

Objective 1⁷

Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of collaborative, community-level efforts to reduce food insecurity.

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| Key Investments | Community Food Systems (CFS) initiative |
| Total Investment | \$13,523,448 |
| Defining Characteristic | Long-term, equity-centered investment in community-led coalitions and initiatives that prioritized power building, culturally relevant food access, and systems change rooted in lived experience. |

Starting in 2019, CHF advanced an equity-centered approach through the CFS initiative, evolving from coordination support to investing in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) led coalitions and community-driven food access solutions. By 2024, this work matured into a model that centered racial equity, strengthened local governance, and supported long-term coalition capacity rooted in lived experience and culturally relevant leadership.

Evolution

| 2019-2020 | 2020-2022 | 2022-2024 |
|---|---|---|
| The CFS initiative began with planning and implementation grants to strengthen coordination among local food actors, align assets, and improve access to nutritious, culturally relevant food, especially for those most at risk of hunger. | Early implementation revealed gaps in trust, infrastructure, and governance. CHF shifted its strategy to prioritize coalition capacity-building, equity-centered governance, and leadership development rooted in lived experience, moving from transactional models toward transformational, community-driven solutions. | CHF narrowed its funding to coalitions that demonstrated meaningful integration of community leadership and advocacy, while continuing to offer phased, flexible funding, technical assistance, and peer learning to deepen food justice and systems change outcomes. |

In addition to CFS, CHF funded innovative community-driven efforts, particularly in BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities, that advanced food sovereignty, leadership apprenticeships, mutual aid, and healing-centered spaces, reflecting a broader commitment to equity and community ownership.

⁷ For more information on the evolution, outcomes, and lessons learned, refer to the [Objective 1](#) section in the Addendum.



Objective 1 Outcomes

CHF supported communities in strengthening infrastructure, building local leadership, and improving coordination to address food insecurity in ways that were grounded in lived experience and aligned with local priorities.

- **Strengthened local food systems and increased access to food:** Coalitions funded through the CFS initiative played a central role in designing and implementing place-based, equity-driven strategies that responded to the unique food access needs in their communities.
- **Improved local coordination and relationships:** As coalitions matured and developed stronger internal structures, they deepened their external relationships, both within their immediate communities and across regions.
- **Built community capacity and leadership:** By combining long-term, flexible funding with technical assistance, peer learning, and a focus on lived experience, the CFS initiative created conditions for local leaders and organization to grow influence, strengthen coordination, and embed equity into their work.
- **Amplified lived experience:** The strategic focus on centering people with lived experience of hunger helped shift local coalitions away from traditional, charity-based models toward more inclusive, equity-centered, and community-driven approaches. This resulted in deeper trust, more responsive food programs, expanded leadership opportunities, stronger civic participation, and a broader shift in how food insecurity is understood and addressed at the community level.
- **Leveraged strategies to shift local food systems:** CHF's investments supported coalitions in adopting increasingly sophisticated, systems-oriented strategies, combining network building, narrative change, and growing policy advocacy, to drive both grassroots and structural change in local food systems.
- **Elevated awareness of hunger and equity:** Through funding and strategic guidance, CHF helped shift public and institutional narratives, moving conversations beyond food access toward deeper questions of justice, equity, and the root causes of hunger.
- **Strengthened community infrastructure:** Outside of the CFS initiative, CHF's Objective 1 investments enabled communities to acquire critical physical and organizational infrastructure, such as land, facilities, and commercial kitchens, laying a foundation for long-term, community-anchored solutions to food insecurity.

Lessons Learned

Several strategic choices, such as leveraging lived experience, supporting language justice, and offering tailored technical assistance, contributed to strong progress in many communities.

- **What helped coalitions thrive:** Local coalitions in the CFS initiative were most successful when several enabling conditions came together, particularly strong and stable leadership, organizational infrastructure, and fundraising capacity.



- **Lived experience at the center:** By requiring coalitions to meaningfully include community members with firsthand experience of food insecurity, the CFS initiative helped reshape who was included in food systems change.
- **Power of tailored support:** What set the technical assistance in the CFS initiative apart was its ability to adapt across coalitions of varying ages, capacities, and community dynamics.
- **Sustainability as a persistent challenge:** While the CFS initiative catalyzed deep community engagement and capacity building, many coalitions worry about maintaining momentum without continued financial support.
- **Strategic considerations** for future efforts included:
 - Strengthen consistent communication across the initiative
 - Establish clear shared goals and common metrics
 - Ensure learning flows both ways
 - Focus on effectiveness and continuous improvement