

Meeting Minutes
February 18, 2021 @ 9am

Chat Box Notes are in Italics.

Attendance: 28

Liz Wiley (Marion Institute):

- We have a special guest today, Nolan O'Brien with Senator Markey's office
 - o Many of you have voiced concern recently about the Southcoast being overlooked with resources

Nolan O'Brien (Senator Markey's Office):

- I'm the regional director for Southcoast MA and the Islands
- I spoke to Liz last week about what the SFPC has been doing the last year
 - o Initial concerns were about the food box program with Sid Wainer

Wendy Garf-Lipp (United Neighbors Fall River):

- We've been very concerned over how we've been left out of not just food but also vaccines, etc.
- We don't have enough advocacy for the region to support the work that we're doing
 - o How do we get what every other community is getting in Massachusetts? The equitable share?
- We would love to hear the plans that the state delegation has for things to move in an equitable way

Nolan O'Brien (Senator Markey's Office):

- We have a biweekly congressional conversation with Governor Baker's office where we share what's happening with constituents, i.e. testing, equitability and accessibility
- The state is responsible and we're in touch with FEMA as well to get more vaccines
 - o I can share information with you about the state's distribution
- Senator is fighting for more state money in next relief bill
- I'd be happy to follow up with Jacob about the EEA program

00:11:36 Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): Maybe Nolan can explain the role of mayors versus senators? Versus the governor... so everyone could be clear on where decisions are made and by who - federal, state, and local level

Jacob Miller (Senator Montigny's Office):

- As of today there will be 2,000 vaccine appointments available a day at the Circuit City in Dartmouth

Wendy Garf-Lipp (United Neighbors Fall River):

- The site crashed at 8:01 a.m.

- The vaccine is a good example of what the problem is across the board, but acquisition of things in general has been inequitable

Susan Murray (Coastal Food Shed):

- We work on food access to everybody, with farmers helping get their product to the community and getting the community access
- Infrastructure grants and access were great, so we could grow more of the food and feed more of our community
- I was disappointed with representation in Southeastern Mass – only a handful of farmers got them here and we feed Boston

Karen Schwalbe (SEMAP):

- The money is administered through EEA
 - o the grant was issued last summer for \$40 million
 - o they just finished rolling out the money across the state
 - o it had 1400 applications, they were overwhelmed by the response
 - o shows that there's a great need for infrastructure investments, how quickly our food system fell apart – it's a program that needs more attention, it should be Federally funded – it came through the CARES act, but was distributed through the state via EEA grants – we need to continue working with
 - o Divvy it between agriculture and food security stuff, was not clear feedback about why some proposals were accepted and why some weren't – didn't seem accurate in terms of which agricultural projects were funded and which won't

Holly Fowler (Northbound Ventures):

- People don't feel there's a ton of transparency in terms of how the grants are rolled out
- There were some distressing things with the weight that was given to the criteria
- Struggling dairy farms and non-profit organizations directly serving the community in the region? Vs. big investors in NY?
 - o Raises some questions about transparency in the process, and the access of food sovereignty in the region?
- That's the most distressing aspect of this round – it will only be important if it delivers on the impact that it promises, increasing employment for members of low income communities
- We need advocacy for food sovereignty and whose pockets are receiving grant funds

00:18:34 *Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her):* *Massachusetts Food Security Infrastructure Grant*

00:20:47 *Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her):* *<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/food-security-infrastructure-grant-program>*

00:21:11 *Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her):* *I want to pick up on Karen's point of transparency.*

00:27:54 *Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her):* *Susan's point is really important.*

00:28:14 Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): *It's an excellent example of the injustice in this grant program.*

00:29:32 Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): *That's why there needs to be some additional transparency - who made the decisions, how the criteria was applied, if conflicts of interests were disclosed, what due diligence was done to address food sovereignty*

00:31:54 Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): *That's interesting to know.*

00:31:58 Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): *About Plymouth.*

00:36:00 Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): *Nolan - This would mean universal CEP - Community Eligibility Program*

00:36:21 Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): *of the National School Lunch/Breakfast Program*

00:37:35 Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): *@Nolan - FRAC (Food Research and Action Center)*

00:37:47 Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): *<https://frac.org> could be a resource for considering this*

Liz Wiley (Marion Institute):

- Some of the requirements were a waste, i.e. requirement to buy a new truck vs a used truck for refrigeration – that wasn't really helpful

Susan Murray (Coastal Foodshed):

- That's a state level MDAR requirement: need to buy new farming equipment
- A lot of farmers missed out because we can't really afford to hire a grant writer and don't have the time
 - o I watched someone who is a caterer get hundreds of thousands of dollars for her catering kitchen in a wealthy high income area
- Yet, as an individual farmer, I do subsidized CSAs with shares and gateway cities like New Bedford, while trying really hard to service my community and didn't receive a grant

Karen Schwalbe (SEMAP):

- You can request individual information for your grant scoring

Wendy Garf-Lipp (United Neighbors Fall River):

- Perhaps we can arrange to get access to a city grant writer?

Holly Fowler (Northbound Ventures):

- Whose role is what in the process to get towards the equity of shares? The mayors vs senators vs governors?
- The federally funded delivery of things? When money comes from federal level, how does it filter at the state level?

Nolan O'Brien (Senator Markey's Office):

- I think it's a bit situational when it comes to certain programs, like the USDA boxes programs – it comes federal and gets distributed locally
- You can reach out to me and ask if it's a state or federal program
- This past year, those lines have been a little unclear

Meg Rogers (United Way Greater Fall River):

- For the past 18 months -past year plus, students have been receiving breakfast/lunch every day – will that continue in September? Or forever? There is obviously a need, do you have information Nolan?
- It's really important to gateway communities that we're serving, it needs to not just be pandemic-related – for low income and middle class mos

Nolan O'Brien (Senator Markey's Office):

- It's extended through summer of 2021, and we'll need to revisit to extend again
- I know it's a conversation the governor's and congressional offices have been having – it's on our radar
- I will flag this for Senator Markey's teams
- I will take back a lot of the questions today, to see if I can share at a future meeting with my colleagues
- I'm leaving my email in chat box, if anyone would like to reach out

Liz Wiley (Marion Institute):

- We've seen that community meals can be made that are nutritious and locally sourced
- Many kids rely on those meals, so we have to be better at making them quality, nutritious, healthy foods - so that we're not so immune deficient and susceptible to pandemics etc
- We are trying to roll out a food hub locally

00:38:25 Susan, Coastal Foodshed: Free lunch is great. My daughter has really benefited. If this program continues it would be great to have a discussion of what goes in the boxes and lunches. My daughter brings home a bag of mostly high processed foods that don't support healthy eating habits. Eating healthy shouldn't be something only the wealthy have access to.

00:38:51 Meg Rogers-UWGFR- she/her: It would be great if we can source them locally and less processed

00:39:16 Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): Massachusetts should study and watch what NY and Michigan have done in introducing an incentive for local food

00:39:23 Deloris Joseph, Dartmouth Youth Advocate: Susan good point

00:39:36 Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): Vermont has begun an 18-month study to see if it is feasible

00:40:14 *Meg Rogers-UWGFR- she/her: Everyone loves the occasional pop tart....but more healthy hearty things should be on those boxes too*

00:41:18 *Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her):*
<https://farmlandinfo.org/publications/growing-opportunity-for-farm-to-school-in-new-york/>

Wendy Garf-Lipp (United Neighbors Fall River):

- I'd like to put in a plug to put in local food in these meals
 - o How can we make sure that food grown here is used here and farmers are paid for that food through the money that our tax pays here?

Deloris Joseph (Dartmouth Youth Advocate):

- I was wondering if people qualify for free/reduced lunch once they have P-EBT cards?

Susan Murray (Coastal Foodshed):

- P-EBT should be allowed for HIP benefits as well, they qualify for SNAP
- People can't access fresh vegetables with P-EBT right now, unless they already have SNAP

Wendy Garf-Lipp (United Neighbors Fall River):

- The first P-EBT roll out was horrendous – the envelopes were misleading
 - o 12% of families in Fall River did not cash it

Liz Wiley (Marion Institute):

- Updates?
 - o Tori how did last Saturday go with boxes?
 - o We opened another food distribution site with the Shah Foundation in Wareham

Victoria Grasela (United Way of Greater New Bedford):

- I believe all boxes went out
- Military foundation is worried that not enough people are registering for boxes – you have to register every week
- 607 for this weekend, 242 for some of the following weeks
- We'll be giving out soup from Blount, pasta, and heartier items for the winter

00:41:21 *Victoria Grasela: this is the link to register: <https://mmsfi.org/farmers-to-families/>*

Meg Rogers (United Way Greater Fall River):

- I did share a PNG graphic of USDA boxes for you to share, it's also good for social media

Pam Kuechler (PACE):

- If we have a lot of snow we might not open the pantry tomorrow
- At 2 pm tomorrow we will close on the new building
 - o We'll start using the parking lot there for a mobile market at least once a week

Susan Murray (Coastal Foodshed):

- We have the Winterbridge market on Fridays
- Large selection of local fruits and vegetables and some other items, tell everyone they can use their EBT
- Starting this weekend we'll be doing home deliveries to Wareham, Lakeville and Freetown
- We're working on doing home deliveries using SNAP
- People can use SNAP on our virtual market, they just need to pick up at

00:43:01 *Deloris Joseph, Dartmouth Youth Advocate: Did I miss the conversation surrounding the P-EBT cards and will this continue to help families with food*

00:44:15 *Susan, Coastal Foodshed: P-EBT should qualify for HIP benefits*

00:45:19 *Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): All current nutrition guidelines:*
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn>

Holly Fowler (Northbound Ventures):

- What's the coordination with Rob Shaheen and others re: food distribution at schools?

00:52:27 *Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): @Liz: What is the relationship of this meal program with the school lunch program?*

00:52:55 *Meg Rogers-UWGFR- she/her: @Holly- it's grant funded and unrelated to schools*

00:54:57 *Holly Fowler, Northbound Ventures (she/her): @Meg - Yes, Shah has done the same in Chelsea. I'm curious if it has any impact on school participation.*

Liz Wiley (Marion Institute):

- The difference is that instead of sandwiches, they are meals that can be eaten also for dinner
- It's an extension of the summer meal program

00:56:07 *Nolan O'Brien (Sen. Markey's Office): I'll be looking into the questions you raised and hope to have updates to share at a future meeting. Feel free to stay in touch with me at Nolan_O'Brien@markey.senate.gov*