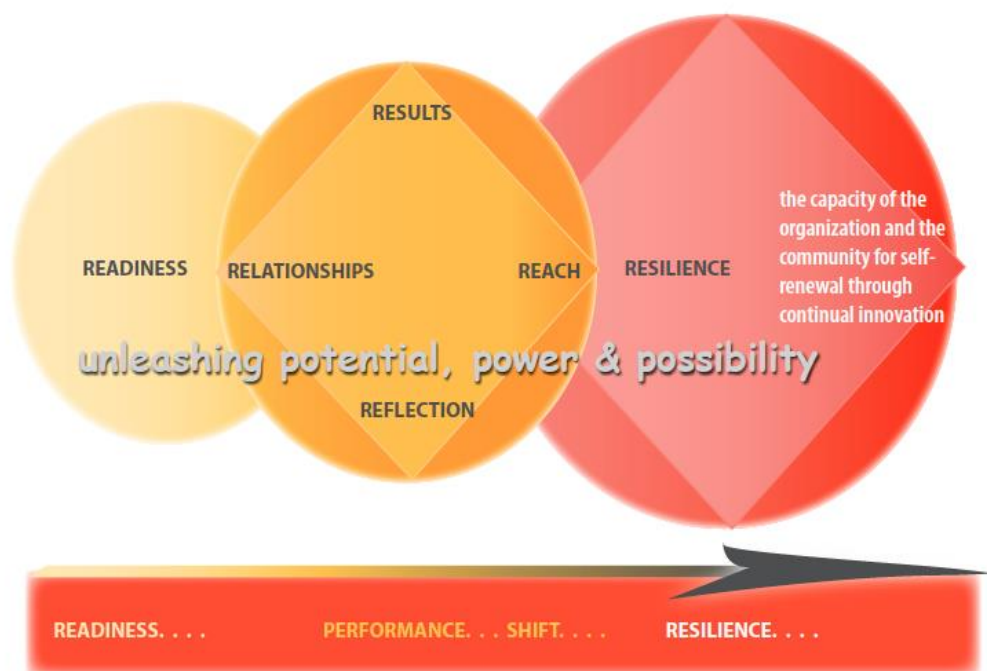
Means of Communication

How a coach communicates with their community varies, but, the most common ways are: telephone, email, in-person meetings with team leaders, co-chairs or the executive committee, attending meetings as an observer, or participating in debriefings or joint meetings with teams/funders/intermediaries.⁵ Nonetheless, many coaches rely on silence during these encounters as a tool to generate coaching moments.⁵ There is no one-way-fits-all for how a community coach communicates with their community, and typically distance and age are determining factors.

Community Coaching Theoretical Applications

Like most coaching opportunities, there are effective and less effective ways to conduct work within a certain audience. Over time, theories and models have been developed to address the progression of effective coaching over a long period of time. Figure 3. shows the six R's of effective community coaching, which include: readiness, relationships, results, reflection, reach, and resilience.¹⁹ Per Figure 3. a community coach must encompass all six areas of the model in order to have successful coaching outcomes.¹⁹ Meaning, both the coach and the community must be ready to implement change and understands there is room to grow, each community must realize there are processes that have been used in the past that no longer benefit their community.

Figure 3. Community Coaching: Six Connected Pieces



According to *Guiding Sustainable Community Change*, readiness begins when there is an evaluation completed of the community's current assets, which recognizes past efforts.¹⁹ Relationships are important because they hold a community together and are the root of all collaboration efforts. A coach must be able to form new relationships both professionally and personally, and see the importance among other relationships within their community.²⁰ Results are the next step in the Six R's of Community Coaching. A coach must implement measurable ways to check on their community's progress. If there are no systems in place to measure progress, a community will not know if they are generating consistent results. Additionally, reflection is vital in effective community coaching. Reflection is where a community discovers what is working well, what is not working well, and where to go moving forward.

Reaching refers to the need for a community coach to lead their community through exercises and teach community members to expand their current knowledge and understand new strategies or implement new ideas.²⁰ Reaching also means a community coach must remain neutral in all dialogue to guide their community into more effective and new ways to engage than the ones used in the past. Lastly, a community coach should aim to create a community that is resilient in challenges it may face in the future. How effectively a community can bounce back from failures or disappointments, can make all the difference for the future of the community.²⁰ In summary, a community coach should meet the challenge of achieving sustainability for communities and help them to create a long term, more effective, and higher performing community. Long term community coaching can create sustainable change, build prosperity, resolve conflicts, provide learning opportunities, strengthen relationships, and improve communication.²¹

The concept of community coaching has been supported by many enterprises such as: W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, and Foundations for the Mid-South and Pew Charitable Trusts.⁵ However, many smaller foundations have also used community coaching to further their leadership, education reform, and sustainable community development initiatives.⁵ Additionally, this type of coaching has been used as a strategic support tool for organizational development or broad-based community development.⁵

Voices for Food

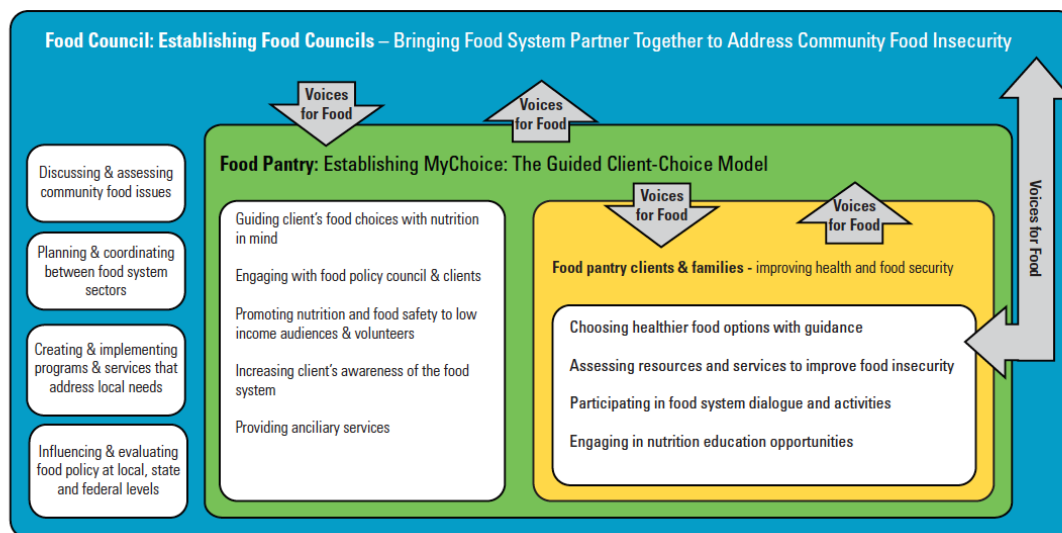
The *Voices for Food* project was created in 2013 by a multi-disciplinary team that wanted to focus on reducing food insecurity within rural, high poverty stricken communities.⁶ The overall goal of this extensive project was to address gaps in the food

system, and reduce food insecurity within certain communities.⁶ Six states worked collaboratively on the project, all were land grant universities: Michigan State University, Purdue University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Missouri, Ohio State University, and South Dakota State University.⁶

Theoretical Framework

The Social Ecological Model (SEM) was developed over the course of many decades and has been the focus of many health promotion and health related interventions.²² Figure 4. displays how *Voices for Food* adapted that model, while addressing behavior change.⁶

Figure 4. Voices for Food Framework



This framework provides us with the bigger picture, along with the small details of implementing the project. In Figure 4. readers are versed with the dynamics of who is involved and what will be accomplished. For example, guided client choice pantries would fall into the institutional or organizational level of the SEM, but aimed to foster a relationship with their local food council, and food pantry clients and families. Food councils are at the next level, often referred to as the community level of the SEM.

Within the project, food councils have larger tasks at hand, nonetheless we see the importance of council members needing to communicate with the food pantry staff and clientele. Short and long-term objectives and expectations of the project are clearly stated within this framework. The overarching long-term goal of the project was to bring community food system partners together to address community food insecurity.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is a longstanding issue that has steadily continued over time. Food insecurity is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon which varies through a continuum of successive stages as the issue becomes more severe.²³ It is defined as a condition resulting from a lack of household resources.²⁴ In 2016, 12.3% of U.S. households were food insecure at least some time during the year, including 4.9 percent with very low food security.²⁵ Food-insecure households in the U.S. (those with both low and very low food security) reference the families whom had difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all their family members. To quantify, in the year 2016 there were 6.1 million households with very low food security. In the Midwest, the prevalence of food insecurity was 12.2% which is higher than in the rates in both the Northeast and the Western regions.²⁵

There are infinite reasons why a household may become food insecure. For some families, food insecurity is more episodic and not chronic, but this does not apply to all families.²⁶ Meaning, some families go through hard times periodically during their lives but don't spend their entire lives in food insecurity. However, this is not true for all. Many food insecure households reach out to community programs that were designed for emergency situations and supplemental help, both federally and locally.²⁶ Therefore,

there is a dire need for these community programs to continue and for more to be created. Accessibility and advertisement of these programs could be the difference between a household being hungry or nourished.

Food insecurity is prominent in both rural and urban areas, and both have been examined to understand the similarities and differences between them. A Minnesota study used focus groups to look at how food systems differ by community infrastructure in rural and urban Minnesota communities.²⁷ This specific study found that civic engagement was vital in affecting food systems.²⁷ One of the conclusions found, was that urban residents relied on food safety net systems and rural residents relied on informal food exchange systems.²⁷ The authors concluded that, “Civic engagement at the community level can reduce food insecurity by creating community driven food provisioning programs.”²⁷ The more partnerships and networks within a community the more likely that the community will have food security.²⁷ Overall, it is important to understand these similarities and differences when working with rural or urban food insecure areas.

Formation of Voices for Food Councils

Voices for Food concentrated on the formation of food councils in rural communities. Research states that food councils can work to improve the nutritional quality of the food available to them, and connect a diverse network of stakeholders.⁷ Prior to *Voices for Food*, food councils had not been used in a rural intervention setting to evaluate if they decrease food insecurity. The *Voices for Food: Food Council Creation Guide* is the guide that that was created by the grant team to guide both the communities in the development of food councils. Some of the topics included in the guide are:

development of a food council, creating partnerships, establishing funding, developing structure within, and completing a community needs assessments.

Each council was paired with a Cooperative Extension Service employee who served as their community coach throughout the three-year grant intervention.²⁸ The coaches were Extension professionals with different backgrounds, experiences and degree types. Each coach was trained in community coaching, facilitative leadership and the intervention conditions prior to beginning the intervention. Coaches from all states met twice monthly for the first year and once monthly following to discuss progress in their community, barriers to coaching, and engage in solution oriented dialogue. The meetings served as time to mentor each other and provide support, as well as check in on progress in the intervention.

Restructuring of Food Pantries

Not only did *Voices for Food* work to implement food councils, but they focused on work with local food pantries as well. *Voices for Food* aimed to implement the guided client choice system in intervention food pantries, in which they created a toolkit that walked communities through developing or transforming a food pantry into a guided client choice pantry.⁶ The *Voices for Food: Food Pantry Toolkit* was created as a tool for pantry volunteers and staff, providing education in nutrition, food safety and cultural competency.⁶ Examples of statewide impact of this manual include: community food drives, nutritional demonstrations, community gardening, and planning of a community farmers market.⁶ Guided client choice encourages families to shop for their food at the pantry just as they would in a grocery store, but they also receive nutrition education.²⁹ This system differs significantly from the traditional model of distribution in which staff

would hand out pre-selected bags of food to the client. The guided client choice system has many benefits: decreased food waste, increased nutrition knowledge, increased interaction between staff and clients, and increased client dignity and self-esteem.²⁹

Within the six *Voices for Food* states, 12 food pantries were selected as treatment and used the toolkit to implement guided client choice, in addition they had an assigned community coach guide them through this process. An additional 12 food pantries were chosen as comparisons, and were provided the same toolkit, but were not paired with a community coach.⁶

Scorecards and Forms

Along with the *Voices for Food materials*, there was a scorecard, the Food Council Implementation Scorecard, that community champions were asked to fill out. The scorecard was created to track and guide changes occurring in the food council, such as activities and accomplishments. Furthermore, it served as a key document during the intervention because it referenced food council progress of: meeting agendas, meeting minutes, press releases, mission/vision statements and group action plans to the research team. This form was completed at three different timepoints: pre-intervention, mid-intervention, and post-intervention. Although this scorecard was useful and tracked the food councils progress over time, there was one missing element - there was no assessment of the role of the community coach. The *Voices for Food* grant team determined that the next step in evaluating their intervention would be to assess whether the community coach role was associated with food council success.

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CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE OF A COMMUNITY COACH IN RURAL FOOD COUNCILS IN SIX
MIDWESTERN STATES

Journal Submitting to: Journal of Nutrition Education & Behavior

ABSTRACT

Objective: To quantitatively assess perceived coaching confidence of a community coach working with food councils, and to qualitatively determine perceived barriers and facilitators associated with coaching rural food councils.

Design: Two phases were implemented using a mixed methods study design with quantitative (scorecard) and qualitative (key informant interviews) methodologies.

Setting: Six rural, Midwestern states implementing *Voices for Food*.

Participants: *Voices for Food* community coaches (n=9) who coached rural food council(s).

Intervention: A component of the broader *Voices for Food* intervention.

Analysis: Quantitative scorecard data were analyzed with STATA by running paired t-tests. Qualitative key information interview data were analyzed with NVivo by coding transcripts to themes, and then using a query matrix.

Results: Perceived confidence scores of community coaches were found to be significantly different at post-intervention compared to pre-intervention (103.3 vs 68.7, $P=.004$). Key facilitators associated with coaching rural food councils included: community relationships; the coach's past experiences, communication, organizational skills, and open mindedness; use of sub-committees, meeting agendas, and in-person communication; food council environmental and system changes; cooperative extension

presence. The only barrier identified was the creation and/or continuation of a food council advisory board.

Conclusions and Implications: Over the course of time, coaches can expect for their confidence in facilitating a food council to increase, and can be better prepared for barriers and facilitators that may arise. Future research should examine the impact community readiness has on coaching and food council success.

Keywords: rural, food council, Voices for Food, community, facilitators, barriers, community coaching

INTRODUCTION

Food councils are built on the foundation of bringing together community members from various backgrounds to work on overarching community goals and systematic changes. These councils have many purposes, with most focusing on improving their food system and implementing changes in food policy.¹ Food councils are becoming more popular both at the local and the state level, and have the power to bring about many positive changes within the food system.² To date, research has been solely focused on understanding the function and organizational structure of the councils.³ There is a gap in the literature on whether the facilitation of the councils, such as by a community coach, is a key component in their effectiveness.

Community coaching is an emerging process that focuses on having an individual coach guide and motivate a community towards success.⁴ A coach sees barriers as opportunities for growth and focuses on the deeper meaning behind any troubles at hand.⁵ Community coaches must possess a wide range of skills to guide the entity they are coaching down the path to achievement, such as excellent communication skills, empathy, the ability to listen, high level of motivation, and a deep commitment.⁵

The use of a community coach was a vital component in the *Voices for Food* intervention, a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant funded six-state collaboration that implemented 12 food councils in rural communities in Midwestern States.⁶ Each food council was paired with a Cooperative Extension Service employee who served as their community coach throughout the three-year grant intervention.⁷ The coaches were Extension professionals with different backgrounds, experiences and degree types. Each coach was trained in community coaching, facilitative leadership and

the intervention conditions prior to beginning the intervention. A key goal asked of each council was to assist one food pantry in their community with restructuring into a guided client choice model referred to as *MyChoice*.⁶ All 12 communities did not form a food council, nor did all 12 food pantries move to a guided client choice model, therefore the need emerged to explore why each community had different outcomes, as they were all provided with the same toolkit to utilize. The overarching difference between treatment and comparison communities was the coach.

The history of food councils in the United States (U.S.) is short and there is limited research literature as to what characteristics lead some food councils to produce more outcomes than others. To the best of our knowledge, there is no literature that correlates the increased production of outcomes of food councils paired with a community coach, whose role was to facilitate the council. Furthermore, there is a lack of self-assessment tools that measure the confidence of individual community coaches, and other skills needed by community coaches in order for food councils to produce successful outcomes.

METHODS

As part of a mixed methods study design, a Coaching Confidence Scorecard was developed and administered, and semi-structured interviews were conducted between March and May 2018. All current and past community coaches (n=12) involved in the *Voices for Food* project were invited to be a part of the study and asked to complete both the scorecard and semi-structured interview. Three coaches chose not to participate for

reasons not identified to researchers; ultimately data was collected from nine (n=9) individuals representing all six *Voices for Food* states. Demographics were not collected.

Community coaches who were not current university employees (n=1) were compensated with a \$30 gift card for their participation. The South Dakota State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study. All coaches provided written informed consent prior to participation.

COACHING CONFIDENCE SCORECARD

To understand the community coach's role and confidence in working with a food council, a scorecard based on the guidelines from the *Voices for Food: Food Council Creation Guide* was created to assess confidence.⁶ Questions were presented in Likert scale format, with a score of 1 being not at all confident and score of 5 being completely confident. The scorecard was administered electronically to coaches and data were collected anonymously. Participants were asked to retrospectively rate their confidence for two time periods: Pre-Food Council Intervention and Post-Food Council Intervention. Pre-Intervention was at baseline prior to the start of the intervention and occurred in the fall of 2014. Post-Intervention referred to a time-period of three total years of work with the food council and occurred in the fall of 2017. Pre-and post-scores were totaled for each of the following sub-sections: organizational structure, organizational purpose, key implementation activities, food council accomplishments; along with a total overall score.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by a researcher trained in qualitative interview methods moderating. A second researcher, also trained in qualitative interview methods, reviewed the recorded interviews for assurance and quality purposes. Interviews focused on participant's confidence in their ability to coach a rural food council, along with the successes and barriers of working with a food council. The interview questions were based on: 1) sub-sections of the *Voices for Food* Coaching Confidence Scorecard, and 2) tasks, tools, skills, education, and past experiences that either helped or hindered their coaching of the food councils. All questions were consistent among all interviewees. Interviews lasted between 40 and 70 minutes, and were conducted online using the Zoom platform⁸ at the participant's convenience.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

Coaching Confidence scorecards were analyzed using STATA Version 14.2.⁹ Paired t-tests were used to determine differences between pre- and post-scores. Differences were considered statistically significant if $P < .05$.

Key informant interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis through the Transcribeme service.¹⁰ Transcripts were entered into NVivo,¹¹ and then independently coded by two different research team members. First, transcripts were coded as pre-determined nodes based on the *Voices for Food* Coaching Confidence Scorecard sub-sections and organized based on that topic. A total of 34 pre-determined nodes aligned with each item on the scorecard. A coding comparison query was run to understand the amount of agreement between coders. A Kappa value > 0.40 was

established as fair-to-good rater agreement status. After running the comparison query any nodes that had a Kappa of < 0.40 were then revisited and discussed between the two coders. Majority of the coder inter-reliability was high at the > 0.8 mark.

A second round of coding took the previously coded lines (pre-determined nodes) and coded them as either “facilitator” or “barrier” depending on the context and views of how the key informant was referencing each coaching experience or task. Once again, a comparison query was run to check for agreement among coders. From there a matrix query was ran and connections between scorecard topics and barrier or facilitator were determined. The cutoff of significance was 70.0% and higher, and all items that met this inclusion criteria were reported.

RESULTS

A total of nine community coaches ($n=9$) agreed to participate and completed both the Coaching Confidence Scorecard and key informant interview.

COACHING CONFIDENCE SCORECARD

All sub-sections saw significant improvement ($P < .05$) between pre-and post-intervention. As did the overall total coaching confidence score. Results are displayed in Table 1.

The organizational structure sub-section score was significantly different at post-intervention compared to pre-intervention (24.3 vs 17.0, $P = .01$), with a score of 7.0 indicating no confidence and a score of 35.0 indicating complete confidence. At baseline, raw scores ranged from 7.0 to 35.0. At post-intervention, the raw scores ranged from 10.0

to 35.0. Individual elements scored within this section: confidence in their ability to lead a food council, and to create diverse committees and/or an advisory board.

The organizational purpose sub-section score was also significantly different at post-intervention compared to pre-intervention (16.1 vs 10, $P=.007$), with a score of 4.0 indicating no confidence and a score of 20.0 indicating complete confidence. At baseline, raw scores ranged from 4.0 to 20.0. At post-intervention, the raw scores ranged from 6.0 to 20.0. Individual elements scored within this section include confidence in their ability to: document the food council purpose, use and employ agendas at food council meetings, and develop a strategic plan and/or a mission statement.

The key implementation activities sub-section was significantly different at post-intervention compared to pre-intervention (56.6 vs 37.8, $P=.005$), with a score of 15 indicating no confidence and a score of 75 indicating complete confidence. At baseline, raw scores ranged from 15 to 75. At post-intervention, the raw scores ranged from 21 to 75. Individual elements scored within this section include confidence in their ability to: complete a community needs assessment, facilitate meetings, forge community partnerships, seek 501c3 status, and obtain funding for the food council.

The food council accomplishments sub-section was significantly different at post intervention compared to pre-intervention (6.3 vs 3.9, $P=.002$) with a score of 2 indicating no confidence and a score of 10 indicating complete confidence. At baseline, raw scores ranged from 2 to 10. At post-intervention, the raw scores ranged from 2 to 10. Individual elements scored within this section: confidence in working on environmental and policy changes within their food council.

Lastly, the total score was significantly different at post intervention compared to pre-intervention (103.3 vs 68.7, $P=.004$) with a score of 28 indicating no confidence and a score of 140 indicating complete confidence. At baseline, raw scores ranged from 28 to 140. At post-intervention, the raw scores ranged from 41 to 127.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Twelve main facilitators were identified through analysis and are listed in Table 2. Coach's discussed the following topics in a positive manner: Past Experiences, Organizational Skills, Communication Skills, Open Mindedness of Coach, Community Relationships, Project Coordinator Meetings, Environmental Changes, Systems Changes, Extension Presence, In-person Communication between Coach and Council, Use of an Agenda at Food Council meetings, and Food Council Sub-Committees. One main barrier was identified and is displayed in Table 3. Coach's discussed the creation or continuation of a food council advisory board in a negative manner.

Location of the food council in relation to the employment location of the community coach varied greatly. Among the nine coaches, the average distance they traveled to coach their assigned food council was 69 miles one-way, with overall distances ranging from zero to 170 miles one-way. Distance was not identified as a barrier in their coaching role.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the research was two-fold: 1) to develop and assess perceived confidence of a food council coach, and 2) to understand the barriers and facilitators

associated with rural food council success. This research resulted in identifying: the tasks or tools that presented themselves as facilitators in coaching food councils, those that presented themselves as barriers, and identifying what specific skills, past experiences, or education were facilitators in being a successful coach.

Results from the Coaching Confidence Scorecard indicate that confidence in one's coaching ability does change significantly over time. Being able to quantify their level of confidence over time was helpful to the coaches, allowing them to see where they could improve and what they excelled at. Interviews allowed community coaches an opportunity to elaborate on the sub-sections of the scorecard. Despite differences in interview duration, all questions and components of each interview were similar amongst interviewees.

Prior to the start of their time coaching a food council, most coaches did not feel fully prepared to fulfill this role but were excited for the opportunity to grow and learn throughout the process. The results indicated that their level of education, past work experiences (teaching, journalism, nutrition, extension), leadership programs and trainings, and prior years of experience doing similar community work were key factors affecting their confidence. Coaching confidence significantly changed over time despite the different operating mechanisms and challenges faced by each food council. In current literature, these past experiences within other areas have proven beneficial to creating community coaching traits.¹²

Organizational and communication skills were mentioned frequently among coaches when asked what skills they used most often while working with the food

council. Open-mindedness was also found to facilitate coach confidence and was examined as being an important aspect of coaching a food council.

Each month of the project, the network of coaches on the *Voices for Food* project met monthly to discuss progress made in communities, engage in conversation about the barriers and facilitators, and to request guidance from fellow coaches when needed. This made an impact on their coaching confidence. Although some food councils faced bigger challenges, or prolonged issues more than others, coaches felt supported by their peers during networking meetings. Having support from within the *Voices for Food* leadership team was also considered an asset.

Food council meeting agendas proved beneficial in the eyes of the coach. Numerous coaches viewed a formal food council agenda as a facilitator to keeping their work focused and on task. Additionally, in-person communication between the coach and the food council was a catalyst for productiveness and relationships. This form of communication appeared to be more effective for older adult food council members that were not as comfortable using technological resources. These results were not surprising, seeing as numerous studies have found in-person communication to be the most valuable form of communication. A study at a large University in Los Angeles found, “As the cues present in face-to-face communication declined, so did the subjective bonding experience and nonverbal affiliation cues; thus, both kinds of bonding measures declined from video to audio to textual communication.”¹³ Within the context of coaching a food council there is a need for that bonding experience, and trust needing to be developed. Thus, in-person communication deemed most beneficial.

Also, establishing and maintaining community relationships was a facilitator in the eyes of the coach. Each food council had individualized and unique connections to other entities and affiliations. These relationships may have aided the food councils immensely through opportunities such as: funding, increasing membership attendance, sharing mission and purpose of food council. When asked about the presence of Extension, the majority of coaches pointed out the various connections Extension has within the community, and the opportunities an Extension employee can suggest to food council members. Moving forward, these two facilitators may help other rural food councils start up.

When it came to organizational structure, food council sub-committees were considered a facilitator to food councils. Multiple coaches mentioned the importance of them and their positive experiences in creating sub-committees or working groups within their food council. Although food council membership size was not measured, the majority of coach's felt confident in helping establish these committees, as well as, received positive feedback from council members regarding them. Moving forward, rural food councils should not let membership size stand in their way of forming sub-committees or working groups to complete specific tasks.

Unlike current literature this study found confidence in creating and/or maintaining a formal advisory board to be a key barrier during their coaching.¹⁴ Current literature points out the value to including this within a food council, however, with small attendance and lack of confidence within the food council members and/or coach, many food councils did not form and/or maintain a formal advisory board. This proves noteworthy, because sub-committees were deemed a facilitator and membership

(attendance) did not stand in the way of their formation. This may be due to the fact that rural communities prefer informal roles and group-tasks versus individualized tasks.

All the food councils that completed environmental or systems changes within their community viewed them as beneficial to their community and saw the importance in them. The food councils that did not complete these changes simply did not get that far during the project time period or did not see themselves powerful enough to lead these movements. Although not directly measured, coaches that reported feeling confident in making PSE changes seemed to lead their food council more towards those avenues.

The food council level of success was not assessed, as there was not a tool to utilize at this time. Further research should be explored to develop this type of novel tool. Also, the development of a tool that measures how food council members perceive the role of the community coach that could be compared to the self-assessed coaching confidence scorecard utilized in this study could aid in determining aspects of food council success.

This study explored the role of a community coach while working with food councils. The impact of this research is that future community coaches can have a tool to assess their confidence in the areas that align with the *Voices for Food: Food Council Guide*. Additionally, a community coach, regardless of past experiences, can expect to see a change in their confidence over time when working with a food council. Rural food councils come with their own challenges, many of which have not been thoroughly explored. Overall, the barriers and facilitators identified may be used to understand what a community coach may encounter while working with rural food councils.

Limitations

Although this study adds a new perspective to current food council literature, there are limitations that need to be acknowledged. There was a small sample size of community coaches which may not have been a great depiction of the entire population. Also, majority of the key informants are still employed with Extension, therefore this could have impacted what they were willing to share. Opinions and details expressed by the coaches may be different retrospectively compared to during times of active coaching and may have changed over time due to recall bias. The opinions of those who did participate may not be representative of all food council coaches. Additionally, there was coaching turnover in some communities, with some coaches completing shorter coaching timeframes than others.

Implications for Research and Practice

A piece that was not completed in the original *Voices for Food* project was a community readiness assessment that could have played a part in the food councils' success. Nonetheless, this research presented informative barriers and facilitators of coaching a food council in rural communities that is transferable to many settings.

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Table 1. T-test results of sub-sections and total score on Coaching Confidence Scorecard

Scorecard Sub-Sections***	Range of Possible Scores⁺	Pre Mean \pm Standard Dev.	Post Mean \pm Standard Dev.	P-value**
Organizational Structure	7 - 35	17 (10.4)	24.3 (7.5)	0.01*
Organizational Purpose	4 - 20	10 (6.3)	16.1 (4.2)	0.007*
Key Implementation Activities	15 - 75	37.8 (22.1)	56.6 (16)	0.005*
Accomplishments	2 - 10	3.9 (2.8)	6.3 (2.6)	0.002*
Total Score	28 - 140	68.7 (41.1)	103.3 (28.3)	0.004*

⁺Coaches were asked, “For all questions, please rate your level of confidence in coaching your communities using the following scale: (1) Not Confident at All, (2) Somewhat Confident, (3) Moderately Confident, (4) Very Confident, (5) Completely Confident.

*Indicates statistical significance ($P \leq 0.05$).

**Differences were determined with paired t-test analysis.

***Questions from each sub-section were totaled.

Table 2: Key facilitators presented by *Voices for Food* community coaches through key informant interviews (n=9)

Theme	Quote from <i>Voices for Food</i> Coach
Past Experiences of Coach	<p>“I’d been a participant in some leadership programs. I think that those tools were certainly useful. Kind of that active listening/questioning so that you gain additional information out of where people are at, and listening to those common threads.”</p> <p>“I have experience in teaching, and my background in nutrition, that was extremely helpful with the food issues...some of the education components.”</p> <p>“You learn a lot from experience...I really do think you do just learn by experience, kind of how to approach a community and how to engage successfully.”</p> <p>“I went to a facilitation training that was helpful.”</p>
Organizational Skills of Coach	<p>“I just needed to stay organized. So that’s one skill I definitely tapped into.”</p> <p>“I just research a lot of other food councils that already existed and some really popular ones I would look up.”</p> <p>“I was very involved. I pretty much coordinated and led the whole effort.”</p> <p>“So, mostly as an advisor as an administrative person organizing materials.”</p>
Communication Skills of Coach	<p>“I employed most of my coaching skills.... after speaking with the champion and realizing that perhaps we could sustain more engagement by having committees and letting folks self-select areas that interested them the most, we were able to move in that direction.”</p>
Open Mindedness of Coach	<p>“I think it's important if you're going to be coaching to keep an open-mind and let the community drive what they see.”</p> <p>“I think I kind of expect that because I worked in that arena, and so we just kind of continue to evolve and keep working through it.”</p> <p>“My role often changed depending on the season and what was going on in our plan.”</p> <p>“You have to be flexible. And if you think that everything’s just going to go by the book or by the toolkit you may as a coach get too frustrated and not interact well with your food council.”</p>
Community Relationships	<p>“It has been fluid in that when the group first started they put out requests though all the local schools, the health department, community mental</p>

	<p>health, the HHS, and community members at large in the food pantries and they drew from that group and local farmers.”</p> <p>“We really were always looking for partnerships and relationships and it’s been interesting how its evolved.”</p> <p>“Their relationships are their strength. Their social capital, social network is really what makes them successful.”</p> <p>“A Facebook page for their food council was a great way...sharing all their different activities and successes. A lot of people started following that.</p>
Project Coordinator Meetings	<p>“I spent time with the other coaches in the other states which is really helpful.”</p> <p>“They give insight in how to respond, and how to act in your other communities that you’re going into.”</p> <p>“When you’re involved in a project like that, you learn about so many different things in other states too.”</p>
Environmental Changes	<p>“Working on healthy menu options in restaurants in our area, and then also grocery store labeling. “</p> <p>“They wanted to create a large food distribution center. They can store all the food in one place, and find a way to get it to the food pantries.”</p> <p>“We have a community cooperative learning garden that in the last three years has put almost 20,000 pounds of produce back in the food system.”</p> <p>“We were able to get a connection with a land bank and the city to get approval to beautify some public spaces.”</p>
Systems Changes	<p>“It was more of a discussion about the local food environment...People could come and kind of discuss what they see are the biggest issues. And talk about different topics.”</p> <p>“So now that we have partnerships with food purchasing, and donations, and things like that, they’re opening that up to some of the other food pantries, and also, so they can model after the choice opportunity.”</p> <p>“We had a couple of people that work with our garden collection program that deliver foods to the pantry. We have quite a bit more now than we did a couple of years ago because we have a delivery system where a lot of council members and community members pick up food and deliver it to the pantries on pantry day.”</p> <p>“The grocery store closed...And so that became a really important task for the food council to be a part of. The food council champion served on an</p>

	<p>over-arching committee that had individuals from different aspects of the community serving on it... They had two public information meetings...And an owner stepped up to buy it due to that increasing awareness of the problem due to these public meetings and getting the word out.”</p>
Extension Presence	<p>“To me observationally, I think the Extension coach was extremely critical in the success of the food council.”</p> <p>“The beauty of Extension is a lot of times you've got Extension staff members that are embedded in communities. And so they know who, they know the linkages, they know the resources.”</p> <p>“I had another co-worker from Extension who attended some of the meetings, and I really they both of us provided that support for them, that they have really great ideas but we would just help them take those resources and plug them in so that they could move it forward.”</p> <p>“My focus was then getting Extension brought into the mix. Because nutrition education was a big need that the council identified.”</p> <p>“All the projects that we work on, I did all the education, the food safety, the food prep, and food handling.”</p>
In person Communication between coach and food council	<p>“In person (communication) was received a lot more-especially at the very beginning when you're trying to establish a relationship that you're not part of the community, it was critical to have a physical presence just because they don't know who you are.”</p> <p>“In person is always so much better but it is a good thing to be able to have all those different ways to communicate.”</p> <p>“It was a strength because kind of out of sight out of mind. And the fact that I was able to drop in, we couldn't forget so easily what we were trying to do.”</p>
Use of an agenda at Food Council Meetings	<p>“It maintained the direction and the flow of the meeting and kept us on time.”</p> <p>“We always have a formal agenda and we always revisit the minutes from the previous meeting and make sure those are approved with no changes.”</p> <p>“The agendas, because it has given us kind of a guideline or kind of an outline of what we want to do.”</p> <p>“So, having an agenda helped keep us on track.”</p>

Food Council Sub-Committees	<p>“It was a very large body of folks that comprised the council, so those sub-committees certainly took the work and made it happen a little but quicker, so that we weren’t waiting for the full body to approve or engage in the process.”</p> <p>“We did assign different things. Like, you two work on that. Come back next time and tell us.”</p> <p>“We split into groups and developed some ideas and then had everybody add to those ideas.”</p> <p>“We did in the beginning. We had four or five work committees. And then we had a couple of them that did well. Some other ones didn’t really ever do what they were supposed to do. But we had a couple of them that were very successful and collaborated and worked.”</p> <p>“I think we just have to work on increasing membership in order to really, again, sustain those committees. But they’re emerging committees currently.”</p> <p>“I always felt like breaking it down to a really manageable task was always a real positive in working with sub-committees or workgroups.”</p>
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Table 3: Key barrier presented by *Voices For Food* community coaches through key informant interviews (n=9)

Theme	Quote from <i>Voices for Food</i> Coach
Advisory Board	<p>“I don’t think a formal advisory board was really in conversation because they were still trying to get people involved”</p> <p>“We created one in the beginning. In the first couple years we met maybe quarterly. Since we had a lot of turnover, we have not – now there’s only three of us on that board that are left.”</p> <p>“I just think there wasn’t enough people”</p> <p>“Our current food champion is not very interested in pushing the matter”</p> <p>“They just don’t see that there was a need and they already were struggling with having regular participation.”</p>