

Sustainable CT Equity Toolkit

To satisfy the “Optimize for Equity” action:

1. Apply the Sustainable CT Equity Toolkit to each new Sustainable CT action that you are including in your Optimize for Equity action submission

2. **Start using the Toolkit before you begin your Sustainable CT action.** The Toolkit may not be applied retroactively to an action. There are a series of questions to consider at three points of your action process: before (action planning), during (action implementation), and after (action evaluation).

3. Complete the questions in the Toolkit for each new Sustainable CT action you have completed under the "Optimize for Equity" action and have the Toolkit signed and dated by your elected official. Or you may use one Toolkit to document multiple actions that you have included under the "Optimized for Equity" action.

4. Upload each completed and signed Toolkit through your community's Sustainable CT online Municipal Dashboard under the "Optimize for Equity" action. Please note you must also submit for the new action(s) to which the Toolkit was applied in the corresponding action submission page(s).

**Sustainable CT Equity Toolkit Overview**

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|  | Step | Question |
| Planning | 1) Set Goals | What does your Sustainability Team define as the three most important equitable community outcomes related to the action (include possible community indicators that measure these outcomes)? |
| 2) Analyze Data | A. Define diversity within your community: what are the demographics of the target groups for the action or those living, working, or socializing in the area(s) impacted by the action? (for example, race, ethnicity, age, gender, physical disability, retired/working, vehicle/commuting needs, shift worker, dependents/not, homeowner/renter, income level, other) |
| B. Which geographic areas (including neighborhoods) in your municipality may be impacted by the action? |
| C. What additional data would be helpful in analyzing the action and its impacts on equity and how can you obtain it? |
| 3) Determine the Benefit/Burden(s) | A. How are your residents and businesses obtaining services related to this action now? What are the root causes or factors of current inequities or barriers related to this action? |
| B. How will you engage those most impacted? Who is collecting and contributing feedback? Have you created accessible opportunities for these groups to engage? Public engagement should prioritize opportunities to collaborate and co-create. |
| C. What did those engaged tell you about the potential benefits, burdens, and/or community priorities related to this action? What results and outcomes would they like to see? Did they identify ways to lessen any potential unintended consequences and/or to broaden any potential positive impacts? |
| Implementation | 4) Engage, Advance Opportunity, & Minimize Harm | A. Given what you have learned, what steps will you take to address any remaining barriers, impacts, or unintended consequences of this action on equity (include immediate and long-term impacts)? |
| B. How will you include and benefit from diverse representation in implementing the action? |
| Evaluation | 5) Evaluate and Educate | A. How will you document, evaluate, and report progress to increase equity and access to services as you implement this action? |
| B. How will you continue to partner and deepen relationships with impacted segments of your community to make sure your action works for all in the long-term? |
| C. What challenges did you encounter while completing the "Optimize for Equity" action, and how might you learn from them for future applications? |

Equity Toolkit

Title(s) of Sustainable CT Action(s): 1.3 Inventory and Promote Local Retail Options

Municipality: Fairfield

Action Planning

Complete this portion of the toolkit *before you begin your action.*

**Step 1. Set Goals**

**1.** What does your Sustainability Team define as the three most important equitable community outcomes related to the action (include possible community indicators that measure these outcomes)?

**- Raising awareness of the benefits and availability of locally grown food –** This has been accomplished initially by creating a special page on the Town’s website (<https://www.fairfieldct.org/localfood>) and by developing educational and promotional pieces (to be submitted separately) that will be distributed through various channels. Future efforts will include offering workshops to be held at local libraries and farmer’s markets on relevant subjects including building simple home gardens, cooking with fresh foods and canning and storing fresh foods and distributing simple recipes incorporating local produce.

**- Addressing cost issues associated with locally grown food –** This has been addressed initially by providing information on alternative payment options on the local food page on the Town’s website. Future efforts will include expanding payment options at Farmer’s Markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs to include public assistance vouchers and defrayed subscription costs and promoting and educating about growing one’s own food at home or in community gardens.

**- Addressing access to locally grown food for those with mobility challenges –** This has been accomplished initially by providing information on local food options accessible by public transportation on the aforementioned page on the Town’s website. Future efforts will include expanding delivery options to assist shut-ins, disabled persons and others with limited or no personal transportation; and offering services such as golf carts and wagons to transport people and produce between markets and public transportation stations.

**Step 2. Analyze Data**

**2a.** Define diversity within your community: what are the demographics of the target groups for the action or those living, working, or socializing in the area(s) impacted by the action?

Race

Ethnicity

**Age** (approximately 15% of the Town’s population is 65 years or older, while 13% are between 55-64 years)

Gender

**Physical Disability** (approximately 7.9% of the Town’s population 5 years of age or older reported some form of disability through the American Community Survey)

Retired/Working

**Vehicle/Commuting Needs**

Shift Worker

Dependents/Not

Homeowner/Renter

**Income Level** (approximately 4.4% of the Town’s population is at or below the poverty rate)

Other

**2b.** Which geographic areas (including neighborhoods) in your municipality may be impacted by the action?

- Low-Middle Income – King’s Highway/Grasmere Ave.; Tunxis Hill; Melville Ave./Villa Ave.; Fairfield Woods Rd./Morehouse Highway; Fairfield Woods Rd./ Lockwood Rd.

- Senior – Throughout town but Senior and Disabled Housing providers listed at: <https://www.fairfieldct.org/content/10726/13067/13304.aspx>

- Disabled – Throughout town but Senior and Disabled Housing providers listed at: <https://www.fairfieldct.org/content/10726/13067/13304.aspx>

**2c.** What additional data would be helpful in analyzing the action and its impacts on equity and how can you obtain it?

- We were unable to obtain statistical data on transportation limitations although some information is available from Human/Social Services. (approximately 3,900 seniors, disabled and low-income residents utilize the transportation services provided through that department.)

**Step 3. Determine the Benefit/Burden(s)**

**3a.** How are your residents and businesses obtaining services related to this action now? What are the root causes or factors of current inequities or barriers related to this action?

- Although the popularity of farm stands, farmers’ markets and CSA’s (collectively “local foods”) has grown in recent years, many residents continue to obtain most of their food from large retail supermarkets. It appears that the root causes are a combination of familiarity, convenience, proximity and lower costs associated with the large supermarkets. Many citizens may not be aware of the benefits and availability of locally grown vegetables and fruit or sustainably raised meats, eggs and other products. Similarly, some may prefer to conduct all of their shopping in one place and others may balk at paying higher prices for sustainably grown, farm fresh foods. Farmer’s markets typically operate one day a week, which may not be convenient with the shopper’s schedule or may present transportation challenges (e.g., certain bus services may not operate on those days). Others, particularly within the targeted population, receive meals provided through the Bigelow Senior Center, Operation Hope, Community Kitchen and houses of worship.

**3b.** How will you engage those most impacted? Who is collecting and contributing feedback? Have you created accessible opportunities for these groups to engage? Public engagement should prioritize opportunities to collaborate and co-create.

- Members of the Sustainable Fairfield Task Force (SFTF) met with numerous entities including the Fairfield Human/Social Services and Health Departments; Operation Hope (which administers Fairfield’s only food pantry among other services); the Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport (which administers all area food banks); Fairfield Public Schools; the Bridgeport Farmers Market Collaborative; the Fairfield Farmer’s Market manager, local farmers, the local community garden master gardener, local food experts and their respective constituents/clients. Feedback came from multiple meetings, interviews and responses to email questions. SFTF envisions establishing a working group comprised of representatives of those organizations and the target groups for this action to further the objectives stated herein.

**3c.** What did those engaged tell you about the potential benefits, burdens, and/or community priorities related to this action? What results and outcomes would they like to see? Did they identify ways to lessen any potential unintended consequences and/or to broaden any potential positive impacts?

- Operation Hope is a 501©3 organization that provides food, shelter and other support for the hungry, homeless and at-risk residents of Fairfield and Easton. The organization runs the town’s sole food pantry, which includes non-perishable items received from the regional food bank, local supermarkets and private donations; home-prepared frozen meals; and fresh produce and dairy products furnished by nearby farms, CSA programs, numerous community gardens and private gardeners. Approximately 800 local households including low-income families, seniors and people with disabilities receive distributions from the pantry at a rate of 6-20 visitors per day. Furthermore, an additional 35-60 people per meal receive lunches and dinners featuring donated food prepared by volunteers at the Community Kitchen. Overall, the food pantry and Community Kitchen serve approximately 150,000 and 60,000 meals, respectively, each year. Operation Hope advised that the summer months require more donations as many children are not eating in schools.

The Bigelow Center for Senior Activities offers lunches five days a week for a suggested donation of $5. Menus for this nutrition program are developed and state approved months in advance. Because of this oversight and the lack of a kitchen on the premises, the lunches are currently unable to offer fresh, locally grown food through this program. They do, however, send people to the Community Kitchen and the Operation Hope Food Pantry. At this time, there are no cooking classes offered through the Center; however, a garden club was started in July 2018, which will allow members to grow produce, herbs and flowers in elevated, raised beds. The Director of the Center is keenly interested in establishing a new community garden on their grounds. A previous effort to create a community garden at this location failed, apparently due to the opposition of a single neighboring resident. We also learned that the Center distributes Farmer’s Market Vouchers to income eligible seniors, age 60 or older. The total value of these vouchers is only $18 and may be used at participating Farmer’s Markets (though none of the participating markets are located in Fairfield at this time because they were unaware of how to administer these programs). The Senior Center also coordinates with Operation Hope a “mobile food pantry” that distributes food items to shut-ins.

Fairfield Public Schools, spurred by a group of proactive parents and working in concert with Whitson Nutritional Services, has implemented a revamped food program that features healthy, balanced breakfast, lunch and snack menus. Notably, these options include home-style cooking with “scratch cooking” of sauces, soups, marinades and gravies featuring locally sourced and organic ingredients. The program strives to include nutritional, allergen and ingredient disclosure on menu items to meet a variety of special dietary needs including vegetarian, vegan and lacto-ovo vegetarian practitioners.

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The general consensus of those engaged was that locally grown food offers important health benefits as compared to canned and processed foods that comprise a significant portion of people’s eating habits, especially at food pantries and senior cafeterias.

In addition, locally grown food can provide economic benefits, particularly to the extent that individuals could gain broader access through community or personal gardens or if farmer’s markets and CSA’s were partially subsidized.

At this time, there are various burdens experienced by members of the target populations with respect to obtaining or using locally grown food. One of the more surprising revelations was that many impacted by this action are inexperienced with respect to cooking with fresh ingredients and others, particularly immigrants from different parts of the world, are unfamiliar with the vegetables grown in this region. Accordingly, one suggestion that is currently in limited practice but could be expanded is to provide simple recipes so that recipients can better enjoy such items (e.g., kohlrabi slaw)

One further suggestion was to take baby steps while introducing improvements so as to learn as we go and expand concepts more effectively. For example, we should seek to expand payment options at one Farmer’s Market initially.

Action Implementation

Complete this portion of the toolkit *while you are performing your action.*

**Step 4. Engage, Advance Opportunity, & Minimize Harm**

**4a.** Given what you have learned, what steps will you take to address any remaining barriers, impacts, or unintended consequences of this action on equity (include immediate and long-term impacts)?

- Provide education and outreach to the community to raise awareness of the benefits and accessibility of locally grown food. This includes the creation of a page for the Town website (<https://www.fairfieldct.org/localfood>) that contains an inventory of locally grown food sources in Fairfield and each town with which it shares a border including Farm Stands, Farmer’s Markets, Community Supported Agriculture programs and Retail Markets. The new webpage will be reinforced by messages from the Departments of Community and Economic Development, Health and Human/Social Services, FairTV (Town-specific TV station), and general Town press releases. In addition, we will create collateral pieces featuring highlights of the new webpage that will be distributed to strategic locations including Town Hall, Bigelow Senior Center, schools, houses of worship, doctors offices, clinics, and libraries. We will promote the new website and network of local food options through other channels including local news, radio, FairTV, YouTube videos and social media. We will also develop workshops to educate interested parties in home vegetable gardening, cooking and preserving foods and collect and distribute recipes for seasonal fare.

- Expand the payment options available through various local food retailers to facilitate greater participation by certain segments of the population. Currently, none of the Farmers Markets in Fairfield accept SNAP, WIC or Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). This is in contrast to the Farmers Markets in Bridgeport, which not only accept those forms of payment but doubles the value of SNAP vouchers using grants and donations. Similarly, we will explore with farmers the feasibility of creating discounted CSA shares to income-eligible families subsidizing the difference with grants and donations. Remaining barriers include procuring an EBT machine, arranging for any necessary training, purchasing tokens and other related matters. Furthermore, we will need to engage with CSA programs with regard to offering subsidized shares to qualifying persons. In connection therewith, we believe that we will need to establish or partner with an existing 501©3 organization in order to seek donations from federal or state programs, charitable foundations, existing CSA members and/or others within the community.

- Provide alternative means of transporting individuals and local food deliveries to those who are unable to easily access the network of retail options in and around the community. One possible solution would be modeled on free snow shoveling provided by high school students. This could involve a program in which students help to connect mobility-challenged people with local food for which they could receive credit for community service. Other options include providing golf carts and/or wagons to facilitate transportation from parking or public transportation to the markets.

**4b.** How will you include and benefit from diverse representation in implementing the action?

- Cuisine, by its very nature, embodies a culture. Encouraging people to share their food preparation and cooking techniques will provide an enjoyable and familiar basis for cross-cultural connections. By including perspectives from those segments of the population that are currently not taking advantage of locally grown food, we will gain a deeper understanding of the breadth of real world issues that impact the implementation of this action. This action offers the promise of promoting diversity within the community particularly with respect to celebrating international cuisine and culture using locally grown produce.

Action Evaluation

Complete this portion of the toolkit *after your action is complete*.

**Step 5. Evaluate and Educate**

**5a.** How will you document, evaluate, and report progress to increase equity and access to services as you implement this action?

- Progress will be measured by further public engagement in purchasing more local food, visits to the “Local Foods” website, increased local food products carried by supermarkets and other food markets, volume of sales attributed to nutritional assistance programs at Farmers Markets, an increase in the publicity of the variety of recipes for locally produced produce, among other factors.

**5b.** How will you continue to partner and deepen relationships with impacted segments of your community to make sure your action works for all in the long-term?

- We will continue to work with impacted segments of the community and identify opportunities to celebrate local food for all such as farm-to-table events or international food themed events. We feel providing produce unusual for the area but “local” to immigrants and recipes for all these forms of produce will provide a means of communications beyond words that will help to build a stronger, more vibrant community.

**5c.** What challenges did you encounter while completing the "Optimize for Equity" action, and how might you learn from them for future applications?

- It is not always apparent how actions impact diverse segments of a population in different ways. It was therefore challenging to identify key issues and address them over a relatively short period of time. Overall, however, the challenges have helped us to develop short- and longer term goals and to collaborate with regional partners, especially those that may be further along the path with respect to a particular issue such as the one chosen here. Having our own perspective of the not-underprivileged, we realized that we need to connect more and coordinate efforts to a greater degree with those in the targeted population. Understanding that working together meant we all enlarged our universe and perspective means that we can appreciate how limited our world is and how much larger and richer it can be.

Signature of Municipal Elected Official

Printed Name

Title

Date

**Tips**

**Holding a Meeting**

1. Make meetings accessible for inclusive participation:
   1. Hold meetings at varied locations, on different days and at different times of day to encourage participation.
   2. Ensure meetings are highly accessible to affected neighborhoods.
   3. Include interpreters /translators for key languages represented in the local community.
   4. Provide nourishment and child care services.
   5. Hold meetings at venues accessible by public transportation.
2. Ensure that all residents are able to obtain meeting information. Seek, and be adaptable to additional feedback on effectiveness of communication. Be sure to reach out to all stakeholders.

**Education, Outreach, and Engagement**

1. Follow the "Hold a Meeting" tips above for your education, outreach, and engagement events.
2. Set expectations early on the level of engagement for the action, and be thorough in any promised follow through. Place informational materials in schools, churches, businesses, and other community destinations; provide resources in multiple languages.
3. Use opportunities to raise public awareness in the broader community about racial disparities, improving inclusion of low income residents, communities of color, and women-owned and minority owned enterprises.
4. Inventory existing communications channels and assess their effectiveness and their accessibility. What barriers may exist that prevent certain groups from accessing communication channels?

**Planning**

1. Consider anti-displacement strategies regarding the potential for gentrification, and the well-being of and community assets desired in low-income communities and communities of color disproportionately affected by environmental hazards.
2. Assess access, equity and diversity factors, including local demographics on participation (access to services should be universal without respect to economic circumstance, gender, age, race, ethnicity, or national origin).

**Implementation**

1. Identify all relevant stakeholder groups/representatives that must be reached prior to implementing any actions and if possible, include those identified on action implementation teams. Build and strengthen relationships within the community.
2. Adopt measures that directly support racial equity and prioritize or set aspirational goals for the inclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including low-income individuals and those facing high barriers to participation, such as at-risk youth, formerly incarcerated people, and those from high unemployment neighborhoods.

**Evaluation**

1. Strengthen the transparency of implementation outcomes.
2. Evaluate outcomes open and honestly, with those involved in the planning as well as those segments of the population impacted by the action.
3. In an open and inclusive process, engage with stakeholders to address any lessons learned and/or enhance beneficial outcomes.