

Guide for Rapid Response Interviews with Call Participants

Developed by Rowan Obach, Paulina Vaca, Tania Schusler and Ma'raj Sheikh

Objectives

- Understand participants' motivations for joining CFPAC's COVID-19 Rapid Response effort.
- Document impacts of participation in Rapid Response with a focus on relationships developed, connections made, and what has resulted through those.
- Understand how participants experience the culture of Rapid Response as it relates to racial identity, equity, and power.
- Gain practical feedback on Rapid Response logistics (i.e., what has worked well, what can be improved upon).
- Gain participants' insights into the effort's potential for long-term change in Chicago's food system.

Prior to interview

- [Research into Call Participants bio/organization]
- Provide informed consent form and answer any questions
- Confirm permission to record (recording will be deleted after transcription occurs)

Interview Questions (to be adapted as needed in context of interview; length 30-45 minutes)

IMPACTS

1. How did you come to be engaged in these calls?
 - 1.1. What's motivated you to stay involved?
2. What connections have you made through these calls?
 - 2.1. What has been the impact of these connections for you or your community?
3. How has your understanding of food systems in Chicago evolved through participating in these calls?

LOGISTICS

4. What has worked well in your experience with the calls?
5. What can be improved? (e.g., communication, timing, structure, etc.)

CULTURAL SPACE

6. How do you identify racially/ethnically/culturally?
7. How do the calls connect with the work you are doing or the needs in your community?
8. How safe and welcome have you felt at these calls?
 - 8.1. What would help you feel safer and more welcome?

FUTURE VISION

9. What do you hope will come out of these calls in the long-term?
10. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Karen Lehman – Funder (Fresh Taste/Chicagoland Region Food System Fund)

Interviewed by Rowan Obach, Paulina Vaca and Dr. Tania Schusler on May 17th, 2021

Right when the pandemic started, Fresh Taste also created a drop in space for anybody who wanted to come in and talk about stuff that was happening in the food system. A couple people from CFPAC came into those conversations, then we decided, it doesn't make sense for us to do this anymore. We moved over to CFPAC because we weren't sure that people were getting enough chance to talk [in our space]. As things went on, I think we did it [for] maybe two [to] three weeks. We didn't try to curate any discussions [and] we didn't have a goal. We were just there [as a] drop in space. That's how we [initially] got involved.

I participated most in the business disruption group (others in my group participated in other of the conversations). [However], at the time we were also trying to develop the Chicago Region Food System Fund. **I was really [trying to] listen to what people were doing and listening for what was important to people.** We were just starting to develop the Chicago Region Food System Fund right around then, so I was interested in hearing what other people were seeing. [Partly] to see if it squared with what I was hearing [as] I was also in other individual conversations with people. **It was just a good place to go and connect with folks.** We worked on the survey for the business disruption [group] because we had been thinking we would possibly do a survey. We had a conversation [about it] and decided, we should all do it through CFPAC, so Howard Rosing and Wasted Food Action Alliance folks were involved in that. It was kind of layered in over time.

We saw them doing a good job of pulling people together, which is why we supported them to do that, in our first round of the fund. The fact that they had people who were convening those calls, we thought was an important service to the field. We wanted to make sure that they had some financial support to do that. I would say that also because we saw that others were feeling comfortable being in CFPAC as a space to collaborate, we also thought that they would be a good partner for re-granting. So, we gave them funding for re-granting and we also gave other organizations money and where they could serve as a fiscal sponsor. **I think the process built confidence with both folks in the grassroots and with the Chicago Region Food System Fund folks.**

I met a couple of groups through there that I hadn't had any individual conversation with before. I hadn't met people from Chi Fresh kitchen before and through the survey, we learned a lot about what businesses were concerned about. Ultimately there was [that] project around PPE, I hadn't known that DePaul had that capacity to do that sort of thing. We talked with some of the warehouse workers organizations who said, "We were able to get people from all over the state." There were [at least] two workers organizations [that] have not heard of CFPAC before. We connected them with CFPAC, and I thought now that's an interesting gap, that those connections were not already there. Maybe that's [also] a space to think more about: the labor side.

[But] we already had a fair number of relationships with people. We were getting applications from people; [several of] them were in CFPAC. There were constellations of people that we might have been loosely in other meetings with, like health people and others in other contexts, **[But] I would say I was more connecting with CFPAC staff that I hadn't connected with before.**

[There were also] all the groups that came together around the USDA boxes and some prepared meals groups working together, [such as] street vendors working with Chi Fresh. I'm not sure

those relationships were made through CFPAC, but maybe they were. The food pantries that started to work together were in the CFPAC space. I would say that the people who are in CFPAC were more likely to be nonprofits who already were active in the food system space, not churches and communities. I felt like CFPAC was [addressing] more nonprofits and less communities. [This is compared to] some of the grantees that we ended up supporting [who] were very community-based, but new to working in food systems and with nonprofits. The CFPAC group was quite sophisticated on that front. **[They were] able to work [with] systems, philanthropy, [and] city [councils] to get resources. Therefore, able to execute on these kinds of things in a crisis.** Others did it more from a neighbor-to-neighbor approach or community institution like a church, mosque or other house of worship. **CFPAC was able to pull together a lot of good networks out there that were already known, at least to somebody in CFPAC, and that was the fast glue.**

[What's] hard for me to tease out is what was CFPAC and what started coming into Chicago Region Food System Fund. We put that out [roughly during] April/May. A lot just started coming in and people [were] describing what they were doing in the pandemic. **The kinds of networks that people were already in was more visible through the CFPAC conversations than it may have been before. It was a convening point for a lot of people to come together.** When you say what happened in those meetings, it was seeing the numbers of connections that were [there]. [Additionally], seeing some networks, bringing their work into it, like the Wasted Food Action Alliance bringing some of their work in the emergency food [call]. **I thought it was good that there [were] public sector people, private sector people, neighborhood people, nonprofits, that were all were in the mix; [it] made for rich conversations.**

I think there were [several] things just technically and logistically that were great. The agreements were good agreements. I thought that the way people were taking notes and using the Google Docs [allowing] an open and transparent record was very useful. We probably adapted some of that ourselves having experienced that in the CFPAC process. **I thought that there was enough openness and enough protection of the space around the use of zoom that you knew that you weren't going to get zoom bombed. It was careful, but it was open.** I thought that it was the first time that I saw large group in breakout rooms do stuff more effectively. Honestly, a lot got done in some of those sessions [especially in the summit]. I thought the staff managed the technology well, so it didn't seem glitchy and it didn't seem, you know it was just easy. **They had done their homework, or they had really figured it out and that made it easier for other people to participate on the content.**

I feel like it was very welcoming to everyone. I identify as white [but I know] that **CFPAC has a very explicit support for BIPOC leadership in organizations which is consistent with what we were working on with the Chicago Region Food System Fund.** At the beginning of it, CFPAC was talking about black and brown people, and I said, well, what about native people. Where does that fit? So, there was an evolution in the conversation over time to be more inclusive more in terms of BIPOC across the full range in the language. [However, it] felt like an aligned space on that front. [I was] seeing mission alignment among the two. [But that's] not the only thing, we also support more rural groups and CFPAC is heavily urban. Although, the Illinois Stewardship Alliance (ISA) was also participating. I felt like there was shared perspective [for the] goals [of] the two [organizations, CFPAC and ISA].

Groups continue to function when they have a purpose. **As the purpose had you know went up and down in terms of its clarity, people started to fall away from groups, including me.** Once in a while I go to a rhizome call or [an] emergency food call. But I hadn't been for a long

time. **The question is, what is the work to do and what is the space then that CFPAC holds to do that work?** It could be that people are dropping and finding more direct ways to work together and we're not as deep in the pandemic. I think that's [the] question going forward: whether people will use the space in the same way that they have. There's no reason to perpetuate something without a purpose for it.

We saw a lot of advantages in zoom throughout the pandemic and people figured out how to use that tool most effectively, even when we can get together [in person]. **[To be] totally economic about it, there is still a huge a transaction cross to pulling a lot of people together face to face; it's a tighter and smaller group.** I think that there's still going to be a space for zoom, potentially. It's easier to do a pop up on zoom than it is to get together somewhere when some of us are vaccinated, some of us may not be. I mean there are still barriers there.

I think that [in the future], they could be more of a pop-up space, for initiatives that people want to start. **It could become a place where people who have sustained work together could use it as a platform [for] organizing calls or organizing conversations.** The work is out there. [For example], what about all those folks who may have started providing food through their pantry, now who's there to connect with an urban farm? Who's there to work with them on doing that? There are a lot of collaboratives [that] emerged out of the pandemic and one of my questions is did they take off [from] CFPAC, [or] are they doing that themselves? **I think that [the space] can be an opportunity, to figure out they can staff a pop-up type space, or a project networking space that has more value than if people were just doing it themselves.** Others might show up that could be[come] allies in the process.

Grower and Advocate

Interviewed by Rowan Obach and Dr. Tania Schusler on May 17th, 2021

[I got involved in the calls] through my full-time job. I think we might have got an email. I'm not currently involved anymore. I went to a couple of meetings and then I stopped going. I tried to attend [as many as I could], but I was more consistent in the beginning up until maybe May. In the beginning, I was in the producers, the growers and another one. I was in three. And then it turned into the rhizome calls. And so, I attended some of those, as well.

I noticed a lot of the same advocacy groups coming together to hold space and, at one point, there were farmers and other community members who were part of the conversation. But ultimately, **a lot of the growers ended up leaving because there wasn't enough space that was centering their needs.** In the beginning, there was a push to get growers and there was talk around what can be done because the pandemic was starting. And folks wanted to do mutual aid work, folks needed technical support, folks needed funding. And it just wasn't really moving forward. And you know people have got to farm. I thought the meetings were creative [in terms of being notified] about them, and how they were made. You can easily reach them and stay up to date, if you need to. [But] on a practical side, speaking as a farmer: **Why would I waste my time in a meeting with advocacy groups who are not listening to growers?** And if they are considering some of the things that are being said —like for example, funding, we needed funding — it was just taking too long. I say all that, because I mean, maybe now there might be some growers, but the folks who were there in the beginning, I have not seen them return.

There's such as disconnect [between the calls and the needs in Black and Brown communities.] I think that the disconnect is not even noticed by the folks who are doing this work for us. **You have people who are directly affected by the issues that the advocacy organizations want to work on. But it becomes like an echo chamber.** 'Oh yes, we need to connect with people.' In the meetings, I found myself really frustrated, and I stayed in part because it was my job through my organization. But if I had to have made a choice as a grower, I would have left those meetings a long time ago, and not gotten involved with them. It's too much bureaucracy, too much frustrating whiteness. It took too long to get anything going. **We're talking about lots of Brown and Black people being directly affected, losing their jobs. The ones at risk of dying from the pandemic. And that was just not the urgency that was felt and taken into the meetings.**

I identify as a queer, gender non-conforming immigrant. I feel for the most part comfortable voicing my perspective. I try not to filter my experiences. So, with that said, that's me. But I recognize that not everyone takes that stance, and not everyone has the emotional capacity and energy to continuously push people in spaces where there's not Black and Brown leadership. So, for me, on a personal level, I felt fine. I have no issue with doing that. But overall, I would say it **was not openly safe and welcoming space.**

[The calls] showed me that a lot of the advocacy organizations need to do a lot more work to be more in tune to the needs of the folks on the ground. Being more in tune, for me that reflects that they need to do a lot of internal processing: How do they engage with the community? What is their mission? How are they centering the people that they say that they're working with? How

are they giving those folks that they say that they work with a space in their decision making? **And not just using them as like images, or tokenizing their work — or uplifting their work but not giving actual funding to them.** And then more on the broader side it's like how are the folks you are serving having part of the decision making of your work? Because that's something that I've noticed as well. As a farmer we get reached out a lot by organizations. **They want to hear from us, they want to talk to us, and we have great ideas. But you're not compensating me for my time.** My ideas and my words will just be used in a research report. **It just feels really extractive at that point.** That's still very much at play, and for me, [I want to be] rooting and really pushing folks that are willing to have a less extractive relationship with the people that we say that we serve.

When [the calls] happened, it was during the pandemic. We couldn't meet in person, and it had to be virtual. As we're moving a little bit away from that, [they should be] re-evaluating that format. Not to say that we shouldn't include virtual options, because we definitely should. [But] it's worth considering **can folks go to communities and meet there with community partners?** And also timewise, from the grower's perspective, it's definitely not convenient to have them during the summer, during the growing season, because you're going to lose everyone who's growing. That's another thing to consider.

The challenges are much deeper than convening the meetings and how do you make the meetings better. Organizations really need to start thinking about, as their mission within their work, how are they giving people a space to be part of the decision-making processes and have a relationship that's not extractive. And **looking at their values and aligning their values with their work and putting their money where their mouth is.** For example, if you have a white-led organization but they have all people of color staff, that might look like it's moving towards diversity and whatnot. But that's inherently still not equitable because you have someone in power in the position of an ED (executive director) making final decisions. And **you don't have people of color in the leadership position.** That bleeds into the work. An organization can do all the talk, can show that they are centering people of color, but if internally people of color are not being given positions of leadership, if they're not being compensated justly, if all these things are not being accommodated for whatever variables are happening internally, then the work as an extension becomes performative. I would say really considering equity internally as well. The meetings are what they are, and unless the deeper root issues are being addressed, you're going to be having some of these challenges.

And so, that's just like one example. Another example is who's convening these meetings, right? If it's all advocacy organizations, people who do a lot of office work, **how are you connecting it with community members** who don't have an office job, with farmers who are literally outside and working in 80-degree, 90-degree weather. I'm up at 5:00 in the morning. The last thing I want to be in a meeting at 2:00pm and try to connect via zoom. It's like, come to me. That's a serious suggestion. **Come to me, come work with me, and then maybe, maybe we can talk about how we can actually change the food system.**

I think, especially right now, the pandemic's shown us that inherently in a society that's unequal and unjust and inequitable — so another **suggestion would be like for organizations to really center equity in their internal processes:** in their workplace and how they function. Because

ultimately, that's a reflection of what they do externally. **If that work is not being done internally, then the work that they do externally can be seen as just being performative.**

Stephanie Katsaros – Social Entrepreneur (Bright Beats)

Interviewed by Rowan Obach and Dr. Tania Schusler on June 29th, 2021

I am on the Wasted Food Action Alliance. I'm a core coordinating team member. And when the pandemic hit, I emailed Wasted Food Action Alliance and [asked], what are we doing? Who wants to get together? Who wants to talk? [Rodger] said, I'm scheduling something. It was like he was reading my mind. He probably already had the plan. I was able to contribute five hours a week because I basically lost all my work. McCormick Place and events and restaurants, that's my livelihood, and it all had been stalled. [That] space in my schedule allowed me to contribute more to [the Rapid Response effort].

[In terms of making connections through the calls], I'll speak first just on the organizations, not Bright Beat, but the [other] organizations [that I'm part of]. I think that Wasted Food Action Alliance has cast a wider net in awareness of who knows about us, and then what speakers we're bringing and projects that we're discussing. Illinois Food Scrap Coalition, I've been able to bring in more [connections]. **I think that the calls and the partnerships and kind of points of contact have expanded the partnerships with my sort of sister organizations or the organizations I lead.** Bright Beat specifically, I have been from early on involved in this Food Business Impacts subgroup. [I've been] working with Howard and Ma'raj at least, if there's only three people on the call, it's us three. And Karen with Fresh Taste, too – this was all evolving. **This stuff didn't exist [beforehand].**

The Chicago Food System Fund conceptually was an expansion of these discussions we were having on our calls. Karen was involved, and many others, too. These aren't people I have business relationships with. **I think that we built some tools and developed some resources on the calls that I was on, and those tools and resources have now benefited partners of mine or myself as a partner.** A perfect example is the survey we created to identify impacts; recognizing it was a means to bring funds to people who needed it and built bridges between folks who needed it became kind of like my talking points for what I'm doing during the pandemic.

Fast forward, I'm working with Seven Generations Ahead and a coalition of mutual-aid groups that were not coalesced prior to November or December of last year. We're working on a food rescue hub. It was funded partially, but still funded by that fund. [We're also] looking for cold storage. We had a whole project that DePaul's involved in, looking at cold storage. We said we needed cold storage. We have money. There's cold storage. How do you draw connections between large entities like Loyola, who probably has a food service contractor, how do we get them to buy more from BIPOC farmers? We're doing it. It's really happening. The manifestation of so much is incredible. The example of Bright Beat working on a project with Chicago Food Sovereignty Coalition and Seven Generations Ahead is a very specific example, and it aligns with things that we did on that food business impact call, which grew out of the individuals that I mentioned.

Bright Beat is me at the helm and whoever is currently on staff, which is zero [right now]. Bright Beat has been shaped, so it has impacted what I consider to be top priorities. And I can't

say this is all, like, thanks to Rodger or all thanks to CFPAC, and I don't mean to discount him or them. **But we have all changed together, and that's a compliment to the convenings. The convenings and the need for it and the space, and the mindful way in which we do convene has allowed us all to grow and change together.**

[For example,] there's a member of the Chicago Sustainability Task Force who's actively involved, Midwest Foods. I invited her and said, "you should come on these calls". **I watched her flourish [on the calls]. It is what you make it.** I think of Compass. I didn't invite [them but they] just showed up. But I think of the way that Compass is shifting its business. Compass is a food service operator, a concessionaire, and an individual who I met at the Food Policy Summit. I was introduced to Compass, like, two years ago. I think it was Northwestern was the school [holding the event]. [They were] learning and wanting to improve their programs. Now [they're] in charge of the whole city, and have five universities under [them]. The Wasted Food Action Alliance got someone who needs something [and connected them]. Someone [sent out] emails and someone responded. If we thought about it, I could think of more examples. I come from business, and **I believe that even businesses are benefiting from their exposure to these discussions.** I feel like there is a wide breadth of ability to hone in and bring focus to that which needs it for the people who are there [on the calls].

Community is such a nebulous term for me. [Defining] my community is tough. I'm not going to say that these calls have impacted the Avondale community and the mutual aid group that's in this community. **But my knowledge and perspective has adjusted the way in which I interact with my community.** That's one point, kind of on a local – as a resident. My professional community—would in part be the Wasted Food Action Alliance, the Illinois Food Scrap Coalition, the Chicago Sustainability Task Force, they're all in my signature, you've probably heard of them. **I think that the lens of equity that everything is seen through and the community agreements, the way in which voices are heard with intention, the way calls and conversations are structured with intention, has impacted the way I lead and the topics and the priorities of the organizations that I am involved in.**

That's broadly speaking. I would say specifically I'm part of the Interrogating Whiteness Program that CFPAC has sponsored and guided. The first time we all introduced ourselves, I chatted [with the facilitator saying] "I want in". I know zero, but I want to know all. If I must fill out documentation, I always say "other," and I list Greek American because I'm 100 percent Greek, second generation. I feel grateful that I'm able to participate in something that's developing and shaping the way the others in my group and myself, [that] equity lens. **Beyond just seeing differently, how do we activate change?**

I think food equity and food justice are utmost priorities. That's number one. I think that this has just been so enlightening to me and so many other white people who have not lived in the midst of the hardest-hit areas of Chicago. **It's tear-jerking powerful how much we've learned and heard and seen.** I speak on behalf of myself only. The second thing is that equity and justice may be the most important thing right now, but if we don't put the environment right there; we are the people to put the environment as a priority right there with it. [In addition to] healthcare,

mental health, health – just health. **Food is really [an intersection of] the environment and health and social [welfare].**

Composting can't be a sub-footnote because if we're going to build a stronger system and we're throwing food in the trash, we're not trying to save more to feed people, and we're not trying to feed our soil, which will feed you. We're continuing the racism. We're continuing the problem that we're trying to fix. I don't believe anyone feels as strongly as I do about that. I wish I felt that that was prioritized as a community agreement. Do we all agree that this is our Earth? It's not a complaint at all and addressed toward anyone. It's just that I feel like we need to keep the heat up on the environmental concerns, [like the] climate.

Leverage shows itself in different ways. There will be a facility scared of a waste hauler because at the end of the day, they need them to pick up their trash. If [the hauler's] not recycling properly, you should not let them just get away with that, but they're scared of their waste hauler. So, there's leverage and power that comes from who needs who to do what to get it done. I don't know a lot about policy, but Chicago doesn't care about Springfield, right? They're going to do whatever they want. Well, Springfield wants to know what Chicago's doing. There's such a struggle between policy and how it happens, and really at the end of the day, only people who get policy get how that happens. When does that filter down? **I feel like the city wasn't doing things right or the state wasn't doing things right because they are in power, and they don't have to.** Now suddenly, voices seem to be raising up where people are listening. At the end of the day, it still comes down to who has the power, [that leverage]. I feel like I could learn from other people on how to dissect it. What's going to change if at the end of the day, no one wants to pay more money to do it right? Where is [that] power?

I do mean to learn more about the other states, but I think that recognizing that you can go outside of state borders to really think about the food system, I just had no reason to think about it besides local food being 200 miles away. **But thinking that there was an ability to have kind of systemic improvements happen outside of the state; I've just never had a reason to think about it before.** That's really empowering from a regional standpoint. And I declare loudly that Chicago is a hub. When the Natural Resources Defense Council selected Chicago as part of the cohort for the Food Matters, I think Chicago had to step up a little bit. We [had to be] willing to look at our system more holistically. Chicago, county, state, it's like this accordion of power.

I feel safe and welcome [at the calls]. If anything, I have to kind of harness myself because I just am talkative, and I am seen as white, or at least as privileged. I'm a natural leader, and I'm a convener and organizer, so I speak up. If anything, I'm trying to make other people feel comfortable and not overtake. But I feel totally comfortable.

The timing worked. Zoom I already had. Keeping it to an hour is smart. [Other than the] Rhizomes, we've done them longer. Rhizomes have been less frequent anyway. Having the chat function, having Google docs [were also good]. I think that's a useful tool, not only for the people on the call to kind of read it if they missed it, verbally, but also for if you missed the call to be able to go to that public doc. So, logistics, all good.

We're in this point of transition, and even with my own work, we really need to figure out who's doing what. It's just not happening. Funded projects, existing projects, being shared on calls so that we can all understand how to plug in or how to help each other plug in. How [do] we maintain visibility on people's work when they're in the thick of it? A lot of [this work] was emergency. Now we're in resilience, but how we [can] stay connected and informed is hard. The Chicago Sustainability Task Force, it's an hour of introductions and that's good. In a way it's the update that we want. I'm asking for two things. I'm asking for updates, but it's just hard to structure. If you're on Zoom calls all day, when do you have time to get to work? How do we take a conversation further without impeding on the pace it's going to take to get through [introducing] these 10 people or more? **[So,] I'd like these to get to a point where we could find a way to arrange for strong updates and abilities to collaborate.** To be able to have time for things, scheduled at a time that works for everybody, and a cadence that feels right. This is a living experiment.

[I just have a] sincere belief in the importance of what it is we're talking about. I don't think I come to learn, but I appreciate all that I am learning. It's being a citizen of the world and a citizen of Chicago. This is who matters. This is what matters to me.

Public Health Professional

Interviewed by Rowan Obach and Dr. Tania Schusler on July 20th, 2021

I routinely already work with CFPAC on a major initiative that is a partnership between [my organization] and the Chicago Food Policy Action Council. When COVID came to fruition, we needed to address food equity issues. Of course, there was [also the racial uprising in response to police brutality] and other disruptions in the food system chain.

In Chicago, we really mobilized to work together to find some immediate solutions because grocery stores had been damaged and people do not have access to food, diapers, pharmacy. We wanted to find some quick solutions working with the grocery store owners or other high-level stakeholders that could play a role, or if they weren't going to be up and running, how could [we] pivot and bring food to the people through Greater Chicago Food Depository (GCFD) or other partners.

Because I believe there was a strong level of collaboration created through the disruptions. I wanted to demonstrate our ongoing support for some of those solutions that we found. [My organization] couldn't really provide financial support per se at the time. That was mostly going directly to community-based organizations working on the ground in the communities. We could provide more of [those] communications to ensure that the CFPAC was talking to the Mutual Aid food providers and to ensure that there was some symmetry and alignment, to ensure that people are being served. My connection to them was a natural extension of the work I was already doing.

I found that **I was learning that there are other partners outside the traditional food equity partners that I worked with day-to-day with [the] Chicago Food Policy Action Council. I wanted to better understand their role in the system and where we could develop more alignments with those organizations, post-pandemic as well.** I learned that there are Mutual Aid groups out there that are part of the overall emergency infrastructure in Chicago that are non-traditional food pantries in a certain sense. They may not meet the high level of food pantries that GCFD works with, but they play an integral part in our system. It was also some academic partners, other food distributors like Midwest foods, and that I never really had direct contact with, [and] Gourmet Gorilla.

Especially in the beginning of the pandemic when [essential workers] didn't have work and they didn't have access to food. A lot of those folks [may not be] U.S. citizens and so they don't have access to some of our food programs, our federally related food programs.

I'll be responding to this for my organization because I'm very privileged to not have to obtain food services myself. I work [across] Chicago overall and so it's very important that I assure that there is access to food services for the residents of the city. I would say it created this urgency for my [organization]. We always recognized that there was a disconnect. We talk about the silos [between and within] organizations. **The impact of this work was that we had to quickly develop some systems to address the immediate need of food insecurity in the communities—food insecurity that has been there for the last three or four decades.**

But in the immediate aftermath of the [racial uprising] we had to find quick solutions to get food to people, food to people's homes, whether they be students or seniors or everyday Jane and Joe

Doe that have lost their jobs. After finding those immediate solutions, it led to the recognition that this was an opportunity to also solve those long-term food systems issues that have been existing in Chicago for some time in many neighborhoods.

I've been working in this area for about, I'd say 8-11 years, in food and security issues. It relates to childhood obesity, it relates to obesity in general for individuals, diabetes rates and other chronic diseases related to food insecurity.

Recognizing that we had an opportunity with all these partners that have come together for this emergency need that we could also use this as an opportunity to develop a convening of certain folks. And not everybody that was in the emergency group through CFPAC was invited to join the [my organization's] table, but I thought we were very thoughtful about who we brought into our convening. With the help of CFPAC, some of its board members [helped] determine, okay who do we need to have in this convening to how we're going to address long-term food and security needs for the city?

Its largest impact is the ability to use the unfortunateness of the unrest and the pandemic to develop long-term planning for food insecurity in the City of Chicago and obtain some resources now due to ARPA and the different federal funding that's coming down in connection with the pandemic.

The impact was that it led to long-term strategy developments that will hopefully have some resources behind it, due to the important issues that were addressed, both in the short-term and now long-term.

In terms of CFPAC's engagement and openness, I feel that they do a very good job of making everybody feel welcome. I think they go above and beyond trying to be thoughtful about assuring that there are different individuals of every group, however you want to slice and dice it at the table.

They're thoughtful about having meetings later in the day so if you're trying to engage folks from the farming community or workers in the farming community; they're done for the day and they're able to jump on a call. **It's just not a bunch of talking white people or privileged roles within an organization that are on these calls and in the decision-making hierarchy.**

They also even offered a session on Interrogating Whiteness to help people and it was strictly for white people. I received my invitation through my role at [my organization]. And I did not participate but I thought that even having that program available demonstrated the intent of inclusiveness.

I know that if I participated, cost was not going to be a barrier. That's often a barrier for employees [where I work]. Everyone thinks there's a lot of money, and there is, but it's not often allocated to employee training.

I find them to be very inclusive, very thoughtful. I know when they even planned their summit, they moved the dates from one part of the calendar to another part of the calendar because it was the farming season for a lot of farmers in Illinois. And if you want farmers to be partners with you on the supply chain and food sustainability and food equity, they have to be able to take a day off the farm and not lose income by participating in those meetings.

When I mentioned that there was the emergency unrest, we came together to address the unrest [through] working with the grocery stores, the City of Chicago's economic development team, licensing team, with churches in the community, everybody, all hands-on deck were there to get resources into those communities, working with GCFD.

When that emergency ended, we formed what we called a Sprint group. And so, we convened a group of folks. It was a combination of community-based folks working on food insecurity in the community, some well-known academics, and then also food equity-type organizations like CFPAC and Urban Growers Collective—other organizations that were growing food and [handling] distribution, and then GCFD, the City of Chicago Mayor's Office, and [other city] departments.

I think it's very important to have this dynamic between private/public partnerships. So that if one changes in terms of a mayoral change, you have a strong private partner that is able to push on the new leadership and say we've already put a lot of resources into this, and we would appreciate your support.

The Sprint group came up with a set of strategies and we just recently came out the last month, a report on the Sprint group's findings. GCFD was able to leverage some of its relationships and able to get McKinsey to support the consulting side of it and have some of the top-notch consultants in the country work on this project. We were able to get them pro-bono to work on this initiative and that was very helpful.

One of the recommendations from that convening was for the city to hire a food equity advisor. An individual has been hired to fulfill that position and she will be starting in the next few weeks I believe. It'll be the job of this new individual that has been hired and to work with the current Food Equity Council. The idea is to follow, the City of Baltimore has a Baltimore Community Advisory Council. So, we've been looking at different hybrid, different models and giving a lot of options to folks doing all the background work and then it'll be up to the Food Equity Council and its leadership to determine the next steps.

We recognize that the Sprint group worked for that council at that point in time, but we want to have more voices and more people at the table as we move forward with now implementing the Food Equity Council's strategies. Those were just the first few strategies to get this work going, but that's just the beginning. That's just an overall framework. **It's going to take a lot of other individuals and meetings and to get things even further off the ground.**

I'll be honest with you, sometimes in some of those calls, it's just my job to shut up and listen and not put my two cents in. I'm fortunate to be able to be invited to those tables because I feel it's an opportunity to hear the community's voice; [I] wouldn't have heard otherwise. **It would be so difficult to go to all of these different tables and hear the feedback and the issues that folks were expressing, the barriers that they were encountering.**

It sometimes is difficult to be [in my role] at those meetings because depending on who's there, sometimes the expectation is that you'll just make it happen, [that my organization] has resources and everything. I know people that have worked with [us] enough know that that's not the case but it's still, for some folks that are newer to those tables, they don't get that.

It's better for me to hear and then kind of bring [the issue] up the chain or find out if there's any assistance that one of our other partners could assist upon, especially when it comes to a lot of these funding-type things. If I can help identify a resource from another [partner], I feel that's my role, too. I can attend a meeting and find where we can kind of connect things and align things between the public sector, the private sector and the nonprofit sector.

This is something small, but as an organization, CFPAC was growing. [Especially] through the pandemic because they were addressing a need, funders were recognizing that, and they were getting additional resources. When you are growing, it's important to still have one person be the point person. **I'm talking something as simple as email communications because it went from one staff person to another staff person** and then I'm confused because if you missed meetings for a few weeks and you didn't know about the staff transition, then you're like who's this new person and what's their role? When I can't find something, I'll go to my email. I'll [usually] be able to search for the individual's name. And if you keep switching the individual's name on me, it's hard for me to remember that transition.

I think for communications purposes, organizations, maybe they shouldn't send things from individuals. Maybe they should identify the name of the organization and maybe the group that that they're referring to, or to have everything come from their leadership or their communications person.

One thing I really like about CFPAC, too is they always keep notes going in their chat the minute you start. They're [also] always good about doing icebreakers. If you're trying to do relationship development, they are important because it does truly break the ice with other people that you're on the call with. So, they're always good about, not just jumping into business, but being thoughtful.

I hope that the collaborations that were developed and facilitated during the pandemic will continue and expand into collective initiatives for the stakeholders and the community alike.

I think that the seeds that we're planting now are going to grow into something more systematic and more grounded for everybody's assistance. There's going to be some winners and losers. There definitely will, not everyone's going to get a half million dollars, not everyone's going to get to the food hub. But I hope that if by working together that we're going to enlarge the tent and get as many people in there as possible. That's what I'm hoping long-term.

I'm [also] hoping that some of the other tools that had been developed online will have a continued shelf life. I think that some of [these] innovations that were created, [these] tools could be utilized for further expansion or contraction as different initiatives come on board. As different resources are identified for scaling up, some of those platforms or websites will be helpful.

You have to keep the momentum going during this interim period. I think that CFPAC is poised to do that based upon what I've seen so far. They have been successful in receiving additional resources. They're also thoughtful about taking a day off to step back, look at what they're doing. Are we going in the right direction? Let's think through our, what we're currently at and what obligations and what grant cycles are coming up and how we're going to approach that work.

Because I think that's been successful for them in the long-term of expanding their organization. **And the better organization they have, the more help they're able to provide to so many ups and downs the supply chain, when it comes to food equity and food insecurity.**

I'm happy to always see that and support that kind of work that they're putting into their overall strategic vision and mission for their organization as well.

Local Foods Policy Organizer

Interviewed by Rowan Obach and Dr. Tania Schusler on July 20th, 2021

I started my position in April of 2020. As soon as I was brought in, everything had erupted. So, there was a lot going on. My organization already had a close relationship with CFPAC. As soon as I was brought in my boss said, “you need to hop on these calls”. This is part of your role to have a relationship with these folks in this community and understand the issues. So **[my role was] understanding what's going on there, who the players are, starting to build those relationships and continuing to build [them]**. I wasn't even entirely sure what it was when I joined. But it quickly became evident that it was food systems; let's talk about what's going on because no one really knows.

I originally was really involved in the local food producers [group] because that was what I could bring to the table. I work directly with local food producers. I organize them to identify the issues that they're facing and then we work on policy solutions together. It's a really long process. It doesn't happen very quickly. I [also] connect regularly with farmers and local food farmers. So, I have a direct line to them. But that group sort of fizzled out at one point and I think merged with another one. I felt like a little less useful or just a little bit less involved at that point.

It seemed like **there was a lot of momentum at first because there was so much uncertainty**. I think the importance of having those relationships is what motivated me to stay involved and to understand what other work was going on in the region because **it seemed to just be a central place that a lot of people were coming to just talk with each other**. That felt like for me the most important piece was to sort of get updated on just sort of what's going on.

I know a lot shifted into mutual aid work, which is essential. And our organization doesn't do that exactly. I felt like it was a place to just stay updated on what was going on. I was a little less actively participating in some of the breakout groups.

It was understandable. **I think a lot of local producers were showing up initially because they were also just kind of freaked out**, needed to talk to other producers and other people who were trying to figure out what was going on and how to shift their entire business models over the course of a couple of weeks. **They were very involved at first and then got busy. The growing season really kicked off. I just think it was unclear of how we should move forward.**

Then [on] the mutual aid side of things, I didn't really feel like I was that connected to or really could help that much. There may have been something, but it didn't feel like the right place for me, so I didn't really participate in the other breakout groups. We don't do as much direct service work. We do more organizing around policies.

I felt like the rhizome calls that were happening, I think weekly and then biweekly, were the best place for me and I got updates there. But that direct service mutual aid work, I think, was sort of its own thing that was happening.

I remember learning about ChiFresh Kitchen through those calls. I was helping run this virtual event with Regenerate Illinois, which is a coalition of organizations that work on regenerative agriculture. We were hosting a conversation about responses to the food system, responses to the pandemic. We brought in a bunch of different speakers who kind of did quick storytelling. And then talked about how they were pivoting and shifting whatever business they were running. We

brought one of the leaders at ChiFresh Kitchen, in to speak at that event to help communicate what was going on and how businesses that were doing catering and local food sourcing were working together, especially since the pandemic, and providing food for folks that needed it in a rapid way.

I remember that connection being made through the rhizome call. We wouldn't have had that speaker if that rhizome call didn't happen. I learned about a lot of new folks. I don't know if any organizational connections came out of all of them. It certainly is a helpful place to understand who's out there and what's going on. You never know when you are going to make that connection so it's worth showing up.

The rhizome group was important for me to understand more about the local producers in the Chicago region. I know they would have special guests come on and I would learn about farms or farmers through those little special guests portions of the calls. That was important for me to be able to know what farms I should reach out to bring them into our work as well if they were interested.

I had no idea there was this robust network of mutual aid [or] organizations. I had no idea. I guess it made sense. I knew they were always out there. I didn't know how interconnected they were and just how many of them there are.

I would say there was a lot of work that they did with the USDA farmers to family food box program. We [also] hosted a meeting with Gourmet Gorilla who was kind of explaining what farmers needed to do to be able to participate in that program. Unfortunately, it was somewhat limiting for a lot of small, diverse farmers. So yeah, but that was something I didn't really understand until these calls happened. I heard from the folks who were working directly with that program, which was important for me in my role because I work with a lot of the farmers that were interested in being able to participate in that program. USDA programs are their own beast and I know there was a lot of issues there.

I think understanding who the players were, like who the catering businesses were, who was getting those contracts, being able to make that connection between the people [and] the businesses who had the contracts who were sourcing the food and the farmers who wanted to sell the food, **that was an essential thing that came out of the rhizome calls that I didn't understand before** or know who those people were. I think it was also just interesting to see kind of who knows who, too. So [that] in the future you didn't have to always introduce other organizations. I know we've all been together on a rhizome call; we know each other or maybe we met each other in a breakout group there.

A piece that was interesting was I know **initially a lot of folks from out of the Chicago region were really involved in the calls at first.** I don't know if the focus of the work that was being done in those calls just remained in the Chicago region or if we just sort of lost momentum and people got busy. **But I know a lot of folks from downstate or out of the Chicagoland area kind of dropped out of those.** And I think that's okay. I don't know if that was an explicit goal or not was to make it a statewide thing. But I wonder if there is some potential there, because I work with a lot of folks that are not from the Chicago area. I think some of them just sort of felt like it just wasn't for them.

I think [I also kept participating to] continue to stay connected and updated on what's happening with the Good Food Purchasing policy because that's a major piece of legislation that we are continuing to work on with our local food producer group. We call it the Local Food Farmer Caucus.

Yeah, I feel like a lot happened over the past year so I'm trying to recall everything. Oh, [and] I know the work that's being done with DePaul, I believe the Food Hub. I don't think there's really a role for me there yet. But in the future, that's something important and that's something that I know Howard Rosing really connected with my boss over. So, continuing to hear an update on where that research was and how that's going was important for me because I have a lot of farmers that we work with that want to be a part of a food hub at some point. It was important for us to understand where that's at so we can convey the information when it's appropriate to the producers we work with.

I think the timing is pretty good. It generally works for me. I know they shifted it a couple times or at least recently they did I think brought it to bi-weekly or something like that, which is understandable. So logistically, yeah on a Thursday afternoon - that works for me.

I think [occasionally], when they were kind of transitioning the dates or something, there was a little confusion. I tried to join a couple meetings a couple times and [it just wasn't] happening. I know Stef has been emailing folks, so I probably just missed her email. I think if that all gets straightened out. I use Google calendar for everything so having it there I think is useful. Everyone's on Zoom now. I think they use it well.

I think 90 minutes is not that long [but] sometimes it feels like it's like I have a 90-minute Zoom coming up, like after you've been on Zoom all day. Every once in a while, that's a little daunting, but I know, I empathize with them in that you cannot get enough done in a 60-minute meeting, either. I [also] know **a big part of what that call is about is relationship building and that takes time and that should be prioritized.** So yeah, I understand that.

They always have the agenda available, which is important. I don't remember if Stef sends it out ahead of time with the reminder email, but maybe just highlighting that more and making sure that's ready and available or stands out or something because I think I miss it a lot of times. So, making sure that that's, yeah really, obvious for folks I think is helpful.

I am curious about where the purpose for the calls is going. Especially that it's been about a year or more than a year since the pandemic really changed everything for everyone. I know they've been working on it, and I've had conversations with folks. But I think I'm still a little bit unclear about the exact purpose and what we're trying to do now that we've shifted things. I don't know if there's a way for them to include that in the reminder emails or something about that might be helpful.

I use she/her pronouns. I'm a white Caucasian American. I see myself as like a food systems emerging leader and an advocate for local food and regenerative and sustainable advocate. There was this sort of racial equity seminar called [Interrogating Whiteness] that I learned about through the rhizome calls, which was essential. And I also was able to connect on more of a personal and professional level with other food system players through those meetings. And I felt like that was important. I feel like I was able to understand my professional connections in an

important way through those. Without the rhizome call I would have probably never known about that opportunity.

It's one of those spaces where the invitation to be more vulnerable, more personal and just honest was there. Not all my work meetings are like that at all. Most of them are not. This space did feel like that, which I felt was refreshing and I think intentional on their part, which I appreciated that they were really trying to cultivate that space and that feeling of safety and inclusion. It allowed for people to be able to talk more openly about the stuff that we're all dealing with and these deep-rooted issues that are intimidating and scary to talk about some times.

I felt good that that space was created, but I think on the other side of it, I think that does intimidate some people sometimes. I think because people just are not used to being vulnerable and open at a professional or some sort of work call. I think some people may have felt like "I don't know how to be a part of this". **I think that there's a lot of work that we all have to do to shift that culture in the workplace. And we're not there yet.** Not everyone's going to be at the same level, which is okay. I think that they also acknowledged that, too.

I remember one of the first meetings I went to, really thinking about the meeting like agreements that they would go through. I remember I had just started my role and I remember taking that and using, we came up with our own meeting agreements. This is important because I noticed how they were intentional about that on the rhizome calls. It felt comfortable, but I can see how it's intimidating for other folks.

They would do these breakout groups right away in the beginning where you just answer an icebreaker question. And I use that at every single one of my meetings with farmers now. And sometimes when you get on, it's like oh I have to talk to people, I have to open up. But then once you do it, it's like oh this is fun. I'm glad that they were, not persistent, but kept doing that and always sort of built it into the culture because then it became kind of expected and I knew what was coming.

I think yeah, **just having the space to continue to get to know other food systems players was huge.** Our work at [my organization] is like 80 to 90% relationships. The rhizome network was just an obvious and clear place where that could happen. You really don't know when you might partner with someone or when an opportunity is going to come up. It's good to have that network, have sort of content experts that you can turn to and just have as resources, yeah, and support for whatever work might come up.

I hope that the network, the rhizome network can continue to grow. I hope that it could become more statewide. **I think we'd be more powerful and more effective if there were more voices from across the state at the table there.** I don't know how to do that necessarily, but I would like to see that. I think that would be important, just to have a space where people who are doing very similar work are connecting and talking openly about these issues together. When I go to the rhizome calls, I get in my Chicago brain, I [think] "I'm going to do Chicago stuff now", which is not necessarily true. I think that's how I've started to categorize it for myself.

I think growing the network and being able to convene a space and conversations that are relevant for everyone and help connect more. We're going to be more powerful and there's more things we can do if we're sort of more interconnected. I really don't think there's a place where all

the food organizations across the state are convening that I know of. I think there's a lot of potential there.

I think having a space to have conversations is incredibly important and that should continue to happen. But I also wonder what the next action items are, the next steps, or the goals, the longer-term goals that we are working towards in those calls. Because **I see the value in the relationships and continuing a conversation. Sometimes I just don't know where it's going or what I could be working towards. I think some longer-term goals would be valuable for everyone.**

I think CFPAC is amazing, and I know how difficult it is to organize a bunch of other organizations. I hope these continue and we can just continue to build something together.