

A Public Policy Advocacy Project to Promote Food Security: Exploring Stakeholders'
Experiences

by

Kayla Mary Atkey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

Centre for Health Promotion Studies
University of Alberta

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Abstract

Food security is said to exist “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2008, p. 1). In the last several decades, challenges related to the achievement of food security in Canada have had a significant impact on public health. To address such challenges, comprehensive approaches are required, which include action at the public policy level. In this study, I worked with stakeholders from Growing Food Security in Alberta’s policy working group to develop a public policy advocacy project to promote food security in Alberta. I also explored the experience of this group as it engaged in this process.

This study was informed by principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR) and a focused ethnographic approach. In total, 14 stakeholders from across Alberta participated in the study. Data generation included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document review. Data analysis took two forms. First, I arranged data chronologically to document and describe the advocacy project. Second, I conducted a thematic analysis to explore stakeholders’ engagement experiences.

Development of the advocacy project involved three phases carried out between November 2012 and July 2013: (a) an initial workshop to begin the identification of our advocacy focus; (b) monthly meetings to develop the advocacy project, and; (c) a final workshop to summarize outcomes and develop a plan for project sustainability. During this process, the group engaged in advocacy steps informed by CBPR approaches to policy advocacy, including issue identification, determining our advocacy focus, research and information gathering, developing our position, strategic analysis, and organizing for action (Themba-Nixon, 2010).

The result of the advocacy project was the beginning of a campaign calling on the Alberta government to develop a Universal School Food Strategy.

Through the exploration of stakeholders' experiences, I identified four main themes. The first theme explores the research project as a positive and open space to contribute, the second theme focuses on diversity and achieving common ground, the third theme describes the group's sense of confidence and capacity throughout the project and, finally, the fourth theme highlights the group's experience of uncertainty. Contextual factors identified include the meeting mode, time, and meeting organization.

I end the study with a critical reflection on our advocacy focus, as well as highlights and lessons learnt from the advocacy project. I also situate the exploration of stakeholders' experiences in relation to the literature. Last, I provide recommendations for future research and action. Taken together, findings and recommendations from this study may help to inform advocacy work to promote food security in other Canadian jurisdictions.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Kayla Atkey. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Building capacity to promote food security at the public policy level: Exploring the experience of community stakeholders participating in public policy advocacy,” No. 3389, 09/13/2012.

Dedication

To Growing Food Security in Alberta, for your efforts to promote a healthier and more sustainable food system

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Kim Raine, for your mentorship and support over the last few years. It has been a privilege to learn from you and to be part of your team. I would also like to thank my committee members for their guidance during this process. Thanks also to Growing Food Security in Alberta and members of the Policy Working Group. It was a pleasure to work with everyone on this project. In addition, I would like to thank my co-workers and friends for bearing with me and keeping me encouraged. Last, thanks to my family for teaching me the value of hard work and always supporting my academic pursuits.

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List of Abbreviations

APCCP: Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention

CBPR: Community-Based Participatory Research

CFS: Community Food Security

FoodARC: Food Action Research Centre

GFSA: Growing Food Security in Alberta

PFCP: Participatory Food Costing Project

PWG: Policy Working Group

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

This chapter presents an introduction to the study. I outline key issues and concepts, as well as the study's rationale and significance. I follow this with an overview of the study's purpose and research objectives. The chapter ends with my research statement, which outlines the experiences and assumptions that led me to this research and the new perspectives that I gained throughout the process.

The State of Food Security in Canada

Food security is said to exist “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2008, p. 1). Necessary for human health and wellbeing, food security is recognized as an important determinant of health (World Health Organization, 2014a, 2014b).

In the last several decades, Canada has experienced a number of challenges related to food security, which have significant implications for public health. For example, in 2012, 4 million individuals in Canada, representing nearly 13% of Canadian households, experienced difficulty accessing a sufficient amount of food, in large part due to financial reasons (Tarasuk, Mitchell, & Dachner, 2014). This is concerning as income-related food insecurity links to negative health outcomes such as inadequate nutrition, increased risk of chronic disease, and poor mental health (McIntyre & Rondeau, 2009). On top of this, increased access to and availability of energy-dense and nutrient poor foods in Canada's wider food environment has increased barriers to a healthy diet and contributed to public health issues such as overweight and obesity (Slater, Green, Sevenhuysen, Edginton, O'Neil, & Heasman, 2009; World Health

Organization, 2003). In turn, these issues are embedded in wider food system challenges, such as increasing corporate control of the food system (Stuckler & Nestle, 2012) and the environmental impact of large-scale industrial agriculture (O'Kane, 2012).

Conceptual Framework

In this study, the concept of community food security (CFS) and the social-ecological model of health promotion provide a useful organizing framework to inform the research. CFS focuses on a community's ability to obtain healthy, safe, and culturally acceptable food through a sustainable food system (Hamm & Bellows, 2003). The social ecological model of health promotion, in turn, provides a framework for guiding the implementation of public health interventions at multiple ecological levels. In line with a CFS perspective, the social ecological model emphasizes the need for policy level action and community participation to create healthier environments (McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988).

Rationale for Study

The need for comprehensive and multi-level approaches to achieve population health goals such as food security is widely recognized in the field of public health (Kreuter, De Rosa, Howze, & Baldwin, 2004; McLeroy et al., 1988; World Health Organization, 1986). Traditionally, food security initiatives have tended to focus on ameliorating hunger through short-term community-based strategies, such as food banks and meal and snack programs (Slater, 2007; Tarasuk, 2001a). More recently, however, community and policy initiatives have emerged with a broad range of goals, such as increasing access to healthy foods, ameliorating hunger, promoting social justice, and building sustainable food ecosystems (Koc, Macrae, Desjardins, & Roberts, 2008; Slater, 2007). While these strategies contribute to food security, researchers and practitioners continue to call for broader and more integrated public policy

action in this area (MacRae, 2011; Rideout, Riches, Ostry, Buckingham, & MacRae, 2007; Slade, 2013; Slater, 2007; Tarasuk, 2010). Engagement in public policy advocacy using participatory approaches is one strategy for facilitating such change (Bryant, Raphael, & Travers, 2007; McLeroy et al., 1988; Themba-Nixon, Minkler, & Freudenberg, 2008).

In terms of the literature, a significant body of research has been established on food security and strategies for promoting food security. Within this literature, research is beginning to emerge around the use of participatory approaches to promote food security at policy levels. With that said, there is a paucity of literature related to the experience of individuals and groups as they engage in such processes, particularly within a Canadian context. Considering the importance of community and citizen participation in policy change efforts (Blackwell, Minkler, & Thompson, 2005; McLeroy et al., 1988; Themba-Nixon et al., 2008), more research is needed to understand public policy advocacy from the perspective of those engaging in it.

Research Aim and Objectives

This study involved a community-university partnership with the Alberta network, Growing Food Security in Alberta (GFSA). Specifically, I worked with stakeholders from GFSA's policy working group (PWG) on the development of a public policy advocacy project to promote food security. This research aim supports the PWG's mission of advocating for policies to promote food security in Alberta as well as the group's desire to build capacity in the area of public policy advocacy. In addition, I explored the experience of this group as it engaged in the advocacy process. Stakeholders in the PWG represented individuals living or working in communities across Alberta. Specific objectives of the study included:

- To document and describe stakeholder engagement in a participatory public policy advocacy project to promote food security; and
- To explore stakeholders' experiences engaging in the advocacy project.

Researcher Statement

Throughout the study, I played the role of both the student researcher and project facilitator. As such, my experience, knowledge, and beliefs have shaped many aspects of this research. In this section, I provide background on the experiences and assumptions that led me to this research focus, as well as lessons learnt that contributed to new understandings and shifts in my perspective over the course of the study.

First, it is important to note that I approached this research with a primary interest in using public policy to create healthier, more food secure communities. Prior to beginning my Masters in Public Health, I worked for the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention (APCCP), focusing on the development of the Policy Readiness Tool, a resource designed to increase local capacity to facilitate healthy public policy change (Nykiforuk, Atkey, Nieuwendyk, Raine, Reed, & Kyle, 2011). Through this experience and my subsequent coursework in the School of Public Health, I came to believe that governments have a role to play in creating healthier and more equitable environments. I also came to value the use of participatory approaches to facilitate healthy policy change. In addition, when I started my graduate studies, I was interested in the topic of food security because I believed it was an important determinant of health. I also believed in the need to move beyond charitable food models to create long-term solutions to food security issues.

As part of this study, I adopted a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach to help guide the development of the public policy advocacy project. This approach

not only aligned with my interests, but also reflected the culture of GFSA. Going into the project, I also believed that participatory approaches, such as CBPR, had the potential to increase individual and community capacity, as well as contribute to the development of more relevant and sustainable public health interventions.

Considering my role as both the facilitator and student researcher, it is important for me to acknowledge that I wanted stakeholders in the group to build their skills in the area of public policy advocacy. I also hoped that they would consider their involvement in the project to be a beneficial experience. Nevertheless, I approached the study with a critical lens and I had balanced expectations for the project.

Reflecting on my experience as a student researcher, it is also important to note that when I began preparing for this study, I conceptualized food security from a household perspective, which is largely focused on financial access to food (Tarasuk et al., 2014). However, as I engaged with GFSA in preparation for this study, my perspective on food security began to expand. I now see value in a CFS perspective, which involves engaging in strategies that promote the health and wellbeing of the community food system as a whole (Slater, 2007). This is in line with my training in health promotion, which emphasizes an ecological approach to public health and, in recent years, has called for greater recognition of the interconnections between the domains of health, socio-economics, and the environment (Springett, Whitelaw, & Dooris, 2010). Nevertheless, I am left with the question of, given finite time and resources, how can individuals and groups prioritize their work within a CFS framework and ensure that some issues and voices are not lost amidst the diversity of priorities present within a CFS approach.

Over the course of the project, I also learnt a great deal about participatory research. At the beginning of the project, I tried to make everything follow a structured plan. I also worried about stakeholder engagement levels and if I was playing too large of a role in the project. However, through mentorship with the GFSA project coordinator and my supervisor, I slowly learnt to become somewhat more relaxed in my approach. Part of this learning was facilitated by a qualitative study I had the opportunity to work on during my masters training, led by Dr. Jane Springett at the University of Alberta School of Public Health. Specifically, this study focused on understanding participatory health researchers' conceptualizations of participatory health research and its quality. As part of my work on this study, I interviewed seasoned researchers on their experience engaging in participatory research. Ultimately, having this opportunity while I was in the midst of my own participatory project helped me to solidify my understanding of participatory approaches and to feel more comfortable working in a context where the 'reality' does not always match the participatory ideal.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Overview

This chapter presents a review of the literature. First, I explore the concept of food security and its connection to public health. Further, I highlight different conceptualizations of food security and introduce the study's focus on CFS. I then outline traditional approaches for promoting food security in Canada and provide a rationale for increasing action at the public policy level. Following this, I explore engagement in public policy advocacy to promote food security as a role for public health and discuss the use of CBPR to accomplish this aim. I end the chapter with a review of the literature on stakeholder experience in policy change to promote food security and present the study's significance.

Food Security

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations defines food security as existing “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2008, p. 1). This definition is associated with four dimensions: access, availability, utilization, and stability (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2008; Power, 2008). The dimension of access focuses on individuals' physical and economic ability to access food; the availability dimension concentrates on food production and supply, and; the utilization dimension highlights individuals' ability to make healthy choices (Power, 2008). The dimension of stability focuses on how global factors, such as adverse weather conditions, affect the stability of the other three dimensions over time (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2008).

Food Security and Public Health

Food security is an important determinant of health (World Health Organization, 2014a, 2014b). In the past several decades, issues related to the dimensions of food security have had a significant impact on the public health of Canadians. For example, despite the country's wealth, in 2012, 1.7 million households in Canada experienced insecurity accessing adequate amounts of food, in large part due to financial reasons (Tarasuk et al., 2014). This is concerning as lack of financial access to food has been linked to negative health outcomes, such as inadequate nutrition, heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, adult obesity, food allergies, and poor mental health (McIntyre & Rondeau, 2009; Townsend, Peerson, Love, Achterberg, & Murphy, 2001).

Challenges to food security and public health extend beyond households. The wider food environment also affects the availability and accessibility of healthy food, as well as Canadians' ability to make healthy choices. Research indicates that Canadians have increasingly come to inhabit an 'obesogenic' food environment (Slater et al., 2009; Swinburn, Egger, & Raza, 1999) where energy-rich and nutrient poor foods are widely available and accessible in a variety of settings, such as communities, schools, and recreational facilities (Chaumette, Morency, Royer, Lemieux, & Tremblay, 2008; Hemphill, Raine, Spence, & Smoyer-Tomic, 2008; Winson, 2008). In turn, such environments create barriers to a healthy diet and contribute to public health issues such as overweight and obesity (Slater et al., 2009; Swinburn et al., 1999). In particular, research suggests that a number of Canadian communities experience issues related to geographic food access, though the literature is mixed and somewhat underdeveloped in this area (Beaulac, Kristjansson, & Cummins, 2009; Fleischhacker, Evenson, Rodriguez, & Ammerman, 2011; Health Canada, 2013). For example,

research based in Edmonton, Alberta found that neighbourhoods with low-socioeconomic status had increased exposure to fast food, which tends to be energy-rich and nutrient poor, in contrast to wealthier neighbourhoods (Hemphill et al., 2008; Smoyer-Tomic, Spence, Raine, Amrhein, Cameron, Yassenovskiy, Cutumisu, Hemphill, & Healy, 2008). Such neighbourhood characteristics, in turn, create unsupportive food environments for vulnerable populations and pose a risk for higher consumption of fast food (Smoyer-Tomic et al., 2008).

In addition, researchers are directing attention to wider food system challenges. For instance, multi-national food and beverage companies with significant marketing power have contributed to unhealthy diets by promoting the consumption of energy-rich and nutrient poor food and beverages (Stuckler, McKee, Ebrahim, & Basu, 2012; Stuckler & Nestle, 2012). Further, the modern industrial agricultural system has resulted in unintended environmental issues such as climate change (O'Kane, 2012), which may exacerbate all aspects of food security in the future (Schmidhuber & Tubiello, 2007; Wheeler & von Braun, 2013). Indeed, as Wheeler and von Braun assert, inaction on climate change will have significant future consequences for global under-nutrition and malnutrition and is expected to increase food inequality from local to global levels (Wheeler & von Braun, 2013).

Conceptualizing Food Security

Food security is a broad topic, which researchers conceptualize in different ways and at different levels (Carlsson & Williams, 2008; Tarasuk, 2005). In the field of public health, common ways to conceptualize food security include the household level, the community level, and the cultural level (Carlsson & Williams, 2008; Power, 2008; Tarasuk, 2005). At the household level, food security focuses on the dimensions of food access and is, in large part, concerned with a household's ability to afford adequate amounts of food (Health Canada,

2012; Tarasuk, 2005). In Canada, measurement and monitoring of food security currently focuses on this level (Power, 2008; Tarasuk et al., 2014). One reason for this is that food within a household tends to be shared and its distribution is somewhat controlled and predictable (Tarasuk, 2001b). At the level of community, the definition of food security expands beyond food access to include availability and utilization, as well as an emphasis on food system sustainability and community participation in the food system (Power, 2008; Rideout, Seed, & Ostry, 2006). More recently, sociocultural researcher, Elaine Power, has proposed the cultural level as an additional point of abstraction (Power, 2008). This lens brings attention to unique considerations for Aboriginal people's food security in Canada, such as the importance of traditional food harvesting, sharing, and consumption (Lambden, Receveur, & Kuhnlein, 2007; Power, 2008).

A Community Food Security Perspective

I adopted a CFS perspective to inform this study. As outlined by Hamm and Bellows (2003), CFS is defined as a situation in which “all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (p. 37). Key aspects of a CFS perspective include a food systems approach, the use of long-term and comprehensive strategies to promote food security, and an emphasis on community participation in the food system (Hamm & Bellows, 2003; McCullum, Desjardins, Kraak, Ladipo, & Costello, 2005). In addition, such a perspective aims to consider food issues holistically by taking into account aspects related to the environment, social equity, human health, and economic vitality (Slater, 2007). In line with this, CFS seeks to reconcile a range of values and food system priorities, which ideally combine to create more comprehensive solutions to food security (Hamm & Bellows, 2003).

Ultimately, I adopted a CFS perspective as it is in line with the vision and mission of GFSA and is a common framework for conceptualizing food security in the field of public health (Power, 2008).

Researchers and practitioners situate strategies for promoting CFS along a continuum from short-term to long-term activities (McCullum et al., 2005; Slater, 2007). As outlined by McCullum and colleagues (2005), the first stage of this continuum focuses on strategies that create small but significant changes to the food system, such as client counselling and education programs. The second stage focuses on activities and strategies that build community capacity and support food systems in transition, such as local urban agriculture projects. Finally, the third stage focuses on food system redesign. Considering CFS's emphasis on community participation, examples of strategies at this level include advocating for minimum wage increases, as well as using participatory approaches to mobilize governments and institutions to develop more sustainable food systems (McCullum et al., 2005).

CFS has many potential benefits as both a perspective and approach. For instance, it aims to bring together diverse food system priorities to generate more comprehensive and long-term solutions to food security. With that said, CFS is also associated with challenges and tensions. For example, Hamm and Bellows (2003) assert that those working to promote CFS often struggle to understand issues broadly enough to incorporate diverse priorities. A second challenge surrounds CFS's emphasis on systems redesign, which tends to require more time and resources because it aims to change the wider environmental and structural forces that shape society (Hamm & Bellows, 2003). This can be problematic as many groups working to promote food security, such as community organizations, tend to operate with limited resources (Tarasuk, 2001a).

There are also tensions associated with CFS. For example, Allen (1999) raises concerns regarding CFS projects and their tendency to operate at the local level. Indeed, while Allen recognizes that CFS has the potential to unite the many different groups involved in food security work and encourage democratic participation, she asserts that working solely at the local level is not enough to address the power imbalances that give rise to wider food system issues (Allen, 1999). In a similar sense, researchers operating from a household food security perspective are critical of community-based food initiatives that aim to contribute to hunger reduction and that have food as their focal point. As Tarasuk (2001a) outlines, these responses do not lend themselves to a critical analysis of the wider social and economic forces that limit the ability of individuals and households to financially access food, such as poverty and unemployment. Further, Allen (1999) states that CFS's emphasis on increasing demand for and access to local food risks benefiting the status needs of the privileged over the material needs of the poor (Allen, 1999). She goes on to explain that as fresh produce becomes distinguished by a specific place or method of production, prices tend to increase, reducing the accessibility of such products for low-income individuals (Allen, 1999). Ultimately, this study does not claim to address all of the above tensions. However, it does attend to some of them by highlighting the need to move beyond community-based activity to promote food security at wider levels.

A Note on Terminology

In this study, I define 'food security' broadly in terms of a CFS perspective and use the term CFS and food security somewhat interchangeably; the term 'CFS' is specifically used when discussing CFS as a conceptual lens, while I use 'food security' in a more general sense.

I use the term ‘household food security’ and ‘hunger’ when referring to the ability of households and individuals to financially access food, respectively.

The Social Ecological Model of Health Promotion

The social ecological model of health provides a framework for guiding public health interventions by illustrating how multiple layers of environmental influence impact human behavior (Fisher, 2008; McLeroy et al., 1988). Over the last several decades, public health research has applied ecological models and approaches in different ways (Fisher, 2008; Richard, Gauvin, & Raine, 2011). While such models differ in their level of specificity and influence, commonalities between them include the understanding that layers of influence interact and that individual behavior reflects the influence of all the ecological layers (Fisher, 2008). Along these lines, the social-ecological model provided a useful framework for conceptualizing different strategies for promoting food security in this study.

Specifically, I used McLeroy et al.’s ecological model for the development of health promotion programs, which provides a systematic means of identifying environmental causes of behavior and outlines opportunities for intervention (McLeroy et al., 1988). Representing a seminal contribution to the theory and practice of public health (Richard et al., 2011), this model outlines five environmental levels that exert influence on individual behavior, including the intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, and public policy level (McLeroy et al., 1988).

To-date, researchers have applied ecological models and approaches to a number of topics relevant to food security, including nutrition, food, obesity, and food systems. For example, Glanz, Sallis, Saelens, and Frank (2005) present a conceptual model of community nutrition environments using an ecological understanding of health behaviors. The model

outlines four types of nutrition environments that influence eating behavior via various pathways and, in turn, are influenced by government and organizational policies (Glanz et al., 2005). Further, Robinson (2008) explores dietary behaviors of low-income African Americans using a social-ecological perspective, as well as presents a rationale and guidance for the integration of social-ecological concepts into dietary health promotion programs. Through the analysis, Robinson concludes that the social-ecological model provides a useful framework for understanding the multiple factors that shape dietary behaviors (Robinson, 2008). More recently, Willows, Hanley and Delormier (2012) present an ecological model to assist researchers and decision-makers in understanding obesity in Aboriginal children and youth. Further, in the same year, Rutten, Yarooh, Patrick and Story (2012) published an ecological framework, which identifies strategies for addressing the problems of obesity and hunger through the cultivation of sustainable food systems.

In bringing together a CFS and social-ecological perspective, it is valuable to highlight points of congruence between the two concepts. For one, both approaches emphasize the need to use comprehensive and multi-level approaches to address complex issues (McLeroy et al., 1988; Schwartz, Goodman, & Steckler, 1995). They also recognize the importance of moving beyond short-term or individual-level strategies to promote social change at environmental and structural levels. In addition, both CFS and social ecological approaches suggest a need to encourage citizen and community participation in social change efforts. At the policy level, this includes engagement in policy development and the political process (McCullum et al., 2005; McLeroy et al., 1988).

Traditional Strategies for Building Food Security in Canada

The social ecological perspective is a useful lens through which to conceptualize societal strategies for building food security. Traditionally, strategies for promoting food security in Canada have tended to be ad-hoc, charitable, and community-based in nature (Slater, 2007; Tarasuk, 2001a; Tarasuk, 2005). When the issue of hunger emerged as a national concern in the 1980's due to shifts in Canada's socio-economic landscape, community groups and other civil society organizations responded by establishing food programs such as food banks and charitable meal and snack programs (Koc et al., 2008; Tarasuk, 2001a). Although the initial aim of these programs was to provide temporary relief, the issue persisted. Consequently, in the face of limited government intervention and the retreat of the welfare state, such programs became the primary response to hunger and household food insecurity in Canada (Tarasuk, 2001a).

During the 1980's and 1990's, food banks gained a significant public profile in Canada (Koc et al., 2008). Nevertheless, since that time, a growing body of evidence has emerged critiquing food banks and other emergency food initiatives (Koc et al., 2008; Raine, McIntyre, & Dayle, 2003; Tarasuk & Beaton, 1998). For example, research indicates that food banks do not meet client needs, are only used by a portion of individuals experiencing food insufficiency, are associated with stigma, and do not adequately address the root causes of hunger and household food insecurity, such as poverty and income inequality (Hamelin, Beaudry, & Habicht, 2002; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003).

In the last several decades, concerns regarding the inadequacy of food banks and growing recognition of wider food system issues have contributed to a rise in CFS and alternative food initiatives. Examples of such initiatives include community kitchens,

community gardens, and cooperative food buying clubs (Koc et al., 2008). Like CFS, these initiatives aim to achieve a range of goals, such as building community capacity, meeting community food needs, increasing access to healthy food, promoting social justice, and building sustainable food systems. Nevertheless, similar to the tensions raised about CFS, researchers question the ability of these initiatives to meet the needs of low-income individuals and argue that their often community-based nature fails to generate long-term and sustainable solutions (Allen, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2009; Tarasuk, 2001a).

Promoting Food Security at the Public Policy Level: Rationale for Action

Milio (1998) defines public policy “as a guide to government action at any jurisdictional level to alter what would otherwise occur” (p. 15). According to Milio, the intent of public policy is to generate a more acceptable set of circumstances and, when operating from a public health perspective, to create a healthier society (Milio, 1998). In the field of public health, the rationale for engaging in public policy change is well articulated in the literature (Schmid, Pratt, & Howze, 1995). In particular, lessons from the tobacco control movement highlight the importance of using policy to alter social and physical environments in ways that de-normalize the use of tobacco and facilitate healthy behavior change amongst individuals (Dorfman, Wilbur, Lingas, Woodruff, & Wallack, 2005; Green, Orleans, Ottoson, Cameron, Pierce, & Bettinghaus, 2006; Mercer, Khan, Green, Rosenthal, Nathan, Husten, & Dietz, 2010).

In the last several decades, public policy level initiatives have emerged across Canada to support community-based food initiatives and promote food security at wider ecological levels. Canadian municipalities, in particular, are playing a significant role in this work. As of June 2013, 64 municipal or regional food policy initiatives had been established across Canada,

many of which have direct or indirect links to municipal government (MacRae & Donahue, 2013). These initiatives perform a range of tasks, such as helping to leverage resources for municipal food projects, working with planning departments, and supporting the work of public health units (MacRae & Donahue, 2013). According to MacRae and Donahue (2013), the high level of municipal involvement in food policy work may be because municipalities have historically been the jurisdictional level most responsive to citizen needs as they are closest to the community.

At the provincial level, many jurisdictions have implemented policies and programs to promote food security, though the range and comprehensiveness of such activities varies. British Columbia, in particular, has taken a number of steps in this regard. For example, it has made CFS a core public health function, provides funding for community-level food action and supports local food production, among other activities (Epp, 2011; MacRae & Donahue, 2013). Alberta, in contrast, has implemented initiatives to encourage local food and improved nutrition, but has arguably done less to support community-based action or integrate food security goals across government sectors (Epp, 2011). In addition, provincial networks like GFSA, which are often structured as non-profit organizations or informal coalitions, have been established across Canada (Levkoe, 2014). Many of these networks incorporate policy change efforts (Levkoe, 2014). GFSA, for instance, was just beginning to develop a policy-change focus when this study began.

In terms of national strategies for promoting food security, traditionally agricultural production has been the primary driver of food-related policy. Following this, researchers point to a void in comprehensive food policy at this level (MacRae, 2011). As MacRae (2011)

outlines, to-date Canada lacks coherent food policy aimed at joining up relevant policy domains, such as health, agriculture, and social and economic development.

Ultimately, while contributions to food security have been made by government, community groups, and other civil society organizations, researchers and practitioners continue to call for broader, more integrated public policy responses at all levels of government to address the systemic factors that compromise food security (MacRae, 2011; Rideout et al., 2007; Slade, 2013; Slater, 2007; Tarasuk, 2010). For example, Tarasuk (2010) highlights the need for increased federal, provincial, and municipal policy action to lift economic and geographic barriers to food access. Dietitians of Canada has also called on dietitians to work with groups such as civil society organizations and food policy councils to advocate for public policy that supports CFS goals at multiple levels (Slater, 2007).

Engaging in Public Policy Advocacy to Promote Food Security: A Role for Public Health

In the public health literature, advocacy is recognized as an important strategy for facilitating healthy public policy change (Carlisle, 2000; World Health Organization, 1986). While the term ‘advocacy’ can be defined in many ways, from a health perspective it can be described as “a combination of individual and social actions designed to gain political commitment, policy support, social acceptance and systems support for a particular health goal or programme” (Nutbeam, 1998, p. 353). In this study, I refer to advocacy specifically in relation to public policy.

In the move towards more comprehensive approaches to improve population health, there is increasing awareness of the need to situate health issues and potential solutions within the context of those affected and to encourage community and citizen participation in the process of public policy advocacy and change (Blackwell et al., 2005; Bryant et al., 2007;

McLeroy et al., 1988; Themba-Nixon et al., 2008). For example, the literature highlights the fact that for many individuals “public policy has become unfamiliar and irrelevant, complicated, inaccessible, and confusing” (Blackwell & Colmenar, 2000, p. 162). Further, community members engaging in advocacy may also face challenges related to community mobilization, bringing together diverse viewpoints, and accessing necessary resources (Cheezum, Coombe, Israel, McGranaghan, Burris, Grant-White, Weigl, & Anderson, 2013). The literature also outlines barriers faced by professionals from health-related fields who often work in community, such as the feeling that there is not enough time to engage in policy advocacy, that it won’t make a difference, that it is beyond ones skill-level or training, and lack of organizational support (Blackwell et al., 2005; Galer-Unti, Tappe, & Lachenmayr, 2004; Power, Sheeshka, & Heron, 1996; Tarasuk, 2001a). In addition, the literature indicates that effective policy change efforts require specific skills and knowledge (Cheezum et al., 2013; Minkler, Breckwich, Chang, & Miller, 2009), which individuals and groups may not possess. Considering this, a role for public health initiatives emerges in terms of building the capacity of community members, community-based groups, and other relevant stakeholders to engage in public policy advocacy.

Community-based Participatory Research for Public Policy Advocacy

Community-based participatory research is a collaborative approach to research that aims to equitably involve community and university partners in the research process (Viswanathan, Ammerman, Eng, Gartlehner, Lohr, Griffith, Rhodes, Samuel-Hodge, Maty, & Lux, 2004; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). While CBPR projects differ in their aims and the specific approaches used, they tend to share core principles, including participation, co-

operation, co-learning, capacity building, and a balance between research and action (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008b).

Part of a participatory research paradigm, CBPR has emerged as a promising approach for facilitating engagement in public policy advocacy and change (Israel, Coombe, Cheezum, Schulz, McGranaghan, Lichtenstein, Reyes, Clement, & Burris, 2010; Themba-Nixon et al., 2008). For example, Vasquez et al. (2007) outlines a CBPR partnership in San Francisco that resulted in a number of policy victories aimed at building CFS at the local level. Moreover, within a Canadian context, Bryant, Raphael and Travers (2007) argue that CBPR has promise in terms of democratizing the policy process and enabling citizens to influence the social determinants of health. Ultimately, while CBPR approaches typically focus on local policy change, researchers call for advocates to engage in such activities at multiple scales of government (Freudenberg & Tsui, 2014).

Exploring Stakeholders' Experiences in Public Policy Advocacy to Promote Food Security

Food security is an important area of interdisciplinary study and, over the last several decades, a significant body of Canadian literature has focused on this topic. From a household food security perspective, studies explore the public health impacts of food insecurity, the experience of food insecurity among different population groups, and the effectiveness of community-based responses to food insecurity (Hamelin et al., 2002; Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2009; Raine et al., 2003; Tarasuk, 2001a). In addition, a growing body of literature is emerging in the area of CFS. For example, Canadian studies explore strategies for promoting CFS, challenges related to achieving CFS goals, and planning for sustainable food systems (Johnston & Baker, 2005; Levkoe, 2006; Mah & Thang, 2013; Wegener, Hanning, & Raine, 2012).

In terms of participatory projects, a number of studies have been published in Canada, which aim to promote food security at institutional and public policy levels. Examples of such projects include community-based research to engage in food policy planning at the local level (Hayhurst, Dietrich-O'Connor, Hazen, & Landman, 2013), and a community-based action research project to foster food citizenship and create sustainable food systems in public schools (Rojas, Valley, Mansfield, Orrego, Chapman, & Harlap, 2011). Further, the Food Action Research Center (FoodARC) at Mount Saint Vincent University in Nova Scotia, Canada, has published a number of reports, peer-reviewed articles, and theses on the use of participatory approaches involving advocacy and policy change to promote food security. For instance, William et al. (2012) outlines FoodARC's development of a participatory food-costing project (PFCP), a component of which involves working with partners to advocate and support policy change (Williams et al., 2012). To-date, the PFCP has had positive impacts related to policy, such as informing increases in income assistance and minimum wage rates, and playing a role in the positioning of food security as a goal within the provincial Healthy Eating Nova Scotia Strategy (Williams et al., 2012).

While research is growing around the use of participatory policy change efforts to promote food security, a limited number of studies have been published regarding the experience of individuals and groups as they engage in such processes, particularly in a Canadian context. One example is Knezevic et al.'s (2014) study, which presents findings from a discourse analysis related to participant experiences in the PFCP outlined above. Considering the importance of community and citizen participation in public policy advocacy and potential barriers to such participation, an increased understanding of how participatory advocacy projects are experienced by those engaging in them is needed. This need is echoed in Cheezum

et al.'s (2013) study on building community capacity to advocate for policy change in Detroit, where the authors call for further research to understand the experience of communities as they engage in the policy making process.

Study Significance

This study aimed to assist GFSA and the PWG in moving from traditional community-based strategies for promoting food security to engage in action at the policy level. In terms of the literature, the study will advance the current state of knowledge and practice by presenting an example of a participatory public policy advocacy project within an Albertan context. In addition, findings may help to inform similar advocacy projects in Alberta and in jurisdictions across Canada.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided a review of the literature. In the last several decades, Canada has experienced a number of challenges related to food security, including hunger, obesity, and wider food system issues. Such concerns are problematic considering food security is an important determinant of health, necessary for human health and wellbeing (McIntyre, 2003; World Health Organization, 2014a). As a concept, food security can be defined in different ways and at different levels (Carlsson & Williams, 2008; Tarasuk, 2005). In this study, I adopted a CFS perspective, which incorporates a food systems approach, emphasizes participation in the food system, and strives to use comprehensive and long-term strategies to promote food security (Hamm & Bellows, 2003; McCullum et al., 2005).

In line with a CFS perspective, this study applied the social ecological model as a framework for organizing current strategies for promoting food security in Canada. From this perspective, traditional food security initiatives tended to focus on short-term, community-

based solutions to address hunger (Slater, 2007; Tarasuk, 2001a). More recently, however, community and policy-level strategies have emerged around a broad range of goals related to CFS (Koc et al., 2008; MacRae & Donahue, 2013). While these strategies make important contributions to food security, researchers continue to call for broader policy action (MacRae, 2011; Rideout et al., 2007; Slater, 2007; Tarasuk, 2010).

Engagement in advocacy is one method for encouraging public policy change (Carlisle, 2000). Considering the importance of community and citizen participation in policy change efforts (Blackwell et al., 2005; Bryant et al., 2007; Israel et al., 2010; McLeroy et al., 1988; Themba-Nixon et al., 2008), a role for public health initiatives is to build the capacity of community members, community-based groups, and other relevant stakeholders to engage in public policy advocacy. CBPR represents one promising approach for accomplishing this aim (Israel et al., 2010; Themba-Nixon et al., 2008).

In terms of the literature, a number of studies incorporate participatory approaches with the goal of promoting food security through policy change. However, there is a paucity of literature in terms of understanding the advocacy experience from the perspective of those engaging in such projects. To help address current gaps in research and practice, I worked with stakeholders from GFSA's PWG to engage in a public policy advocacy project to promote food security, as well as explored the group's experience throughout this process.

Chapter Three: The Research Setting

Overview

To understand the rationale for this study, it is important to consider the social and institutional context in which it took place. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research setting and the community-university partnership.

The Province of Alberta

The research took place in Alberta, an energy-resource rich province in Western Canada. As of July 1st, 2013, Alberta had a population of 4,025,074 million people, with major city populations in Edmonton and Calgary (Government of Alberta, 2014). The current governing party in Alberta is the Progressive Conservative Party, which has been in government for over 40 years. Key components of the government's strategy include a low tax regime, streamlined regulations, a strong fiscal framework, and modern infrastructure (Government of Alberta, 2014).

Over the last several years, Alberta has experienced a high standard of living and high provincial growth rate, a phenomenon fuelled in part by the province's oil and gas industry. In addition, food and beverage processing and primary agriculture make up an important part of the province's traditional economic base (Government of Alberta, 2014).

Despite Alberta's wealth and productive agricultural land, the province faces a number of food security challenges. For example, 11.5% of households in Alberta experienced food insecurity in 2012 (Tarasuk et al., 2014). Fruit and vegetable intake, an important component of a healthy diet (Pérez, 2002), is also low in the province. Statistics from 2013 indicate that consumption rates for fruits and vegetables in Alberta were on par with the national average. This suggests that, in 2013, only around 40.8% of Albertans 12 years or older reported

consuming the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables per day (Statistics Canada, 2014).

In addition to the above challenges, the province has experienced issues related to food production and the food system. For instance, in recent years, the farming population in the province has been on the decline. A significant portion of farmers are also reporting their main occupation as non-agriculture (Statistics Canada, 2006). Further, in the last several decades, public confidence in Alberta's food safety system has been eroded by events such as the beef recall at XL Food Inc. in Brooks, AB (Lewis, Corriveau, & Usborne, 2013). This event involved the contamination of beef with *Escherichia coli* (E. coli), resulting in 18 sick consumers and the removal of approximately 1,800 products from Canadian and United States markets (Lewis et al., 2013).

Health and wellness in Alberta. In terms of health and wellness management in Alberta, the provincial government has traditionally emphasized individual treatment and management of disease. The province tends to place less emphasis on preventative measures, such as the implementation of social programs and policies aimed at addressing the systemic causes of disease (Briggs & Le, 2012). Viewed through a public health lens, such an approach can be seen to emphasize the concept of individual responsibility, which holds that individuals are chiefly responsible for shaping their environments and have the capacity to control their health (Emmons, 2000; McKnight, 1978). With that said, recent events suggest the provincial government is taking steps towards prevention and systems thinking. For example, in February 2012, the government released a social policy framework to provide a vision for social policy in Alberta, which includes an increased emphasis on the use of preventative measures to tackle health and social issues (Government of Alberta, 2012).

The Community-University Partnership

Growing Food Security in Alberta. This study involved a community-university partnership with the GFSA network. Established in 2003, the network aims to engage communities across Alberta in strategies to promote food security. Currently, the network seeks to engage in activities such as connecting individuals and groups, sharing success stories, and facilitating discussion and action towards achieving food security in Alberta communities.

GFSA has operated through grant funding in the past. However, at the time of the study, the network was volunteer run and operating with limited resources. Key figures within the organization include an un-paid project coordinator and an un-paid assistant project coordinator. The project coordinator is a founding member of GFSA and acts as a primary facilitator of GFSA projects and events, while the assistant project coordinator plays a key role in the administrative and technical aspects of the organization. In addition to the two coordinators, GFSA receives support from a steering committee and community facilitators from across Alberta. Halfway through the study, a non-profit organization was established with a board of directors, which now operates the GFSA network.

GFSA members are located across the province and span a variety of sectors related to food security, such as local agriculture, nutrition, health, and permaculture. Due to geographic constraints related to operating a provincial network in a large jurisdiction such as Alberta, the majority of GFSA meetings and correspondence takes place through teleconference meetings, the GFSA website, a list-serve, and social media platforms.

The Policy Working Group. Spurred by growing awareness of the need to engage in long-term strategies to promote food security, GFSA formed a PWG in 2011 with the aim of strengthening policies relevant to food security in Alberta. Prior to the study, the group

typically met once a month via teleconference to discuss opportunities for advocacy and work towards advocacy goals. During this time, the PWG engaged in activities such as the development of an elections brochure and submissions to government consultations.

Partnership formation. The establishment of a strong partnership between the research team and GFSA was integral to this study's feasibility. In this section, I outline how the partnership for this study came into being.

My involvement with GFSA began in January of 2012. At the time, I was working as a research assistant for the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention (APCCP), a coalition of organizations advocating for healthy public policy change (Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention, 2014), which is co-directed by my supervisor, Dr. Kim Raine, and includes GFSA as an organizational member. As a graduate student interested in food security and healthy public policy, I was eager to volunteer for GFSA and explore the possibility of working with the organization on my thesis project. After discussing this idea with my supervisor, she advised me to get in touch with the GFSA project coordinator. After doing so, the project coordinator and I discussed my interest in public policy and, as a result, she recommended that I begin volunteering for the PWG.

During the winter of 2012, I attended the PWG's monthly teleconference meetings and assisted with advocacy activities. Through volunteering, I came to value the perspectives presented by members of the PWG and appreciated the collaborative environment of our meetings. Further, I began to feel that, by working with the group as part of my thesis, I could be an asset to GFSA by providing much-needed human resources.

In the spring of 2012, the GFSA project coordinator and I began to discuss the possibility of working with the PWG on a public policy advocacy project as part of my thesis.

During our discussions, we both recognized that the group was just beginning to engage in public policy advocacy and that this project had the potential to strengthen the PWG's capacity in this regard. Once I had discussed general ideas for my thesis with the GFSA project coordinator, she recommended that I present the idea to the PWG. Based on this advice, I met with members of the PWG in early July 2012 to explore their interest in the project. Overall, individuals were interested in seeing the PWG grow and increase capacity for advocacy, but seemed somewhat apprehensive regarding the level of engagement that may be required.

With the commitment from the GFSA project coordinator and interest from current PWG members, I began to develop a specific research purpose and project proposal. This component of the research was solidified through meetings during the summer of 2012. During this period, the project coordinator also sent emails to the PWG, informing them of project developments and providing opportunities for questions and feedback.

The research team. In this study, the research team consisted of my supervisor, the GFSA project coordinator, student volunteers, and me. While I was responsible for conducting all study-related tasks, my supervisor and the GFSA project coordinator assisted me in project planning and provided ongoing support and feedback. I also received assistance from student volunteers, mainly undergraduates, who helped me with research activities, such as writing field notes, transcribing interviews, and preparing knowledge translation documents. All student volunteers signed a confidentiality agreement prior to engaging in research activities.

It is also important to highlight the research team's relationship to the APCCP. As previously described, GFSA is an organizational member of the APCCP, my supervisor is the co-director and I was a research assistant for the Coalition during the study. As a result of these

relationships, the APCCP became a significant resource during the study, linking the research team to capacity-building strategies, policy resources, and advocates in the province.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the setting in which the research took place. Situated within the province of Alberta, this research involved a community-university partnership with GFSA, specifically working with the PWG. The study's research team included my supervisor, the GFSA project coordinator, student volunteers, and me. Further, the APCCP provided support throughout the project.

Chapter Four: Methods

Overview

This chapter provides an overview of study methods. I present the study's research design, as well as provide details regarding the study sample and recruitment. I also provide an overview of the public policy advocacy project and its development. Last, I outline the process of data generation and analysis, as well as discuss study ethics and quality.

Research Design

This study was informed by the principles of CBPR and a focused ethnographic approach. To inform the development of the public policy advocacy project—the intervention component of the study—I used CBPR principles. As outlined in the literature review, CBPR is a collaborative approach that equitably involves partners in the research process with the goal of building capacity and facilitating social change (Viswanathan et al., 2004; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). Rooted in a subjectivist epistemology, such an approach emphasizes the co-creation of knowledge, co-learning, capacity building, the primacy of the local context, researcher reflexivity, and the importance of working towards social change (Mayan, 2009; Springett, Wright, & Roche, April 2011). Over the last several years, CBPR has gained increased legitimacy as a research approach and provides a useful framework for guiding meaningful stakeholder participation in the study (Viswanathan et al., 2004). Although CBPR ideally aims to involve participants as co-researchers in all stages of the research, there is no consensus in the field of public health regarding the exact level of participation required (Viswanathan et al., 2004).

CBPR was a suitable framework to guide this study for a number of reasons. First, members of the PWG expressed interest in taking part in the project and building the capacity

of its members to engage in policy advocacy. A participatory approach is also consistent with the culture of GFSA, which operates using community-building perspectives. Second, a growing body of literature has applied CBPR principles to public policy advocacy. Barbara Israel's (2010) work, for example, outlines how a CBPR process can help to build the capacity of participants to engage in policy advocacy (Israel et al., 2010). Last, CBPR is in line with the study's CFS and social-ecological orientation, which emphasize the reciprocal relationship between individuals and their environment (McLeroy et al., 1988; Springett et al., April 2011).

In addition to using a participatory framework to guide the development of the public policy advocacy project, I used the method of focused ethnography to document stakeholder engagement throughout the project and to understand the group's engagement experience. Traditional ethnography is a flexible and inductive method aimed at exploring the behaviours, norms, and attitudes of individuals connected by group membership (Schulte, 2000). In contrast, focused ethnography is more specific in nature because it centres on a distinct phenomenon and operates within a single context (Mayan, 2009; Speziale & Carpenter, 2003).

Focused ethnography was an appropriate method to guide the study because it allowed me to achieve a rich understanding of stakeholders' experiences in the context of the public policy advocacy project. More specifically, use of this method was helpful in capturing attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives regarding food, public policy advocacy, and working together to develop an advocacy project. Further, in contrast to traditional ethnography, focused ethnography typically involves a smaller group of people and shorter timelines (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013; Knoblauch, 2005). This corresponds with the study's research aims and project timeline of less than a year.

Study Sample and Stakeholder Recruitment

A combination of purposeful and convenience sampling was used to recruit potential stakeholders to the study. The sample consisted of individuals connected by group membership through their involvement in the PWG or wider GFSA network. In terms of initial sample criteria, individuals had to be over 18-years of age, living or working in the province of Alberta, and connected to food security initiatives in their community. This sample was chosen based on the fact that it provided the richest data on the topic of interest (Mayan, 2009; Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). For example, recruiting individuals with previous knowledge of food security and related issues provided an entry point to discuss food security at the public policy level. Further, recruiting individuals with a previous connection to the PWG or wider GFSA network helped to foster group cohesion.

The initial plan was to recruit eight to ten stakeholders. This sample size was based on the current size of the PWG as well as group dynamics research suggesting that small groups of this approximate size facilitate maximum communication and engagement (Becker, Israel, & Allen, 2005). Nevertheless, in keeping with CBPR principles, there was flexibility in the number of individuals I recruited to help meet the needs of GFSA and to ensure inclusion (Becker et al., 2005). Recruitment involved contacting potential stakeholders by email through the PWG and GFSA network.

The total number of stakeholders enrolled in the study changed over the course of the project. Initially, 12 individuals agreed to take part in the study. Early on in the project, two stakeholders withdrew from the study due to employment changes. However, two additional stakeholders enrolled based on specific recommendations from GFSA. It is also important to note that one stakeholder attended few meetings and did not participate in a final interview,

though this stakeholder did not officially withdraw from the study. Along these lines, the study had 12 individuals enrolled at the project's end, though only 11 were active in the project. Overall, 14 individuals took part in the study.

Informed Consent

Prior to initiating the study, I received informed consent from all potential participants. Individuals were notified through an information letter and over the phone of the study's research purpose, the research procedures involved, anticipated risk and benefits, inconveniences or discomforts they may experience, and their right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any point (Coughlin, 2006). Stakeholders had the opportunity to review the information letter at key points throughout the study, such as prior to interviews.

At the beginning of the study, I notified stakeholders in the information letter that I would not identify GFSA in the findings that resulted from the study, a decision made by the research team at the beginning of the project to help ensure the group's anonymity. However, at the end of the study, stakeholders expressed the desire to use study results to inform the development of an advocacy toolkit, requiring that I link GFSA to findings. Based on this, I received ethics approval to discuss the possibility of enabling GFSA and the APCCP to be identified in the data and to have stakeholders sign an addendum to the information letter illustrating their consent for this change. All stakeholders who took part in the study were comfortable with the proposed changes and signed the addendum.

The Public Policy Advocacy Project

The intervention component of this study involved engaging stakeholders as part of the PWG in a public policy advocacy project to promote food security. This 9-month project consisted of three phases: (a) an initial workshop to provide a refresher on public policy

advocacy and to begin the generation of our advocacy goal; (b) monthly meetings and activities aimed at developing the advocacy project, and; (c) a final workshop to synthesize project outcomes. I outline the three general phases below. A detailed description of this process is located in chapter six.

Box 1. Project Phases

<p><u>Initial Workshop:</u> An initial workshop was held in November 2012 via Adobe Connect, a web conferencing platform (Adobe Systems Incorporated, 2012). The overall aim of this workshop was to provide a primer on public policy advocacy and begin the generation of our advocacy goal. Specific objectives of this workshop included establishing rapport among members, setting guidelines for the project, reviewing the process of public policy advocacy and beginning the generation of an advocacy goal.</p>	<p><u>PWG Monthly Meeting and Advocacy Activities:</u> From December 2012 until June 2013, the group met monthly via teleconference to refine our advocacy goal and develop it into a campaign. During this period, the group also engaged in activities related to the development of the advocacy campaign. Specific objectives related to this process included engaging in a participatory process to generate ideas, make decisions and delegate tasks related to the policy advocacy project and building the group's capacity to engage in public policy advocacy.</p>	<p><u>Final Workshop:</u> A final in-person workshop was held in July, 2013. Specific objectives of this workshop were to engage face-to-face with members of the PWG, finalize current project activities, explore stakeholders' engagement experiences, generate ideas for the project's sustainability and discuss use of study results. Ultimately, while the advocacy project has continued after the study's end, this workshop represented the final stage in the research component of the project.</p>
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As agreed upon by members of the research team, the initial and final workshops were only open to stakeholders participating in the study. The research team made this decision to help ensure confidentiality, as well as to allow for the possibility of recording the audio from group discussions. Monthly meetings were open to study participants, as well as non-participants involved in the GFSA network. This helped reduce study constraints on GFSA and allowed network members to function as per usual. Non-participants were informed that notes

were being recorded as data. I also asked note-takers not to record direct comments from non-participants.

Development of the Public Policy Advocacy Project

Development of the public policy advocacy project was informed by CBPR approaches to public policy advocacy, public health advocacy resources, and input from stakeholders and the research team.

Drawing on models of the policy change process, such as Kingdon's model of policy development (Kingdon, 2003), CBPR approaches to policy change identify a number of steps in the policy process, including problem definition, agenda setting, constructing policy alternatives, policy implementation, and evaluation (Cacari-Stone, Wallerstein, Garcia, & Minkler, 2014; Gonzalez, Minkler, Garcia, Gordon, Garzón, Palaniappan, Prakash, & Beveridge, 2011; Minkler, Vásquez, Tajik, & Petersen, 2008; Petersen, Minkler, Vásquez, & Baden, 2006; Vasquez, Minkler, & Shepard, 2006). While such models have been critiqued for oversimplifying the complex policy process, they can provide advocates with practical insight, highlighting the cyclical nature of policy making and the role of contextual factors in influencing policy change (Cacari-Stone et al., 2014).

Informed by steps in the policy process, Themba-Nixon (2010)¹ outlines a framework for policy advocates, which includes seven steps in the development of a policy advocacy initiative. These steps include testing the waters, defining the initiative, direct issue organizing, steering through appropriate channels, victory and defense, implementation, and enforcement.

¹ A similar policy advocacy framework based on the work of Themba-Nixon is presented in Minkler and Wallerstein's *Community-based Participatory Research for Health: From Process to Outcomes* (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008a). The stages in the framework include: Assessing the policy environment, reframing the issue and defining the initiative, strategic power analysis, organizing support, in the belly of the beast, victory and defense, and enforcement and evaluation (Themba-Nixon et al., 2008).

This framework provided a useful guide to inform the development of the advocacy project in this study. This is because it emphasizes stakeholder engagement and community mobilization, as well as provides a clear set of steps for public policy advocacy that are suitable for new advocates. In addition to this framework, a number of public health advocacy resources provided helped inform collaborative engagement around advocacy specifically within a Canadian context. Particularly useful resources include the “Thought about Food? Workbook” for promoting food security through public policy change, developed by the Food Security Projects of the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council and the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre (2005), and the Canadian Public Health Association’s “Leadership for Public Health” (2009) guide to advocacy.

It is also important to note that development of the advocacy project was participatory and experiential. Before the project began, I consulted with stakeholders to explore their previous involvement with policy advocacy, skills and competencies they were hoping to gain, and recommended advocacy resources. Stakeholders were also encouraged to share resources and lessons learnt during the project. Further, I regularly discussed ideas for advocacy activities with my supervisor, the GFSA program coordinator, and the APCCP Policy Analyst. This process helped to ensure project feasibility and allowed for the translation of lessons learnt from the GFSA and APCCP to the advocacy project.

Data Generation

This study employed a variety of data generation strategies to document the group’s engagement in the advocacy project and to understand their engagement experience. Ultimately, focused ethnographies tend to rely heavily on interviews, limiting or removing additional forms of data (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013). However, a number of studies have

employed data generating strategies within this approach (Ensign & Bell, 2004; Garcia & Saewyc, 2007). In this study, the use of multiple data generating strategies was helpful in developing thick description to track the development of the advocacy project over time, as well as to capture the influence of contextual factors on the project (Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). It also contributed to the triangulation of data sources, which helped to reduce the potential for bias (Ensign & Bell, 2004). The specific strategies used in this study included in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and the collection of written documentation from group activities and discussions. To help keep stakeholders' names and responses anonymous in the data, I assigned each stakeholder with a number identification, which I applied to all research material.

Semi-Structured Interviews. The primary form of data generation in this study was one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview is an open and flexible approach that can help generate rich accounts of the informant's perspectives, perceptions, and experiences related to a specific topic of interest. Semi-structured interviews are in line with CBPR perspectives as they represent a collaboration between the investigator and the informant (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao).

Interviews were conducted with stakeholders at the beginning, mid, and end-point of the study. I chose these time-points to achieve a rich understanding of the groups experience over the course of the project and to help ensure stakeholders were able to recall key aspects of their experience given that the project spanned several months. To guide the interview process, I developed an interview guide for each time-point. Interview questions were informed by my research objectives, the interactive nature of data collection and analysis, and ethnographic approaches. The first interview focuses on building rapport, achieving an understanding of

stakeholders' roles in the community and experiences with advocacy, as well as collecting information to inform the development of the advocacy project. The mid-point and final interview broadly explored stakeholder's opinions, attitudes, and interactions related to the advocacy project. In addition, I used the mid-point and final interview as a way to explore stakeholders' perspectives relating to my ongoing analysis, which helped to ensure accurate interpretation of the data and strengthen the participatory nature of the study (Mayan, 2009).

Participants had the option of conducting interviews in-person or over the phone. Due to geographical constraints, the vast majority of interviews occurred over the phone. On average, interviews lasted between thirty minutes to an hour. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Over the course of the study, I conducted 34 interviews in total. Of the 14 stakeholders who participated in the entire study, 9 stakeholders completed all three interview rounds.

Participant Observation. Participant observation in the form of field notes was a second source of data in the study. Participant observation took place at all formal project meetings and structured group activities, including monthly teleconferences and workshops. Field notes were guided by the interactive nature of data collection and analysis and focused on factors such as group dialogue, how people behave and interact, attitudes and opinions expressed, the process of meetings, and organizational characteristics (Mulhall, 2003).

In relation to participant observation, it is important to recognize my role in the study as a complete participant (Mayan, 2009). In addition to my research role, I was also the main project facilitator. While this helped me to understand my environment, it posed a challenge in terms of taking detailed notes and enabling me to understand group activities from the perspective of those participating. To address this challenge, I enlisted two to three

undergraduate student volunteers at all group meetings to assist with the development of field notes, such as recording key parts of dialogue. In turn, I used field notes from volunteers to inform the writing of a detailed field note soon after each group activity. Graneheim, Norberg and Jansson (2001) suggest that this collective approach can help reduce misunderstandings and enable the crosschecking of data.

Written Discussion Material. Written documentation from participatory group activities was a third and less significant form of data in the study. Examples of such documentation include activity worksheets, flip chart paper, and meeting minutes. The purpose of collecting this material was two-fold. First, since the group developed these documents as part of the advocacy project, they helped to describe and document the public policy advocacy process. Second, collecting the documents as coded data helped to achieve a deeper understanding of the group's attitudes, opinions, and beliefs around food security and public policy advocacy.

To be included as coded data for the thematic analysis of stakeholders' experiences, written responses had to be relevant to the group's experience and reflect the direct thoughts and opinions of stakeholders. In contrast, I used documents that I had played a role in generating, such as meeting minutes, to inform my description of stakeholder engagement, but not as coded data.

Reflective Journal. The need to be reflexive is integral to qualitative approaches, particularly within the field of ethnography and CBPR. According to Mayan, reflexivity can be thought of as "the process of being highly attentive to how and why you make decisions and interpretations along the research way" (Mayan, 2009, p. 137). To assist with reflectivity, I engaged in journaling throughout the study. This provided me with a place to think critically

about the research, track my ‘aha’ moments, and record personal assumptions and challenges that arose. From the beginning of my research, I knew that this journal was not going to be included as data (Mayan, 2009). For this reason, it provided me with a safe space to track my thoughts and opinions throughout the study.

Field Journal. In addition to my reflexive journal, I kept a field diary to record study logistics. Examples of activities recorded include interview notes, the location of activities, and descriptions of advocacy activities that took place outside formal group activities (Mayan, 2009). I did not use this journal as coded data. However, it did aid me in the process of describing key events that occurred throughout the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study took two forms based on my research objectives. The first objective was to document and describe stakeholder engagement in the advocacy project. Data analysis related to this objective involved organizing field notes and written documentation from group activities chronologically. In line with Travers’s (1997) account of participatory research with low-income women, my aim here was not so much to analyze the data, but to represent the process of stakeholder engagement in the advocacy project in an organized fashion.

The second objective focused on exploring stakeholders’ experiences participating in the public policy advocacy project. Data analysis related to this objective involved a thematic analysis of interviews, field notes, and written documents from the study. Specifically, I followed the six-step approach to thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) in an iterative and inductive fashion. I chose this approach as it offered a well-outlined process that was suitable for a new investigator. It also provided a flexible approach for organizing

large amounts of data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I conducted the third round of interviews, I grew confident that I had reached theoretical saturation as I continued to identify similar ideas in the data.

I outline my thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's approach below. While the authors present the six steps in a linear fashion, they recognize that they are iterative and often overlap (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

Stage One. The first stage in a thematic analysis is *familiarizing yourself with your data*. Due to the large number of interviews and activities taking place simultaneously, I enlisted student volunteers to assist with interview transcribing. Once a volunteer had completed a transcription, I listened to each digital recording, reviewed each transcript for accuracy, and jotted down my initial ideas. At this point, I removed all identifying information from the research material, apart from job titles, which I retained to help provide context. Following the removal of identifying information, research material was uploaded to NVivo 10 to prepare for coding (QSR International, 2013). Prior to coding data, I engaged in the re-reading of interview transcripts, field notes, and written documents, making annotations in NVivo to track my initial thoughts and ideas.

Stage Two. The second stage in the process is *generating initial codes*. This involved moving through the data set in a systematic fashion, creating initial codes to identify persisting patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mayan, 2009). My aim here was to analyze the data at the latent level, which involves the coding of participants' intent within context (Mayan, 2009). To help manage the data, I placed initial codes into general categories. As I engaged in analysis, I remained open to dissolving or reorganizing these initial categories, though some went on to inform the development of themes and sub-themes.

Stage Three. The third stage is *searching for themes*. According to Braun and Clarke, this stage begins when all data has been initially coded and collated. During this phase, I sorted through the coded data to explore potential themes. As Braun and Clarke suggest, a theme aims to capture “something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). At this stage, the practice of developing thematic maps, memoing, presenting initial findings to stakeholders, and discussions with my supervisor helped me to begin the exploration of relationships between codes, between themes and between different levels of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, I also engaged in the re-organization of initial candidate themes as I tried to identify and accurately capture patterns across the data set. Through this process, I identified four candidate themes, each of which clustered around a central organizing concept. Reviewing field notes from interviews was useful during this process as it helped me to inform the development of themes by allowing me to identify striking aspects related to the group’s experience.

Stage Four. Paired closely with the third stage, the fourth stage is *reviewing your themes*. During this phase, I engaged in the refinement of the four candidate themes. This involved reviewing codes and sub-themes to ensure all coded data extracts fit. It also involved rereading the data set to ensure my candidate themes were reasonable and to code data I had missed earlier.

During stages three and four, I also began to identify categories related to the broader context of the advocacy project, such as group culture and contextual factors that influenced the project. I saved these categories and later used them to help describe the context of the advocacy project.

Stage Five. The fifth stage is *defining and naming themes*. At this point in the analysis, I organized themes into a table and engaged in the naming and defining of each theme and sub-theme. I also produced a preliminary report for stakeholders to review and comment on my emerging analysis. I describe the process of participant checks below. Taken together, this process helped me to refine themes and ensure they reflected stakeholders' experiences.

Stage Six. The sixth stage is *producing and writing the report*. This phase involved writing up my analysis and selecting vivid and compelling data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Personally, this stage represented the most intuitive part of the analysis. As I wrote, I sometimes identified ways to discuss relationships between and within themes more logically, which resulted in the minor re-organization of sub-themes. When making such changes, I engaged in self-reflection to ensure that what I was writing was a reasonable account of the group's experience. It is also important to note that, at this stage, I provided stakeholders with opportunities to review the analysis to ensure they were comfortable with the findings. Last, feedback from my supervisor and committee members helped me to refine and prepare my final analysis.

Memoing

Throughout data collection and analysis, I regularly engaged in the writing of memos, which involves writing preliminary analytical notes about the data (Mayan, 2009). Memoing is an important component of qualitative research as it enables you to immerse yourself in the data, explore meaning, and maintain continuity of ideas and thoughts (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008).

Participant Review of Study Findings

Throughout the study, I provided stakeholders with opportunities to review study findings and contribute to the collective interpretation of the data (Mayan, 2009). First, during interviews, I collected feedback from stakeholders regarding my emerging ideas and interpretations. Second, I provided stakeholders with an opportunity to review and provide feedback on my analysis via email or phone at two different points during the development and write-up of study findings: first, when my themes were just beginning to emerge and, second, when I had a final write-up of results. During the final review, stakeholders also had the opportunity to provide recommendations for GFSA, research, and community practice to help ensure the outcomes of the study were meaningful to the group.

Overall, stakeholder participation in the review and feedback of the analysis was somewhat limited. Out of the 12 stakeholders enrolled in the study towards its end, 7 reviewed and provided comments on the first preliminary review of themes. Further, nine stakeholders requested the final report and five stakeholders provided comments or recommendations. One reason for the low participation may be that a significant amount of time had passed—approximately 7 months—since the study's end and the final review of the analysis.

Ethics

This study received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. Below, I highlight a number of key ethical considerations made throughout the study.

The first consideration centers on confidentiality and anonymity. To help ensure confidentiality, research material produced from the study was kept private by members of the research team and all student volunteers signed a confidentiality agreement before engaging in

study activities. In addition, I removed all identifying information from the research material, apart from job title, to help keep stakeholders' names and responses anonymous in the data. Tied to this, I assigned each individual a number identification to distinguish them in the data. Further, during group meetings, I provided those present with reminders not to disclose any information that was shared by others during our discussions. With that said, I also informed participants regarding limits to confidentiality and anonymity due to the group nature of the study.

The second ethical consideration related to the fact that the study focused on food security, a topic that can be emotionally sensitive, particularly if an individual has experience with household food insecurity. To reduce the potential for emotional risk, I did my best to create a positive environment for individuals to discuss food security issues. As a student researcher, this involved being respectful and reflexive in terms of my own engagement in the project and working to develop a sense of rapport and trust with stakeholders.

A third ethical consideration related to the study's focus on engaging stakeholders in public policy advocacy. Advocacy is a political activity and, as such, it may be associated with social risk, such as damage to one's professional reputation. To mitigate the potential for social risk, I stressed the fact that stakeholders did not have to participate in any activity that made them uncomfortable. I also provided participants with the opportunity to review the study results to ensure they were comfortable with the findings. In some occasions, this resulted in a reconsideration of the quotes I used in my analysis.

In addition to the above considerations, I was aware of the potential for ethical issues to arise given the community-based nature of the study. Examples of tensions discussed in the literature include the different power dynamics at play among individuals in the project,

discrepancies regarding how the research findings should be used, and issues related to who benefits from such projects (Minkler, 2004). I tried to reduce the potential for such tensions to arise by taking a number of steps, such as organizing travel reimbursement to the final workshop, consulting stakeholders regarding the use of findings, and striving to create an atmosphere of trust and respect (Mayan, 2009). Further, when potential issues did arise, I addressed them using self-reflexivity, as well as through discussions with my supervisor and members of the University of Alberta ethics office.

Quality

Determining quality of participatory projects is challenging for health researchers as, to-date, there is no consensus around what drives quality in participatory research in a health context (Springett et al., April 2011). In this study, I aimed to ensure quality by attempting to uphold and integrate the principles of CBPR into the project, as well as by engaging stakeholders in participant checks to ensure the relevancy of findings. Moreover, the study's focus on stakeholder experience also provides an indicator of quality as it reflects what worked well from the perspective of those involved, as well as areas for improvement.

Throughout the research process, I was also committed to the development of rigorous data from a qualitative research perspective. Along these lines, I used the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability developed by Guba and Lincoln (1985) as a guide to ensure rigor. The concept of *credibility* assesses whether findings reflect accurate representations of the phenomena of interest. In this study, I ensured credibility through triangulation of data, participant checks, and prolonged engagement in the field (Mayan, 2009). I also achieved credibility through regular conversations with my supervisor, an expert in ethnographic approaches, and peers to reflect on emerging ideas within the data.

Transferability assesses the applicability of findings to other settings. In this study, transferability was ensured by generating thick description through the use of multiple data generating strategies (Mayan, 2009). *Dependability* refers to the ability to review, post-hoc, how decisions were made throughout the study and *conformability* focuses on ensuring findings are logical (Mayan, 2009). I met these criteria via an audit trail generated through careful organization of study material, journaling, and the writing of memos.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an outline of study methods. In terms of research design, I applied CBPR and a focused ethnographic approach. I then used a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling to recruit individuals to the study, engaging 14 stakeholders over the course of the research process. I received informed consent from all stakeholders prior to their engagement in the study. Stakeholders also signed an addendum to the information letter during the study indicating their consent to have GFSA and the APCCP named in the study findings.

In line with the study design, I used CBPR approaches to inform the development of the public policy advocacy project, which represented the intervention component of the study. Guided by CBPR approaches, this project involved three phases over a 9-month period, including: (a) an initial workshop to provide a refresher on public policy advocacy and begin the generation of our advocacy goal; (b) monthly meetings and activities aimed at developing the advocacy project and; (c) a final workshop to synthesize project outcomes. In particular, Themba-Nixon's seven steps in the development of a public policy advocacy campaign provided a useful framework to guide the advocacy process (Themba-Nixon, 2010).

Additionally, I used advocacy resources and engaged in consultation with stakeholders and the research team to inform the project's development.

To generate data for the study, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with stakeholders at three points during the study. I also engaged in participant observation and collected written documentation. Further, throughout the study, I kept a reflective journal and a field journal to track key insights and study logistics. Data analysis took two forms. To answer my first research objective, I organized data in chronological order. To answer my second research objective, I conducted a thematic analysis using the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Throughout the study, I engaged in the process of memoing, as well as provided stakeholders with the opportunity to review findings as they developed.

In terms of ethics, the study received ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. In addition to receiving ethics, I made ethical considerations throughout the study pertaining to confidentiality and anonymity, emotional and social risk, and the community-based nature of the study.

Finally, I strived to ensure quality in the study by aiming to integrate the principles of CBPR into the project, engaging stakeholders in participant checks, and asking stakeholders to comment and reflect on their experience in the project. Further, I used the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability to ensure rigor from a qualitative research perspective.

Chapter Five: Background on Group Dynamics and Stakeholder Engagement

Overview

This chapter helps to generate thick description by providing study context. I provide background on group dynamics, as well as discuss levels of engagement throughout the project.

Stakeholder Characteristics

Stakeholders involved in the PWG came from different backgrounds and areas of expertise. The group included local food producers (n=2), engaged citizens (n=2), public health dietitians (n=3), a former school board trustee (n=1), community developers (n=2), representatives from non-profit organizations (n=2), and individuals working in public health-related research or practice (n=2). Ages in the group also varied. The majority of stakeholders were 50+ (n=7). However, there were also individuals in their twenties (n=3), thirties (n=3), and forties (n=1). In terms of sex, the group consisted of thirteen females and one male. The high ratio of females to males somewhat reflects the wider culture of GFSA, which I have observed as including a high proportion of females, particularly with the network's core group. In addition, stakeholders involved in the project were connected through their interest in GFSA and food security. Indeed, the vast majority of stakeholders had been involved with GFSA in some capacity prior to the study's initiation and had experience working with food security issues in their communities.

Background on Group Dynamics

In this section, I highlight characteristics of the PWG that shaped the group's experience in the advocacy project. Ultimately, my aim here is not to provide a comprehensive

analysis of group dynamics coming into the project, but to highlight factors that helped to establish a foundation for the group's collective experience.

Commitment to food security. Coming into the project, stakeholders illustrated a passion for food-related issues and a commitment to promoting food security. As one stakeholder reflected, you could tell members of the group “want something to happen, they want things to change...they're really passionate” (I02, 005). This passion and commitment, in turn, helped to create a positive atmosphere during group meetings. For example, one stakeholder highlighted the fact that, “if you get a bunch of people together that are keen on an idea...then it sort of multiplies from there” (I02, 013).

Diverse values around food. While stakeholders were all interested in food security issues, they came to the project with a diverse range of values and priorities. Examples include connecting to nature and the land, establishing a cultural connection to food, environmental sustainability, active citizenship, health and nutrition, and equity. With that said, many stakeholders seemed to consider food-related values in a holistic and interconnected way. As one stakeholder commented, “I think they're all intertwined...when you pick any of them...it would drag the rest of them along” (I02,010).

Relationships and community building: Another feature of group dynamics relevant to the project was the value stakeholders placed on relationships and community building. Many stakeholders highlighted the importance of relationships, whether they were discussing the need to connect with clients as a local producer or working towards change in their community. In many ways, the value placed on relationships was rooted in the wider “culture or the tradition of GFSA,” which “has always been relationship focused” (I02, 006). Tied to this, stakeholders came to the project with an appreciation for both GFSA and the opportunity

to engage and support individuals who were like-minded in their desire to promote food security.

The GFSA project coordinator. The GFSA project coordinator was a key motivator of stakeholder engagement in the advocacy project. Most members of the PWG had worked with the coordinator in the past and they admired “her ability to work...with people” (I02, 010). Stakeholders also viewed the project coordinator as “having a lot of knowledge” around food security issues (I02, 013).

GFSA organizational structure. Another important factor that influenced group dynamics was GFSA’s organizational structure. It is important to recognize that the PWG was just getting started on the path towards advocacy when the advocacy project began. As such, GFSA did not have a high level of organizational structure in place to guide such activities. It also had limited financial and human resources for engaging in advocacy. Further, stakeholders engaged in the project were doing so in a volunteer capacity and, as such, were often strapped for time as they juggled a variety of priorities. Along these lines, development of the advocacy project had a grassroots and ad-hoc quality. As one stakeholder suggested, the experience might be different “when you’re [a well-established] organization,” and you can say, “this year, these are our top three priorities and we run these campaigns” (I03, 007).

Levels of Engagement

Before moving on to a description of the advocacy process and stakeholders’ experiences, it is important to outline levels of engagement in the project. Overall, levels of engagement in the project were positive, though somewhat variable. In terms of attendance, 9 out of the 11 stakeholders enrolled in the study participated in the first online meeting. Further, during monthly meetings, the average number of stakeholders present was eight. Out of the

monthly meetings, the highest number of stakeholders (8 out of 11) attended the first monthly meeting on December 12th, 2012. The lowest number of stakeholders (6 out of 12) attended the May 7th, 2013 meeting. Attendance at the final in-person meeting was low, with 5 out of 12 stakeholders enrolled at the time in attendance.

In terms of individual stakeholder's participation, there was considerable variation within the group. For example, a couple of stakeholders were regularly unable to attend meetings. Others attended meetings whenever possible and were quite consistent in terms of their participation, providing feedback and contributing to documents. Further, a few stakeholders took on more substantial leadership roles.

At the final in-person meeting, I engaged in a discussion with stakeholders around levels of engagement, which nicely captured their views on the subject. During this discussion, stakeholders highlighted how they were not always able to engage in the project for a variety of reasons, such as personal and professional factors. While some stakeholders expressed feeling guilty about their low levels of engagement, the conversation eventually shifted to emphasize the importance of making room for different levels of participation and being flexible to changes in the schedule. As one stakeholder suggested, "you have engaged us to the point where we want to be involved and to the extent that we can we are" (W02).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the study context. In terms of stakeholder characteristics, members of the group represented a range of fields and areas of expertise, ages, and levels of advocacy experience. In addition, background on group dynamics illustrates that the PWG was passionate about food security, contained a diverse range of values around food, emphasized relationships, had a desire to support one another, and admired the GFSA project

coordinator. Taken together, such characteristics illustrate that despite some organizational constraints, the PWG was well suited to engage in a participatory advocacy project. Finally, the chapter provided an overview of attendance and levels of stakeholder engagement during the project. Overall, attendance in the project was positive and while stakeholders engaged at different levels, in the end the group recognized that whatever individuals could give in terms of their time and energy was valued.

Chapter Six: Description of Advocacy Project

Overview

The first objective of the study was to document and describe stakeholder engagement in the public policy advocacy project. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the advocacy project and describe the process of engagement in each phase of its development.

Project Summary

The PWG engaged in the development of the public policy advocacy project from November 2012 to July 2013. As described in the methods section, the project involved three stages: (a) an initial online workshop to begin the generation of our advocacy goal; (b) monthly meetings to develop the advocacy project, and; (c) a final workshop to summarize project outcomes. The result of this process was the beginning of an advocacy campaign to improve school food environments. Specifically, the PWG created a campaign calling on the Alberta government to take the lead in the development of a Universal School Food Strategy. Key components of the proposed strategy include government support and funding for healthy meals and snacks sourced from local producers, student involvement in the cultivation and preparation of food, education on the food system, and relationships with local producers and local procurement policies. I provide a critical reflection on this advocacy focus in the discussion.

The PWG's focus on a Universal School Food Strategy emerged from a vision developed by the group of a province that recognizes *the real value of real food*. While the PWG recognized that real food means different things to different people, as a starting point it was viewed as food that was nutritious, grown in an ecological and sustainable manner, and connected to traditions and the local economy. Over the course of the project, the group took

part in advocacy activities, including the creation of a position paper and key messages document, engagement in social media, and the development of website content. Additionally, the group engaged in conversations with individuals and organizational representatives involved in school food, hereafter referred to as school food actors, to collect feedback and raise awareness. I discuss future directions related to the campaign at the end of the chapter.

Stakeholder Engagement in Public Policy Advocacy

This section outlines the process of stakeholder engagement in public policy advocacy. To inform this process, I relied on CBPR approaches to policy change, advocacy resources, and consultation with stakeholders and the research team.

Phase one: introductory workshop. The first phase of the advocacy project was an introductory workshop to provide stakeholders with a public policy advocacy primer and to begin the generation of our advocacy goal. The research team initially planned this workshop to take place in-person, on November 1st, 2012. However, the majority of stakeholders were unable to attend, largely due to geographic barriers related to travel. For this reason, the research team rescheduled the meeting for November 13th, 2012, and made the decision to host it via the web conferencing platform, Adobe Connect (Adobe Systems Incorporated, 2012), to reduce geographic constraints.

The online workshop began with introductions, icebreakers, and a discussion of opportunities and challenges for food security in Alberta. Following this, Dr. Kim Raine provided the group with a primer on public policy advocacy. This presentation introduced policy concepts to the group and outlined steps in the advocacy process. It also provided the group with general strategies for facilitating public policy based on content from the APCCP's Policy Readiness Tool (Nykiforuk et al., 2011).

Public policy advocacy projects often begin with problem identification and an exploration of policy solutions (Themba-Nixon, 2010; Vasquez et al., 2007). Considering this, the second half of the workshop focused on a brainstorming activity to begin the identification of a food security issue that was salient to members of the group and to begin the process of identifying a potential advocacy goal.

During our brainstorming session, the group was lively and passionate about a range of food security issues. However, the wide variety of concerns and perspectives expressed made it difficult to pinpoint a specific issue that all members of the group could get behind. Indeed, as we moved through the activity, we recognized a need to narrow our focus. This was highlighted when one stakeholder posed the question, “at the end of the day, what is it that we want people to buy into, or understand? What is it that we are trying to achieve (W01)?” Reflecting on the project, this question seemed to resonate with the group. In the discussion that followed, we began to move away from addressing a specific food security issue to identifying our big goal or vision for food security. This shift is in line with Themba-Nixon’s assertion that a group’s rationale for policy change is not always rooted in a problem or deficit, but a vision for positive change (Themba-Nixon, 2010).

Over the remainder of the meeting, dialogue helped the group pinpoint a vision for food security in the province that captured the essence of our discussion and what we wanted to achieve—a *province that recognizes the real value of real food*. As I look back on this discussion, the group seemed to conceptualize this vision in different ways. On one hand, stakeholders believed it fit with the idea of having to make a fundamental shift as a society towards respecting our food. At the same time, there was recognition that policy reflects values. Thus, for some stakeholders, the vision opened up the possibility of advocating for

policies that illustrated food's value beyond a commodity. Ultimately, this vision went through several iterations as our advocacy project progressed, but the core meaning was maintained.

By the end of the initial workshop, stakeholders began to show signs of confusion and fatigue, suggesting it was time to wrap up the discussion. While we had decided upon a vision for our advocacy project, the group still had much to discuss in the weeks ahead. For example, what did we mean by real food and what specific public policy advocacy goal did we want to pursue?

After the introductory workshop, the group contributed to a force field analysis as a take-away activity. Force-field analysis is an activity commonly used by group's during problem identification and planning processes to identify forces working to maintain and/or influence a situation at a particular moment in time (MacDuffie & DePoy, 2004). At this point in the project, the force field analysis was used to consider forces working with us and against us in terms of achieving our vision for policy change. This was useful as we moved towards the next step of identifying a specific advocacy goal because it helped us understand the wider context of our advocacy project, an important consideration for advocacy (Themba-Nixon et al., 2008).

Phase two: developing the advocacy project. The second phase of the advocacy project involved monthly meetings via teleconference to develop the advocacy project and move towards our advocacy goal. Meetings in this phase were approximately one hour in length. In line with GFSA's community building approach, meetings began with a short check-in to allow the group to hear who was on the call and to provide updates. Following check-ins, we often engaged in a short capacity building activity, such as a review of a resource or a presentation from a policy advocate. The group then spent the bulk of the meeting discussing

and planning different aspects of the advocacy project. Meetings ended with debriefing to discuss stakeholders' final thoughts and the group's future directions. Between meetings, stakeholders also had the opportunity to participate in advocacy-related activities such as providing feedback, research and information gathering, and meeting with individuals from organizations and community groups relevant to our advocacy focus.

During the monthly meetings, stakeholders engaged in a number of specific activities related to the public policy advocacy process. I describe this process below.

Identifying an advocacy focus. Our first monthly meeting took place on December 12th, 2012. This was an important meeting for the PWG because it focused on narrowing our vision into a specific advocacy goal. After check-ins, we began the meeting with a short discussion on advocacy and values. A key feature of this discussion was the idea that advocates can be more effective by connecting to beliefs and values (Dorfman, Wallack, & Woodruff, 2005). Following this discussion, we explored the question: Within our wider vision for food security, what specific goal do we want to achieve at the public policy-level in Alberta? To answer this question, stakeholders were encouraged to consider their own knowledge and experience, forces working with us and against us in wider society, and the priorities of GFSA and like-minded organizations.

Over the course of the December 2012 meeting, the group identified government support for a Universal School Food Program sourced from local producers as a potential goal for policy change. Not only could such a program contribute to the wellbeing of children by increasing access to healthy food, it could also help to educate children about the food system, thus contributing to a cultural shift in values, and it would support local procurement. Along these lines, the proposed focus fit nicely with the group's different priorities and values around

food, as well as the group's vision for food security in the province. It is important to note, however, that as we continued to research and collect feedback on our campaign, our advocacy focus shifted into a call for a Universal School Food *Strategy*, rather than program.

Research and information gathering. Research and information gathering is an important step in the development of a public policy advocacy project (Minkler, 2010; Themba-Nixon, 2010). After settling on an initial advocacy goal, the PWG began a process of secondary research to develop and refine our position. This involved an effort to compile existing information and resources to learn more about our vision, school food, and the specific objectives the PWG hoped to achieve through our policy focus. To facilitate this process, I asked stakeholders to contribute to a set of questions via email, which included space for participants to list resources and sources of information. Information gathering occurred in two rounds from December 2012 to February 2013.

It is important to note that, throughout the process of information gathering, stakeholders experienced a number of difficulties and frustrations. For example, some stakeholders said that answering the questions individually took too much time. Further, others felt they did not have the necessary type of knowledge to answer the questions.

Developing our position. A key outcome of the January and February 2013 meetings was the decision to develop a position paper to summarize the results of our information gathering efforts and develop our position. While collectively the group liked the idea of a position paper, there was limited buy-in in terms of writing the document. In the end, one stakeholder in the PWG volunteered to lead its development.

While direct group involvement in the writing up of the position paper was limited, its development was still a collaborative process. Specifically, the group was provided with

multiple opportunities to offer feedback on the paper during group meetings or individually via email and over the phone. At the March and April 2013 meetings, for example, the PWG engaged in detailed discussions and review of the document. By the end of May, a working draft of the paper was ready for circulation, acknowledging that it was open to modification as we engaged with a wider audience and continued to refine our position. Overall, stakeholders seemed to enjoy the opportunity to contribute to the discussion, provide feedback, and have a tangible advocacy document as an outcome.

Although the experience of developing the position paper was positive, it brought up a number of issues related to engagement. First, while developing a position paper is a common strategy for communicating advocacy messages, this format was not conducive to all stakeholders' skills and areas of expertise. Second, as the student researcher, I recognized that I played a significant role in constructing the position paper, which created a tension as I tried to strike a balance between maintaining the language and ideas of the group while making modifications and edits based on my own knowledge and academic writing skills. In the end, providing the group with many opportunities to provide feedback in different formats (i.e. verbally and in writing) and maintaining open lines of communication helped to overcome these tensions and ensure effective collaboration on the document.

Strategic analysis. While developing our position, we also engaged in strategic analysis. According to the literature, a key feature of strategic analysis is identifying targets, allies, and opponents that can influence your advocacy campaign (Themba-Nixon, 2010; Themba-Nixon et al., 2008). To accomplish this, the PWG completed a stakeholder analysis to explore key individuals and organizations relevant to our advocacy focus. As part of this analysis, we considered questions such as who is going to benefit from the proposed policy

change, who might be negatively affected, who are the key stakeholders involved, who are our allies, and who might be opposed to our initiative (The Food Security Projects of the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council & Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre, 2005).

Organizing for action. Informed by our strategic analysis, we began to organize for action. After brainstorming advocacy strategies and developing an initial action plan, we engaged in a range of advocacy activities throughout May and June 2013. Examples include the development of key messages and collecting feedback from school food actors. We also developed website content, collected stories about school food from members of the GFSA network, and worked with student volunteers to communicate our message through social media. Feedback received from these activities played an important role in refining our position and ensuring our objectives were palatable to the wider community.

Although moving towards action was an exciting phase in the project, it was also a haphazard process. A number of stakeholders expressed confusion during this stage, and others felt June was not an ideal time to engage in advocacy activities because it was a busy month for individuals working in the area of school food.

Phase three: final in-person workshop. The final phase in the study was a 4-hour in-person workshop held on July 19th, 2013.² The goal of the workshop was to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to meet face-to-face, reflect on the initiative thus far, and develop a plan for project sustainability. The workshop took place on an acreage in Central Alberta, which proved to be an ideal setting as it was welcoming and provided ample space for the group to meet and form small group discussions.

² The research team aimed to schedule this workshop at an earlier date. However, July 19th was the most appropriate time for GFSA to co-host the workshop.

In total, 5 stakeholders out of the 12 enrolled in the study at the time took part in the workshop. Members of the research team in attendance included Dr. Kim Raine and three student volunteers. Some factors that may have contributed to the small group size include geographic barriers and scheduling conflicts. Despite the small group size, I felt it was important to host an in-person meeting due to feedback I had received from stakeholders throughout the study regarding their desire to meet in-person. In view of the small size of the group, I made an effort to collect feedback on workshop content from those unable to attend.

The meeting began with a potluck to provide stakeholders with a chance to meet or catch-up in-person, and share a meal. After the potluck, the workshop began. The first activity involved reviewing feedback and suggesting modifications to our position based on feedback received from our meetings with school food actors. This review resulted in a number of key decisions. First, the group made the decision to change our focus from a Universal School Food Program to a Universal School Food Strategy. This decision was made based on the understanding that a strategy suggested the involvement of multiple partners, which aligned with government language and priorities. Second, a decision was made to modify the language in our position paper so that the wording was more palatable to a range of audiences, including those who might not share the same views as our group. Last, while some of the feedback that the group received questioned the PWG's use of the word 'real food' because it was value-laden, the decision was made to keep the phrase as it was a key component of the group's shared vision.

For the second activity, a stakeholder led us in a brainstorming activity using graphic facilitation. The first half of this activity focused on exploring what worked well with the project and areas for improvement. Examples of things that worked well include meeting

regularly, the creation of a safe space to work through frustrations, and having a facilitator and other individuals available to help make sense of the advocacy process. Examples of areas for improvement include achieving broader engagement and providing more clarity on the project (i.e. next steps and future directions). PWG members also felt they could have devoted more time to group tasks, like information gathering and preparing for meetings.

During the brainstorming session, we also spent time exploring future actions for the PWG and ways to sustain the project moving forward. Examples of actions included strengthening the position paper, encouraging the wider GFSA network to engage in advocacy activities (i.e. sharing stories about school food, contacting their MLA's through social media), and highlighting the need to improve school food during upcoming municipal elections. Examples of ways to help sustain the project after the study's end included partnering with community service-learning programs at Alberta universities, which enable university students to work on projects in their community for credit, and connecting with like-minded organizations working on similar goals.

The third activity was generating ideas for the use of finding that result from the study component of the project. To accomplish this, we brainstormed practical products that the group would like to see developed from the study results and engaged in a collaborative process of determining the group's top priorities. Through this process, the group came up with the idea of developing a toolkit, called Recipes for Policy-Change, to summarize study findings and compile advocacy resources used throughout the project.

Overall, stakeholders had a positive experience at the in-person workshop. Although the advocacy project was still in the beginning stages, the final in-person meeting wrapped up the study component of the project and helped the PWG consider the project's future directions.

Future Directions

Since the study's end, the PWG has continued to work towards the goal of a Universal School Food Strategy. Examples of recent activities include collecting additional feedback on our position paper, engaging in further strategic analysis, presenting to community groups, submitting letters to the editor to Alberta newspapers, and meeting with decision-makers. The group has also worked with university community-service learning programs at Alberta post-secondary institutions to engage university students in advocacy activities. Further, since December 2013, GFSA has been working with the APCCP and an advisory committee to conduct an environmental scan to identify existing gaps and strengths related to school food programming and policies in Alberta.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented an overview of stakeholder engagement in the public policy advocacy project. Over the course of 9 months, the group engaged in the development of a public policy advocacy project, which resulted in the beginning of a campaign calling on the provincial government to lead the development of a Universal School Food Strategy. This focus emerged out of the group's vision of a province that recognizes *the real value of real food*.

The first phase of the advocacy project was an initial workshop, where the group received a primer on public policy advocacy and established our vision for public policy change. Phase two involved monthly meetings, where stakeholders engaged in a number of policy steps and activities, including identifying our advocacy focus, research and information gathering, developing our position, strategic analysis, and organizing for action. The last stage of the study was a final in-person workshop, which provided the group with an opportunity to

reflect on the project, explore future actions, and generate ideas for use of the study findings.

This workshop represented the final stage in the study. However, the PWG has continued to engage in the project after the study's end, with continued support from the APCCP.

Chapter Seven: Exploration of Stakeholders' Experiences

Overview

The second objective of the study was to explore stakeholders' experiences as they engaged in the public policy advocacy project. This exploration led to the development of four themes: (a) a positive and open space to contribute; (b) diversity and common ground; (c) confidence and capacity, and; (d) uncertainty. In addition, I identified a number of key contextual factors that influenced the group's experience, including the meeting mode, time, and meeting organization.

A Positive and Open Space to Contribute

The first theme focuses on the advocacy project as a positive and open space to contribute. Within this theme, I explore stakeholders' experiences of the advocacy project as a positive and open space where stakeholders could voice their opinions and perspectives. I also describe factors that contributed to the cultivation of this space and factors that created obstacles.

A platform for everybody to have a voice: This sub-theme explores the advocacy project as a positive and open space, which provided a platform for stakeholders to voice their opinions and perspectives.

As the project progressed, many stakeholders came to describe their experience as positive overall, highlighting the collaboration process and the opportunity to work and learn from each other. As one participant commented, "It's been really positive, people being open to voicing their opinion or their knowledge into the process" (I02, 004). Tied to this, while some stakeholders described the atmosphere of group meetings using neutral statements, such as "it's been fine" (I02, 003), many characterized them as friendly, respectful and open:

The atmosphere is friendly and open, and not judgmental, it's good... You know, that people feel free to give their opinion and... feel free to give their opinions back on somebody else's opinion, so I think it's very good. (002, 008)

Indeed, as I discussed the project with stakeholders, it became clear that a highlight of their engagement experience was the opportunity for individuals to contribute their ideas and the willingness of others to share their perspectives. While a few individual sometimes dominated the conversation during discussions, many stakeholders described meetings as a space where everyone could put their opinions and perspectives on the table. One stakeholder highlighted this when discussing lessons learnt during the project:

The other thing I learnt is how important it is in these processes to be inclusive, with people that put their names forward and, I just thought that this... this did that very well...kind of created a space for everybody to have their point of view. (I03, 010)

Another stakeholder expanded on this idea, describing the project as a space where people not only had the opportunity to contribute, but where decisions and next steps were discussed openly and transparently:

You don't get a sense of there being any of what I call parking lot conversations after. It's sort of, we all come together, we put our opinions and what not on the table and then we all have a chance to contribute to it and discuss it... I've never ever gotten off a call thinking 'oh dear, I wonder what they are going to do with this now', and 'who is going to talk to who', it just, doesn't have that kind of an atmosphere at all (002, 001).

This positive and open space, in turn, helped contribute to learning, confidence, and the establishment of common understanding. As one stakeholder outlined, the inclusive nature of the project provided people with "the confidence to know that their perspective or their view is

valued and encouraged, as opposed to ...just being passive participants in the conversation”(I02, 006).

With that said, the advocacy project was not completely open and did not always encourage stakeholders’ contributions. For example, during group meetings and interviews, a number of stakeholders identified the process of information gathering as a challenging activity that may have led individuals to feel intimidated providing “their two cents” (002, 013). Some stakeholders also expressed an understanding that you sometimes had to set aside your own opinions to be inclusive or to allow the process to continue in a timely manner. In the next sub-theme, I expand on these findings by presenting supporting factors and obstacles related to the cultivation of a positive and open space.

Cultivating the space: supporting factors and obstacles. This sub-theme explores project characteristics that influenced stakeholders’ experiences by either supporting the cultivation of a positive and open space or acting as an obstacle. Within this sub-theme, I describe the following supporting factors: (a) GFSA culture and established relationships; (b) the role of the facilitator; (c) providing opportunities to contribute, and; (d) the final in-person meeting. In addition, I highlight the following obstacles: (a) the information gathering process; (b) knowledge and communication barriers; (c) the need to strengthen relationships, and; (d) contextual barriers.

Supporting factors. This section highlights factors that contributed to the cultivation of a positive and open space.

GFSA culture and established relationships: As I became familiar with the group, it became clear that the comfortable atmosphere was, in many ways, a product of group dynamics coming into the project and the way GFSA had operated in the past. For example,

one stakeholder commented, “the group feels comfortable, ‘cause it’s an environment” where “nobody’s right or wrong, and everybody has an opportunity to speak” (I02, 008). This stakeholder went on to state that this was a parallel to “how GFSA is always operating” (I02, 008). For a number of stakeholders, relationships established prior to the initiation of the project (i.e. through the GFSA network) also contributed to a positive experience by helping stakeholders feel comfortable within the group.

Role of facilitator. Throughout the project, I took on multiple roles, including the role of the project facilitator. During interviews, stakeholders described the facilitator as playing an important role in setting the tone for the meetings and helping keep things open and positive. Specifically, stakeholders stated that I helped to encourage participation in the project by ensuring meetings were structured, sending out meeting minutes, agendas and reminders, providing opportunities to contribute, and keeping the group on schedule. With that said, a few stakeholders did question whether the group was “overly reliant” (002, 007) on the facilitator to move the project forward.

Opportunities to contribute: Overall, stakeholders appreciated the project’s participatory approach and the many opportunities provided to contribute. As one stakeholder noted, “the opportunity to participate and the opportunity to be heard...was there” (I03, 007). Examples of these opportunities include asking for everyone’s opinion on the call, providing multiple ways to provide feedback (i.e. in writing or over the phone), organizing opportunities to learn and share resources, and making time for check-ins and debriefs. The following excerpt highlights the importance of providing opportunities to contribute:

Asking people and making sure that everybody has their chance to speak, I think, is important. And you... are sending the emails out to everybody to get their input, I think

that is important especially for those people who maybe need to think about it more too, to have their thoughts down on paper, not just have it as a phone meeting. (I02, 003)

The final in-person meeting. For many stakeholders, the teleconference format and the lack of opportunities to meet face-to-face poised a barrier to stakeholder engagement, which I discuss below. Considering this, the final in-person meeting was an important phase of the project because it provided the group with an opportunity to meet face-to-face.

Only five stakeholders were able to attend the final in-person meeting. However, these stakeholders described the meeting as a positive experience. Not only did it provide an opportunity for individuals to build relationships, it also helped develop understanding within the group. The is described in the following excerpt:

After the in person meeting, like the bonds were definitely stronger. I feel like now when I go to a teleconference...I can picture their face, I know who is speaking, I know what they're doing in their life and what background they come from. (I03, 014)

Obstacles. Below, I highlight factors that acted as an obstacle to the cultivation of a positive and open space.

The information gathering questions. During the first half of the advocacy project, I engaged the PWG in a research and information gathering process to help refine our advocacy position. This involved answering a set of questions and providing sources of information in chart form. Though some stakeholders appreciated this process, many felt it discouraged their participation. For example, a number of stakeholders did not appreciate the written format and others described it as frustrating and time-consuming. For instance, one stakeholder explained that she “looked at it” and “opened it a couple of times,” but “didn’t put any information into it,” finally stating, “it just didn’t work for me” (I02, 002).

Knowledge and communication barriers. Connected to the process of information gathering, stakeholders identified knowledge and communication barriers that inhibited their capacity to contribute. First, the information gathering process emerged as a challenging activity that may have discouraged stakeholder input. For example, in an interview, one stakeholder with a background in research pondered whether the questions were suitable for all education levels. During a group meeting, another stakeholder explained that, although she understands why people want formal data, as a community representative she relies on experience to inform actions and looking up sources takes time.

Second, stakeholders experienced barriers related to communication. For example, one stakeholder felt that providing written feedback was a barrier to engagement, preferring to provide input verbally during group discussions because “you can hear what is happening” and easily clarify questions (I02, 011). On the other hand, another stakeholder preferred “being given the time to review questions” (I02, 004) and then providing feedback in writing. Ultimately, such contrasts highlight the importance of providing multiple avenues for communication exchange.

Need to strengthen relationships. While the project provided some opportunities for relationship building, including check-ins and debriefs at every meeting, many stakeholders felt there could have been a greater emphasis in this area. When discussing this topic, some stakeholders highlighted the fact that they did not know everyone on the call and that the nature of the teleconference created obstacles to relationship development. For example, one stakeholder stated that meeting via teleconference did not provide “a chance for any real connection” and was simply not the same as being “in a room with a bunch of people” (I02, 013). Further, in terms of engaging with each other, another stakeholder wondered if “time up

front building [relationships] might have helped the group get through some of the earlier activities faster, considering the group was “a bit more reserved with each other” at first (I02, 007). With that said, this stakeholder went on to say that, over the course of the project, the group was “able to go quite deep” into discussions (I02, 007).

Contextual factors. Contextual factors, such as the teleconference set-up, project timelines, and meeting organization, also created obstacles to the creation of a positive and open space to contribute. For instance, tight project timelines created an atmosphere of urgency towards the end of the project, which may have decreased stakeholders’ desire to offer input. Further, the teleconference set-up made it difficult to ensure everyone was “getting a say,” because “the body language isn’t there” (I02, 013). Last, the general organization of the meeting sometimes led to confusion, which may have made it difficult for participants to engage. Ultimately, while these factors influenced the group’s experience, individuals generally considered them part of the reality of the project. I explore these contextual factors in detail at the end of this chapter.

Diversity and Common Ground

The second theme is diversity and common ground. This theme explores diversity within the group, the process of achieving common ground, and stakeholder views related to outside perspectives.

Group diversity. This sub-theme explores stakeholder perspectives on group diversity. At the beginning of the project, it was clear that stakeholders shared a number of similar characteristics. For example, they held a common interest in promoting food security and were connected through their involvement with GFSA. However, as the project progressed, it also became apparent that the group was diverse in many ways. Stakeholders came to the project

from different communities across Alberta, had different personal and professional backgrounds, were different ages, and had different levels of advocacy experience. They also had different values, perspectives, and “perceptions of the food system and what priorities should exist” (I02, 002). Stakeholders often highlighted this diversity during interviews. For example, one stakeholder commented that a striking aspect of the project was “the diversity in the group” which included a variety of “different points of view” (I02, 004).

For the most part, stakeholders valued the diversity within the group. For instance, one stakeholder commented that she loved “the people in the group and how [they] all come from very different backgrounds and perspectives,” which “brings a different flavor to everything” (I02, 011). Operating within a positive and open space, this diversity seemed to contribute to learning and helped open up the group to new ideas and ways of thinking about food:

The different points of view and where their coming from...has certainly given me at time, a pause to think about and think ‘oh, ok, I never really thought of that or looked at it that way’ and it’s just a real meshing of ideas and opinions, that is helping us as we move forward. (I02, 001).

While the group generally appreciated the opportunity to engage with a range of people and perspectives, there were sometimes differences of opinion that had the potential to be conflicting. Although it was not common for stakeholders to air such differences during group meetings, these differences were sometimes mentioned during interviews. Interestingly, during these discussions, stakeholders often referenced value-laden topics, such as what is ‘healthy’ or ‘real food’. This is highlighted in the following two excerpts, which nicely contrasts different perspectives in the group:

The dietitians, they went to school and... they did nutrition, it's a really positivistic university degree where they learn about nutrition and vitamin A, and how much you need of Vitamin A, you know. Without necessarily doing any studies in the social justice elements of nutrition or things like that...and for me too, I often sort of forget about the nutritional elements and I'm just like, if it's from the earth its healthy, and it is, and like if you think of real food, and someone was like debating on the idea and who's to say what is real food, like some people think McDonalds is real food. I was like no, no, no, there is an absolute what is real food, whether it's a chicken, or whether that is something grown out of the ground or a bush, like real food is, like it's an absolute, in my opinion, it's an absolute. (I02, 013)

It's just funny being a dietitian, people's perceptions, that whole conversation about what healthy food is can be dangerous...you know just with the box cereal comment too... I don't want to be pin holed into something that we can't get out of. (I02, 003)

Further, it is important to note that while stakeholders experienced the group as diverse, some stakeholders felt the group should invite more diversity to the table and make "more effort to engage others" (I03, 008). I discuss this further in the sub-theme on outside perspectives.

Achieving common ground. This sub-theme explores stakeholder's perspectives on the process of achieving common ground over the course of the project.

Early on in the project, stakeholders experienced some difficulty taking a "really huge topic" (I02, 003) like food security and trying to pin-point a specific focus for public policy advocacy. One factor that may have contributed to this difficulty was the different views and backgrounds present within the group as described in the previous sub-theme. This was further

articulated by one stakeholder who noted that “when you have that variety, people are coming from their different backgrounds, their own ...agendas...sometimes that can be difficult to bring together” (I03, 003). This stakeholder went on to state, “for the most part, you know, people...were like-minded...but there was that different background” which made it challenging (I03, 003).

Despite some challenges, there was a sense that the group was able to achieve common ground during the project, or at least “make a dent in the process” (I03, 004). One source of this common ground came from our focus on children and schools:

I think even with the diverse range of ideas, people in their heart hold the same understanding that there actually is a need to change the way we feed children. I think the underlying thread is strong amongst the stakeholders. (I02, 010)

Tied to the above, stakeholders viewed our advocacy focus as being able to address a range of food system priorities. At our January meeting, for instance, one stakeholder said she appreciated how a universal school food program (later *strategy*) could address many different aspects related to food, while another highlighted how such a focus emphasized the importance of wider cultural change within the food system. The potential of our advocacy focus to capture a range of priorities is succinctly described in the following excerpt:

If we come from different directions, it’s hard to narrow it down, but it seems that...we’ve come to that point, because...we’re talking about the value of food, which we can all relate to, and then there’s many categories under the value of food, but...the school seems to catch all those different ideas. (I02, 005)

Further, it is also important to note that the group was sensitive of the need to highlight interconnections between the different aspects of the strategy as well as make it clear to outside

stakeholders that our strategy was more than a one-dimensional school feeding program. For example, one stakeholder commented that:

I feel like there has to be a real interconnectness between these ideas and not just we want to have a healthy, nutritious food program in schools because the US does that and they have a bunch of [garbage] in their schools. So we all know what the possibility of just serving kids garbage even though it's supposed to be healthy and nutritious...it has to be a real holistic integration on all these ideas. (I02, 013)

Ultimately, the PWG was able to establish common ground around our focus on children and schools. However, I identified a number of potential issues related to this process, though the data is not well developed in this area. For example, some issues related to our focus were brought up but never fully addressed, such as the fact that our advocacy goal did not directly address food security in Alberta First Nations communities. Some stakeholders also suggested that more time was needed to 'gel' around issues.

Considering outside perspectives. This sub-theme explores stakeholders' attitudes towards the broader public. As stakeholders worked together and engaged in the advocacy project, they illustrated a consideration for outside perspectives and highlighted the need for broader engagement.

Throughout the project, stakeholders recognized that our position had to be amenable to a broader public in addition to members of the group. Along these lines, a number of stakeholders considered our advocacy project in relation to outside perspectives and how wider society would receive our efforts:

I think we have to...picture the things that other people are going to picture when they read this, and make sure that it's something others will buy-into and they won't just say, oh yeah, people were doing that in the 60s too. (W01)

For some stakeholders, such considerations led to struggles around aspects of our position and highlighted the need to maintain flexibility in our stance. As one stakeholder mentioned:

At times it almost feels like there isn't an either or, like it's got to be local food. And I guess that's where my struggle is...I'm trying to come to grips with it...you know if I were to speak to somebody in my community and say "well you know this is what we really want to encourage" and then, you know, the question comes up about "well you know the reality is in the middle of winters you're not going to get fresh fruit and vegetables in this part of the province, so what do you mean by local?" (I02, 001)

In addition, another stakeholder noted that:

Not everyone wants their food to be regulated by the government, what kinds of fats or grains and flour they can eat. So how can we create public policy and advocate in ways that allow for people to have choice in what they are eating? (I02, 010)

Connected to a consideration of outside perspectives, stakeholders stressed the importance of engaging with and mobilizing a broader public to achieve our advocacy goals. For some stakeholders, the diversity within the group was seen as helping us prepare for broader engagement:

Well to think of and hear other peoples different perspectives, food is a very broad topic, a lot of us from different areas of work and why we were around the table, but I think that's okay because then we brought in more insight into the problem... if we are all looking at it from the same direction... then we will have more difficulty

understanding the people outside our committees...I think it enhances our ability to understand what's going on outside in the world, if we all have different perspectives.

(I03, 005)

Nevertheless, there was still a sense of the unknown in terms of how our position would be received once we began to engage more broadly:

Now that's we've come up with this idea, the next step is trying to engage school communities to see the benefits of this...I think sometimes there's a danger in that we have our own opinions, and we think they are fact, and they're not necessarily always the case...and we just don't know the whole big picture. (I03, 001)

Confidence and Capacity

This theme aims to capture confidence and capacity present within the group. I explore stakeholders' beliefs in advocacy as a tool for change, new learning throughout the project, and the group's collective advocacy knowledge.

Belief in advocacy as a tool for change. This sub-theme explores the group's confidence in advocacy as a tool for change. I outline stakeholders' desire for food system change and the group's convictions regarding the use of advocacy to achieve this goal.

During group discussions and interviews, stakeholders highlighted a range of issues related to food security. Examples include a lack of access to healthy and nutrient-rich foods, the corporate food system, and a public disconnect from our food. They also recognized that wider change was needed to address these problems and to create long-term solutions to food security issues. Stakeholders sometimes articulated this as a need for "a cultural shift in our thinking" (IG).

Rooted in the above understanding, stakeholders expressed convictions about the need to engage in advocacy to achieve food systems change. For example, at the beginning of the project, one stakeholder made the following assertion:

Number one, I really don't know that much about public advocacy, but it appears to me that if we don't advocate and stand up for what we want to see, and if we don't have the conversations or push for it, we won't see anything change or be different. (I01, 010)

As we progressed, stakeholders expressed similar convictions regarding advocacy and our advocacy project. However, while engaging in the project seemed to help strengthen the group's resolve, stakeholders sometimes voiced their convictions alongside hesitation:

Well, if it's anything, it's just, I think it's a big task, so it can be a little daunting at times but if anything this has just really helped to think 'okay, no, it's important, we need to do something' and that whole thought process of how to get it accomplished. I think this whole process has helped with that. (I02, 003)

New learning: solidifying aspects of the process. This sub-theme explores stakeholders' experiences of learning over the course of the project.

Stakeholders came to the project with different levels of experience engaging in public policy advocacy. While some stakeholders had engaged in advocacy activities in the past (i.e. raising awareness, making government submissions, contributing to provincial recommendations, engaging in consultation processes, and writing policy briefs), others had limited experience in this area. One of the goals of the project was to provide stakeholders with learning opportunities to help build their capacity to engage in advocacy.

Overall, stakeholder learning in the projects was variable. For example, some stakeholders did not experience new learning as they had been through similar processes

before. Further, one stakeholder expressed the fact that she was an action-oriented person and was, therefore, more interested in taking action than learning something new. With that said, the project did contribute to new learning for a number of stakeholders. For example, it was described as helping to solidify “some of the steps,” in advocacy (I03, 005) and contributing to an increased understanding of specific advocacy activities, such as developing key messages and “starting to really suss out an action plan” (I02, 013). In particular, those with limited advocacy experience seemed to derive the most from the project in terms of new learning. For instance, one stakeholder without previous advocacy experience stated that the project “was a huge learning experience,” (I03, 014) particularly in terms of engaging with the group and working on specific advocacy activities, such as the position paper. Further, another stakeholder with limited experience stated that the project:

Gave me...a sense of confidence, in that, just ordinary people can take on advocacy work and that there are certain things that you can do to follow through with that and that it's not something that is out there for other people to do, it's actually something that I too personally can take on. (I03,010)

In terms of facilitating learning, a feature of the project involved presentations from policy advocates and sharing of public policy advocacy resources. Over the course of the project, four short presentations from policy advocates were scheduled. These presentations were about 10 minutes in length, followed by 5 minutes for questions. Presentation content was general in nature and typically focused advocacy tips and strategies. Overall, the majority of stakeholders found the presentations to be beneficial. For instance, stakeholders appreciated receiving “some really good solid...advice” (I03, 013) and tangible examples of how “other people have tackled” advocacy (I02, 003). Indeed, during group meeting and interviews, a

number of stakeholders reiterated lessons from presentations, such as the importance of breaking big advocacy goals into smaller components and not blindsiding politicians.

In addition to presentations, advocacy resources were shared during group meetings. Ultimately, individuals found the resources to be somewhat useful. With that said, other priorities seemed to get in the way of stakeholders' ability to review resources as take-away activities. As such, there was a sense that it might have been beneficial to designate more time to review resources and related activities as a group during meetings.

Advocacy knowledge. This sub-theme explores stakeholder knowledge and expertise related to public policy advocacy.

While stakeholders came to the project with different levels of advocacy experience, as a collective, they expressed a significant amount of direct and indirect knowledge regarding the public policy advocacy process. Indeed, as I engaged with stakeholders, they made a number of assertions regarding what our group should do to achieve success. For example, stakeholders highlighted the importance of breaking advocacy goals into small steps, taking the long-term view, "celebrating small wins" (T03), framing advocacy messages to appeal to your audience, and making an economic case for our advocacy focus. As one stakeholder commented:

We need to look at the economy issue because that's all they care about, when they're developing policies. So as long as we don't include that as part of our public policy planning... they're not going to listen to what we say." (W01)

Overall, the group's collective knowledge seemed derived from a variety of sources, including past experience with advocacy, related areas of work such as community development, and lessons learnt from the project.

In relation to advocacy knowledge, a key highlight of the stakeholders' experience was the opportunity to engage with and learn from individuals with advocacy knowledge and expertise, including presenters and other stakeholders. Indeed, this sharing of knowledge seemed to help the group build confidence during uncertain points and reaffirm some stakeholders' ideas about what was needed for effective advocacy. For example, one stakeholder suggested that group members with advocacy-related experience and presenters helped the group move forward during uncertain points:

When we get into those lull points when we're not... all sure maybe of what the next step is...those that have been through this or have worked in public policy have been able to kind of add to the conversation and of course having the guest speakers in as well helps to stimulate ... that...thinking. (I02, 006)

Similarly, another stakeholder highlighted the role of the presenters in helping to reaffirm ideas about successful advocacy and increase the group's confidence:

[The Presentations] really add to it. Because it makes...the call a learning space....I think probably helps create comfort or sometimes [when what the presenter says back to you] is kind of what I've been feeling like "O I think that's how we should approach it"...but I don't have the experience to base that on, right...so I think that's also created...more confidence...in the group or sense of skill. (I02, 007)

Uncertainty

This theme aims to capture aspects of uncertainty experienced by stakeholders. I discuss confusion and perplexity related to group dynamics and the advocacy process, as well as hesitations expressed by stakeholders regarding advocacy and our advocacy goal. I also explore how stakeholders made sense of uncertainty.

Confusions and perplexity. This sub-theme explores stakeholders' experiences of confusion and perplexity. I describe confusion experienced by the group related to engaging with a broad and complex topic, moving towards action, determining next steps, and contextual factors.

Over the course of the advocacy project, the group experienced confusion and perplexity from a number of sources. As I previously described, collaborating around a broad and complex topic such as food security was, at times, a challenging and perplexing experience for the group. This was highlighted at the first workshop, when stakeholders expressed difficulty trying to narrow a broad topic like food security into a manageable focus for policy advocacy. The research team made the following observations during the meeting:

The participants seem to be getting scattered or overwhelmed by this point in the brainstorming session. "My brain is going in too many directions to be anything concise" one person commented at the end of the workshop. (W01)

This feeling of confusion carried through the project as stakeholders engaged in the process of identifying our specific focus for advocacy and refining aspects of our advocacy position. As one stakeholder commented, "it's not always easy, because there are only so many things you can do...it's a really huge topic" (I02, 003).

While the group was able to achieve a sense of understanding in terms of our advocacy focus and position, the process of moving towards action was also haphazard. Factors such as different levels of experience and involvement in the group, as well as contextual factors such as short time lines, meant that not everyone was on the same page when it came to rolling out our initial plans for action. This is reflected in the following excerpt:

I think depending on the different roles people are in the group, they could clearly see perhaps where they could take action and for like personally myself it was less clear because I'm not immediately in an advocacy public role especially related to the school. (I03, 007).

Tied to moving towards action, there was also a sense of confusion in terms of determining next steps in the advocacy project and achieving broader engagement. For example, one stakeholder commented that:

The main confusing part for advocacy relating to the project right now is just getting the word out there. I mean....we're doing the social media stuff and everything but we've gotten kinda little response as far as I'm aware of. So I think the advocacy part now we have we're like okay we're excited, we're trying to tell people all these really awesome things and ideas that we have, but now we just need to get people to listen. (I03,014)

Weaving through the above examples, contextual factors, including meeting over the phone, disorganized documents, and missed meetings, also contributed to the group's experience of confusion and perplexity. I discuss the role of contextual factors at the end of the chapter.

Hesitations. This sub-theme describes hesitations experienced by the group. Throughout the project, stakeholders expressed hesitations regarding advocacy and our advocacy focus. These hesitations include questions of feasibility, navigating perspectives about food, work and funding constraints, and the difficult nature of the task.

First, stakeholders raised questions regarding the feasibility of our advocacy focus. For example, some stakeholders viewed our advocacy goal as difficult to accomplish considering

the individualistic “mindset in Alberta” (I03, 005). Tied to this, there seemed to be some underlying doubt regarding the group’s power to influence policy. This is articulated in the following excerpt, which also acknowledges the need to work with people in power to achieve change:

You’ve got little dietitians that don’t have a lot of pull or power and a farmer who doesn’t have a lot of pull or power, you know, I think it’s important to get the people’s voice and the people are actually in the trenches, but then it needs to go a step up. (I03, 003)

Second, the group experienced hesitations regarding navigating outside perspectives. For example, some stakeholders in the group seemed to perceive their views about food as being outside the norm. At times, this led to irresoluteness in terms of navigating outside perspectives and determining “how hard-hitting” (I02, 008) the group wanted to be. This was highlighted at the final in-person workshop when the group reviewed feedback on the position paper. During this activity, stakeholders acknowledged that radical views had the potential to reduce the acceptance of our position. For example, they questioned whether using words such as ‘real food’ would be helpful or harmful to our efforts. In the end, the group seemed to view this as a balancing act. As one stakeholder summarized, “you need to be able to talk a language that doesn’t put people off...but also that stays true to what...you want and what you’ve been and what you’re standing for” (I03, 007).

Third, work and funding constraints created a sense of hesitancy or caution for some members of the group in terms of active engagement in advocacy work. Some stakeholders said that they had to be careful about the advocacy activities they engage in because they “can’t necessarily just go out and challenge everything” given their professional role (I02,

009). Other stakeholders also recognized that “advocacy can be a hot button” issue (I02, 002) and that you had to be careful using words like advocacy when trying to secure funding as a group.

Last, stakeholders expressed hesitation in terms of moving the project forward, particularly after the study’s end. For example, at the end of the study, one stakeholder pointed out the following:

We’re just at the beginning stage.... I feel reinforced that we have a strategy; I don’t know that I necessarily feel that we have moved to the next level of carrying it. So I have a hesitancy about, oh gosh, I hope we can, we are getting it out as well as we should. (I03, 008)

Related to this, stakeholders recognized that engaging in advocacy was a long and difficult task. For some, this created uncertainty about the group’s ability to achieve advocacy success over the long term. For instance, some stakeholders described the process of moving forward with our campaign as intimidating, daunting, and hard to do. Additionally, one stakeholder commented that the project was “a great policy advocacy project to undertake...even though it seemed kind of hopeless” (I03, 013). This stakeholder went on to make the following statement:

I feel it’s quite a difficult, long road and I think that a person has to put themselves out there quite a bit to actually be successful...So that’s my general feeling, it’s difficult, long and a little bit scary (I03, 013).

Making sense of uncertainty. This sub-theme describes the various ways in which stakeholders made sense of the uncertainty experienced during the project and achieved clarity.

Throughout the project, stakeholders used different analogies to make sense of the confusion, perplexity, or hesitations experienced. Early on, one stakeholder said they viewed the process as messy: “it doesn’t always make sense or seem to connect, but each step of the way we’re slowly sorting things out” (I02). At the final in-person meeting, another stakeholder described the process as moving through fog: “we’re making the road as we walk it, versus it being a paint by numbers” (I02, 007). Certain stakeholders also acknowledged that the group was dealing with a complex topic and attempting something that has not been done before in Alberta, making some level of uncertainty inevitable.

There was a sense that the group achieved some clarity by the end of the project. As discussed in the previous theme, a number of stakeholders were able to increase their understanding of the advocacy process. Further, in relation to group dynamics, there was indication that stakeholders had a better understanding of the group’s aims and next steps. This was particularly apparent at the final in-person meeting, where one stakeholder made the comment that “things congealed” (W02). Nevertheless, there was still some uncertainty regarding aspects of the project. For instance, stakeholders questioned how we could effectively engage the broader public in our advocacy efforts and how the project would continue over the long term.

Contextual Factors

In addition to the themes outlined above, I identified a number of key contextual factors that influenced stakeholders’ experiences. These factors include the meeting mode, time, and meeting organization.

Meeting mode: teleconference versus face-to-face. Due to financial and geographic constraints, teleconference was the primary meeting mode throughout the advocacy project.

While the research team attempted to schedule an in-person meeting at the beginning of the project, this was not feasible due to low-attendance. As I have previously discussed, this resulted in the scheduling of an online meeting using the web conferencing system, Adobe Connect (Adobe Systems Incorporated, 2012), which includes both an audio and an online component. Overall, the online component was not well used by the group.

Many stakeholders identified the teleconference system as a barrier to their engagement. For example, the lack of face-to-face contact made it more difficult to engage in conversation and build relationships. Nevertheless, for some stakeholders, meeting over the phone acted as a facilitator of engagement. This was particularly the case for those who lived a significant distance from urban centers or had busy schedules. Stakeholders also recognized that, given the resources available, meeting over the phone was a satisfactory option for the group.

In light of the feedback received regarding the use of the teleconference, I prioritized the scheduling of an in-person meeting at the end of the project. Further, while connecting by web conferencing did not appear to be overly effective with this group, some stakeholders suggested that the group explore other meeting modes, such as video conference, and strategies for relationship building in non-face-to-face contexts.

Time. Time was another significant contextual factor that influenced the project. In terms of barriers, stakeholders experienced a variety of challenges related to time, including busy schedules, work constraints, other priorities, and the time commitment required of the project. Further related to time, stakeholders described the project timelines as “really tight” (I03, 003), both in relation to the length of our meetings (1-hour) and the length of the project (approx. 9 months). Ultimately, while some stakeholders appreciated the short meetings due to

their busy schedules, others felt the tight timelines made it difficult to achieve our goals and created a tension with a participatory approach.

Meeting organization. Another factor that influenced stakeholder experience in the project was the organization of our meetings, which stakeholders generally described as positive. In particular, the group appreciated my role as a facilitator, which involved sending meeting documents in advance of meeting and keeping the meetings organized.

With that said, sometimes the organization of the meetings acted as a contextual barrier to engagement. While I made an effort to ensure that meetings were organized and systematic, this was not always the case. This was due, in part, to the fact that the project represented a learning experience for me as a facilitator. Indeed, stakeholders sometimes expressed confusion over documents when I had forgotten to add page numbers, or suggested that our discussions could “use a little more guidance” (I02, 013). Such issues seemed to be accentuated by additional factors, such as when a stakeholder missed a number of meetings in a row. When possible, I made an effort to incorporate stakeholder feedback into future meetings as I received it.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented findings from the exploration of stakeholders’ experiences in the advocacy project, which revealed four themes and a number of contextual factors. The first theme is a *positive and open space to contribute*. For the most part, when stakeholders attended group meetings and participated in the collaboration process, they experienced a positive and open space that welcomed contributions and the sharing of ideas. The creation of this space was an important aspect of stakeholders’ experiences, which provided an opportunity for different perspectives to be shared and learning to take place. This space,

however, was neither fixed nor ideal. For example, certain activities, such as the information gathering process, were described as dissuading participation.

With respect to cultivating a positive and open space, influencing factors include the importance of prioritizing relationship development, providing multiple opportunities to contribute, and planning occasions to engage face-to-face. This theme also highlighted the key role of the facilitator in setting the meeting tone and providing meeting structure, the need to be sensitive to different ways of working, to consider different knowledge and communication needs, and the importance of establishing project timelines that allow for thorough engagement at all stages.

The second theme is *diversity and common ground*. Early on in the project, it was clear that stakeholders shared a common passion or interest in food security. Nevertheless, the group was diverse, comprised of different ages, experiences, and priorities around food. Despite some minor challenges dealing with diverse views, the diversity provided stakeholders with a valuable opportunity to learn and engage with new ideas. By the end of the project, there was also a sense that the group was able to establish common ground around our focus on children and schools, though stakeholders appeared to share this common vision to different degrees. In addition to exploring diversity within the group, stakeholders recognized the importance of considering outside perspectives and engaging with a broader public to achieve advocacy goals.

The third theme is *confidence and capacity*. Throughout the project, stakeholders expressed a belief in the use of advocacy to help shift the food culture in Alberta and positive convictions regarding advocacy and our advocacy focus. The project also provided a space for learning, which helped to solidify some aspects of the public policy process. Last, the group

expressed collective knowledge and expertise regarding what was necessary for advocacy efforts to be successful. In particular, creating a space where group members could engage with those knowledgeable about the subject seems to have contributed to feelings of confidence and capacity.

The fourth theme is *uncertainty*. Throughout the project, stakeholders experienced confusions, perplexities, and hesitations, resulting in an underlying sense of uncertainty. Specific aspects of the process that contributed to confusion or perplexity included engaging with a broad topic like food security, moving toward action, determining next steps, and general meeting dynamics. Stakeholders also expressed hesitation related to our advocacy focus, such as questions around opposition and feasibility, managing views around food, work and funding constraints, and the difficult nature of advocacy work.

As we moved through the process, stakeholders made sense of the uncertainty in different ways. For example, some stakeholders described the process as messy, moving through fog, complex, and something that has not been attempted before. Further, while the group achieved some clarity around group dynamics, next steps, and aspects of the policy advocacy process, there were still questions regarding project sustainability and the capacity of the group to carry the project forward over the long-term.

In addition to the four themes outlined above, I identified a number of key contextual factors that influenced stakeholder engagement. One of the most significant factors was the use of the teleconference system as the primary mode of communication during meetings. While some stakeholders felt the use of the teleconference facilitated their engagement because it reduced geographic barriers to participation, the majority of stakeholders felt the teleconference made it difficult to engage.

Another significant contextual factor was time. Many stakeholders described challenges related to time, such as busy schedules, competing priorities, and work constraints, which made participation challenging. Moreover, a number of stakeholders also felt that the length of meetings and overall project timelines inhibited the group's ability to collaborate and meet advocacy goals.

Last, meeting organization and dynamics influenced stakeholder engagement. While stakeholders generally felt the meetings were well structured, issues related to meeting organization, such as document pagination, sometimes caused confusions. For stakeholders, these issues seemed to be heightened by factors such as missing meetings.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

Overview

In this study, I worked with stakeholders from GFSA's PWG to develop an advocacy project to promote food security at the public policy level in Alberta. In addition, I explored the experience of the group as it engaged in this process. In this chapter, I provide a critical reflection on our advocacy project and explore highlights and lessons learnt from the advocacy process. I also discuss findings from the exploration of stakeholders' experiences in relation to the literature.

The Public Policy Advocacy Project: Reflections, Highlights, and Lessons Learnt

The first objective of the study was to document and describe stakeholder engagement in the public policy advocacy project. Over the course of the project, the PWG engaged in the beginning stages of an advocacy campaign to improve school food environments. In this section, I reflect on our campaign, as well as describe highlights and lessons learnt from the advocacy process not captured in the exploration of stakeholders' experiences.

A Universal School Food Strategy for Alberta: a critical reflection. As discussed in the previous chapter, the outcome of the advocacy project was a campaign calling on the provincial government to develop a Universal School Food Strategy for Alberta. A critical reflection of this focus highlights a number of strengths. For one, the school food environment has been shown to have a significant impact on children and is an important site of intervention for public health and community food security (Carlsson & Williams, 2008; Joshi, Azuma, & Feenstra, 2008; Story, Kaphingst, Robinson-O'Brien, & Glanz, 2008). Further, the strategy's emphasis on healthy meals and snacks, food system education, relationships with local producers, and local procurement policies provides evidence-informed opportunities to

promote food security at all levels of the food security continuum (Carlsson & Williams, 2008). Last, the campaign's call for public funding and government leadership can be viewed as a form of resistance to neoliberal forces and the retreat of the welfare state (Allen & Guthman, 2006), which have arguably contributed to food security issues in Canada (Koc et al., 2008).

Improving school food has a role to play within a comprehensive approach to food security and has the potential to address a number of CFS priorities (Carlsson & Williams, 2008). However, it is important to recognize that it is not a cure-all solution to food security, which is a complex systems-issue (Rutter, 2012). For example, school feeding and growing initiatives do not directly address the structural roots of household food insecurity. As such, researchers have cautioned against the implementation of such programs in the name of those experiencing household food insecurity or hunger, and highlight the potential for the 'healthy food for all' movement to render the issue of household food insecurity invisible (McIntyre, 2011). Stakeholders also brought attention to the fact that a Universal School Food Strategy supported by the provincial government is not directly relevant to Alberta First Nations communities on-reserve, a population that experiences a number of issues related to food security (Willows, 2005), as First Nations school funding is under federal jurisdiction (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2014).

Since the study's end, the PWG has continued to refine and modify its position based on feedback and lessons learnt. In light of the considerations above, the partnership is encouraged to engage with the tensions and complexities inherent in efforts to promote food security and food systems change (Levkoe, 2011). Levkoe (2011)'s framework for a transformative food politics may be helpful in this regard. Focusing on three elements,

including the transition to collective subjectivities, a whole systems food approach, and a politics of reflexive localization, the framework can assist groups in critically engaging with the process of food system transformation (Levkoe, 2011). Moving forward, developing networks and partnerships with different groups, including poverty reduction coalitions, may also be helpful in terms of supporting comprehensive approaches to food security, including action to address the root causes of poverty (Tarasuk, 2001a). Further, considering food security in Alberta is shaped by policy and power dynamics at multiple jurisdictional levels (Freudenberg & Tsui, 2014), it may be beneficial for advocates to consider supporting partnerships at different scales of government. With that said, the question remains as to whether it is realistic to ask so much of volunteer-run advocacy groups such as the PWG, given the significant constraints on their time and resources.

Highlights and lessons learnt. In line with CBPR principles, the public policy advocacy project represented a learning experience for all involved, including myself as the student researcher. Below, I outline highlights and lessons learnt regarding the public policy advocacy process. Considering the project was in the beginning stages when the study ended, these lessons may help to inform the partnership's future advocacy efforts.

Integrating different ways of knowing. The first highlight centers on the role of knowledge. In the CBPR literature, the co-creation of knowledge is an important component of a participatory approach (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Minkler, 2005). Reflecting on the advocacy project, we did not explicitly consider different ways of knowing, which led to a number of potential issues and lessons learnt.

First, during the process of issue identification, stakeholders generated our policy focus through dialogue and discussion, bringing together the group's diverse knowledge, expertise,

and experience related to food security. While such dialogue was an important aspect of the project, a process that better integrates different forms of knowledge, including direct scientific evidence, may have been beneficial at this stage (Fischer, 1993). This is particularly the case given the complexity of food security issues and potential policy solutions at the provincial level. Along these lines, the National Collaborating Center for Healthy Public Policy has developed an approach for synthesizing different forms of knowledge related to public policy, which could be used to inform a participatory process for understanding complex public health issues and policy options (Morestin, 2012). Further, Bryant (2002)'s framework for policy development, which has been applied by the PFCP in Nova Scotia (Williams et al., 2012), may also be useful as it highlights different ways of knowing about the public policy process and discusses how knowledge can be used in different ways to inform policy.

The second issue centers on the information gathering activity the group engaged in, which involved collecting secondary research and citing sources. Reflecting on the project, this process did not compliment the skills or knowledge base of all stakeholders in the group. For example, while it may fit with the evidence-based training that dietitians and researchers receive, it may not have been the best process for utilizing the wealth of community knowledge present amongst stakeholders. This consideration emphasizes the need to better align activities with the knowledge and skills of stakeholders, assign roles within the group based on interests and strengths, and provide opportunities for project members to build their skills in areas of interest to them (Israel et al., 1998).

Power in public policy advocacy. The second highlight focuses on the role of power in public policy advocacy. In the literature, power has been identified as an important consideration for public policy advocates (Freudenberg & Tsui, 2014). For example,

Freudenberg and Tsui (2014) propose that for participatory policy partnerships to be effective, they must cultivate relationships with those who have political power. Power analysis, in particular, can help advocates consider the different power dynamics at play in a project, including who has the power to encourage public policy change (Gonzalez et al., 2011; Ritas, Minkler, Ni, & Haplin, 2011).

During our advocacy project, the group considered general questions related to power when conducting strategic analysis. In hindsight, however, conducting a more strategic power analysis at this stage may have been beneficial, particularly given the confusion experienced by the group when moving towards action. For example, in the CBPR literature on public policy advocacy, power analysis in the form of power mapping has emerged as an effective strategy for helping advocates consider allies, opponents, and individuals with decision-making power (Cheezum et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2011; Israel et al., 2010; Ritas et al., 2011). As Gonzalez et al. (2011) outlines, it also assists advocates in creating an action plan to “neutralize or win over opponents, mobilize constituents,” and “bring appropriate arguments and advocacy methods to bear on a target or group of targets” (p. S169). Indeed, Israel and colleagues (2010) indicate that, during a series of training sessions to build community capacity for public policy advocacy, participants identified power mapping as one of the most important aspects of the training.

Participation. The third highlight centers on stakeholder participation and my role in the project. First, in terms of participation, stakeholder engagement in the project was somewhat variable. While stakeholders appreciated the flexibility, this seemed to contradict the goal of high-level community participation in CBPR projects (Minkler, 2004). Participatory researchers have outlined similar tensions in the literature (Minkler, 2004; Yoshihama & Carr,

2002). For example, in Yoshihama and Carr (2002)'s exploration of participation in a feminist participatory action project, the authors find that despite efforts to maximize community engagement, participation was regularly impacted by contextual factors, such as personal and family related circumstances. As the authors outline, this fluidity was challenging in terms of achieving continuity and consensus, but it was realistic given women's competing priorities (Yoshihama & Carr, 2002). In the end, the authors come to recognize participation as a "fluid process, as opposed to an absolute state" (p. 94). They also highlight the importance of reflexivity for managing tensions related to participation (Yoshihama & Carr, 2002).

Further related to participation, another highlight focuses on my role in the project. As a funded student, I was able to contribute part-time hours to the project and devote significant effort to carrying it forward. While I sometimes questioned my high-level involvement, I also recognized that stakeholders were volunteering their time and had many competing priorities, which limited the time and energy they could contribute. The understanding that participatory projects need designated, and ideally funded, support to move them forward is outlined in the CBPR literature. For instance, the literature emphasizes the importance of having community-based researchers and funded support staff, whether community or university-based, to support the project in terms of planning, facilitation, research, and communication (Israel et al., 1998; Pigford, Ball, Plotnikoff, Arcand, Fehderau, Holt, Veugelers, & Willows, 2013). With that said, for participatory projects to be effective, individuals in such roles must recognize and value the skills, knowledge, and perspectives that others bring to the table and leave room for others to contribute (Israel et al., 1998).

Stakeholders' Experiences in the Advocacy Project

The second objective of the study was to explore stakeholders' experiences in the advocacy project. Using the process of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), this exploration resulted in the identification of four themes and a number of contextual factors. In this section, I discuss findings in relation to the literature and present a final perspective on moving the project forward.

A positive and open space as a foundation for engagement. In this study, I found that stakeholders experienced the advocacy project as a positive and open space to contribute. This, in turn, provided a foundation for collaboration, common understanding, and advocacy learning to take place. These findings are in line with research highlighting participatory projects as creating safe and empowering spaces where individuals have a voice (Israel et al., 2010; Knezevic et al., 2014; Vaughan, 2014). For example, Knezevic et al.'s (2014) critical discourse analysis on food insecurity and participation in the Nova Scotia PFCP indicates that the project created a space for participants to have a voice and provided an empowering experience through which participants could shape an alternative discourse around food insecurity. In addition, Vaughan's exploration of youths' experiences in a photovoice project, a participatory method that seeks to combine photography with action to achieve social change (Emme, 2008), highlights the project as a safe social space, where youth felt comfortable discussing issues and sharing openly. With that said, Vaughan asserts that while the project created a safe space, youth experienced difficulty moving beyond this space to implement their action goals in wider society (Vaughan, 2014). I discuss Vaughan's findings further in relation to this study toward the end of the chapter.

While the advocacy project provided stakeholders with a positive and open space, I found that this space was not fixed and not always ideal. Indeed, throughout the project, I identified both supporting factors and obstacles pertaining to the cultivation of the space, through which a number of key lessons emerged. These lessons include prioritizing the development of relationships throughout the study, providing multiple opportunities to contribute, planning occasions to engage face-to-face, applying effective facilitation strategies, considering different ways of working and different knowledge and communication needs, and establishing project timelines that allow for thorough engagement. Many of these lessons are reflected in the literature on effective CBPR and group dynamics. For instance, this literature highlights the importance of equitable participation, valuing the knowledge and expertise of all involved, incorporating facilitation strategies, and engaging in ongoing relationship building (Becker et al., 2005; Israel et al., 1998).

This study's finding that a positive and open space to contribute was an important aspect of stakeholders' experiences draws attention to the need to pay attention to group dynamics and the process in which participatory advocacy projects are coming together; factors that are well documented in the CBPR and group process literature (Becker et al., 2005). For example, Shultz, Israel & Lantz (2003) assert that for public health partnerships to realize their collaborative potential, they "must assess the quality of the working relationships that are essential to these goals" (p. 258). To facilitate this process, the authors outline a set of evaluation approaches for assessing group dynamics in participatory processes (Schulz et al., 2003), which may be relevant to future participatory advocacy projects.

Diverse perspectives and common ground: school food as a site of convergence.

The CFS literature highlights the importance of creating a unified vision for effective action to promote food security, but recognizes that it can be difficult to do so given the diverse perspectives operating within a CFS approach (Anderson & Cook, 1999; Ashe & Sonnino, 2013b; Hamm & Bellows, 2003; Power, 2005). In this study, I found that, working within the cultural context of the PWG and supported by a positive and open space, stakeholders generally valued the opportunity to engage with different perspectives and were able to establish a shared vision and sense of common ground.

In terms of establishing common ground, findings from this study suggest that stakeholders were able to come together through our focus on children and schools. This is in line with research that has situated school food as an intersection or point of convergence among diverse food system priorities (Ashe & Sonnino, 2013a, 2013b). For example, Ashe and Sonnino (2013b) argue that school food represents a potentially powerful site of convergence for a number of reasons. First, it addresses food system issues at a variety of points from production to disposal. Second, it targets children, a sympathetic population. Last, it involves the state, which “lends it a uniquely strong base of potential resources, legitimacy, reach, and implementation capacity” (Ashe & Sonnino, 2013b, p. 73). Considering this, findings from this study suggest that school food may be a strategic area to focus joint efforts to promote policy change.

While children and schools represent a site of common ground in this study, it is important to consider whose interests and priorities are left out when groups attempt to establish common ground amidst diverse perspectives and priorities. For example, research from McCullum, Pettetier, Barr and Wilkins (2002) suggests that in bringing together diverse

interests in CFS discussions and planning processes, certain voices, such as those of marginalized populations, may be downplayed. In this study, I noticed some potential issues related to the process of achieving common ground, including the fact that not all stakeholders seemed to be on board with our chosen advocacy goal to the same degree. Ultimately, this suggests a need to better understand the underlying factors that influence the process of achieving common ground during such projects and how tensions related to this process can be uncovered and addressed (McCullum et al., 2002).

It is also important to note that, throughout the advocacy project, stakeholders recognized a need to consider outside perspectives and to engage a broader public to achieve advocacy goals. Viewed in relation to the theme of diverse perspectives and convergence, such considerations highlight the complexity experienced by those engaging in participatory advocacy projects. Indeed, for advocacy groups or coalitions to be effective, they must consider both internal group process and wider community mobilization and organizing (Cheezum et al., 2013; Themba-Nixon, 2010; Themba-Nixon et al., 2008).

Project impact on confidence and capacity. In the exploration of stakeholder experience, I found that the group illustrated confidence and capacity to engage in public policy advocacy and that the experience of engaging in the advocacy project seemed to have some positive impact in this area. For example, there is indication that the project helped to create a space for the group to reinforce their beliefs around advocacy as a tool for change, contributed to some new learning, and created a venue for knowledge sharing. Taken together, these findings support the use of participatory approaches to build capacity for public policy advocacy. They are also in line with the literature, which suggests that participatory approaches can help to facilitate policy learning and feelings of confidence and capacity to engage in

policy change (Cheezum et al., 2013; Israel et al., 2010). However, since the advocacy project was in the beginning stages when the study ended, it is difficult to determine how increases in the group's confidence and capacity might translate into tangible action.

In terms of activities that facilitated the group's confidence and capacity, I found that stakeholders valued presentations from policy advocacy and opportunities to engage and learn from those with advocacy experience. Indeed, while advocacy resources were shared during the project, there was a sense that more time could have been devoted to reviewing these resources during group meetings. These findings somewhat coincide with Cheezum et al.'s (2013) evaluation of a CBPR policy advocacy project in Detroit, US, which recommends using an experiential approach to advocacy learning that provides participants with the opportunity to practice using advocacy tools and resources in small groups. The authors also suggest creating a binder of relevant advocacy resources for participants (Cheezum et al., 2013).

Managing advocacy uncertainty. Another key finding related to this study focused on the group's experience of uncertainty. Taken together, this sense of uncertainty seemed to derive from a combination of factors, including group dynamics, the broad and complex nature of food security and advocacy, and contextual factors. Ultimately, the group's experience of uncertainty is in line with the views put forth by Janssen (2007), who states that a level of uncertainty is expected when engaging in policy advocacy as policy practice often lacks structure, clear boundaries, and requires an unknown amount of time and energy. Considering this, Janssen asserts that it is important for advocates to learn to tolerate uncertainty (Jansson, 2007). The findings also contribute to an understanding of the challenges and barriers experienced by community stakeholders engaging in advocacy. For example, they are in line with Cheezum et al.'s (2013) study in which community residents reported difficulty

identifying the specific policy solution to work on and narrowing down their focus to one issue.

Contextual factors. Throughout the study, I also identified a number of contextual factors, such as the teleconference-meeting mode, time, and meeting organization, which had an influence on stakeholders' experiences. In particular, I found that while the teleconference helped to reduce geographic barriers, many stakeholders felt that the lack of face-to-face communication had a negative impact on their engagement and made communication difficult. This highlights the importance of incorporating face-to-face contact into group meetings (Bikowski, 2007), as well as the need to explore strategies for relationship building when face-to-face meetings are not possible. Further, in terms of meeting organization and time, the exploration of the group's experience emphasizes the need for participatory advocacy projects to be well organized and to have realistic timelines that allow for thorough collaboration at all stages, considerations outlined in the literature on effective CBPR and group process (Becker et al., 2005; Israel et al., 2010).

Synthesis of findings: moving beyond the project space. In this study, I found that stakeholders experienced the research project as a positive and open space to contribute. Within this space, the group was able to narrow its focus and establish a goal for advocacy, with the topic of children and schools emerging as a site of common ground. Further, in line with the CBPR literature (Cheezum et al., 2013), participation in the advocacy project seemed to contribute to positive impacts in terms of the group's confidence and capacity to engage in advocacy.

In addition to the above findings, I also found that the group experienced an underlying sense of uncertainty throughout the project. One source of uncertainty seemed to center on the

nature of working to achieve change at wider ecological levels. Indeed, since the project was in the beginning stage when the study ended, there was still a sense of the unknown in terms of moving beyond the project space. Considering this, as the group moves forward, it will be beneficial to explore how best to transition from the project space to broader advocacy activities, as well as how to overcome potential barriers related to this process. For example, Vaughan's study on youth involvement in a photovoice project describes challenges related to working at wider levels, such as disinterest from community leaders (Vaughan, 2014). To address such challenges, Vaughan highlights the need for participatory projects to create in-between spaces, such as a community exhibition, that link participants to powerful others (Vaughan, 2014). In relation to public policy advocacy, the development of in-between spaces could also be supplemented by effective strategies for public policy advocacy and community mobilization. Examples include watching for open policy windows (Kingdon, 2003), engaging in media advocacy (Wallack & Dorfman, 1996), working with opinion leaders and advocacy champions (Valente & Pumpuang, 2007) and celebrating small wins (Weick, 1984). Considering constraints on time and resources, the ability to sustain advocacy efforts over the long term may prove difficult. Nevertheless, continued efforts to establish creative community-university partnerships may offer a promising way forward.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed study findings in relation to the literature. In terms of my first research objective, I provided a critical reflection on the public policy advocacy project and presented highlights and lessons learnt from the advocacy process. In particular, highlights and lessons learnt focused on different ways of knowing, the role of power, and participation. In terms of my second research objective, I discussed key themes and contextual factors in

relation to the literature, as well as presented a synthesis of findings. Building on this, I provide a summary of recommendations for future research and action in the next chapter.

Chapter Nine: Conclusions

Overview

This chapter concludes the study. I provide recommendations for future research and action, as well as outline plans for knowledge translation and study limitations. I end this chapter with concluding remarks.

Recommendations

This section outlines recommendations for future research and action.

Future research. Findings from this study contribute to the literature by providing an illustration of a participatory advocacy project in a Canadian context, and exploring an advocacy project from the perspective of those engaging in it. Future research should build on this study by exploring stakeholders' advocacy experiences in different Canadian contexts and by providing examples of long-term participatory advocacy projects. In addition, future research could examine the impact of such projects on the confidence and capacity of groups to engage in public policy advocacy, strategic areas to focus advocacy efforts among diverse CFS priorities, and effective strategies for transitioning from internal planning to broader advocacy activities and policy change.

Future action. Below, I provide recommendations for future action to promote food security at the public policy level using participatory approaches. These recommendations have been derived from a specific cultural context. As such, they may not be generalizable to other settings. Nevertheless, as Israel et al. (2001) outlines, lessons from the experiences of others may help inform the adaptation of strategies to new contexts. Further, as the public policy advocacy project was in the beginning stages when the project ended, the PWG may use these

recommendations to inform future advocacy efforts. Recommendations have been organized into three categories, including group process, the public policy advocacy process and general.

Group process.

- Provide opportunities for meaningful participation, but recognize that participants often have competing priorities. Considering this, it may be helpful to recognize participation as a fluid process as opposed to a fixed state (Yoshihama & Carr, 2002). Explore strategies for maximizing participation, while accounting for this fluidity.
- Participatory advocacy projects require significant support in terms of planning, facilitation, and communication (Israel et al., 1998). The ability to hire a part-time funded project coordinator to manage such projects is ideal (Pigford et al., 2013). However, considering resource constraints, working with graduate students interested in conducting community-based projects is a potential alternative.
- Devote time to the cultivation of a positive and open space where individuals feel comfortable contributing their perspectives and ideas. Key lessons from the project include the importance of prioritizing relationship development, providing multiple opportunities to contribute, planning occasions to engage face-to-face, applying facilitation strategies, considering different ways of working and different knowledge and communication needs, and establishing project timelines that allow for thorough engagement. These lessons could be supplemented with literature and resources on effective CBPR and group process (Becker et al., 2005; Israel et al., 1998; Schulz et al., 2003). As the facilitator plays an important role in cultivating such a space, it is important that they build and develop skills in these areas (Springett et al., April 2011).

- Provide opportunities to meet face-to-face, if possible, and explore effective strategies for relationship building in non-face-to-face contexts (Bikowski, 2007).
- Set timelines for projects that allow for thorough collaboration at all stages. It is also important to devote time to meeting organization, such as sending out meeting agendas and reminders (Becker et al., 2005; Israel et al., 2010).

The public policy advocacy process.

- Critically reflect on the tensions and complexities inherent in advocacy work to promote CFS. Levkoe's framework for a transformative food politics, which focuses on three elements, including the transition to collective subjectivities, a whole systems food approach, and the politics of reflective localization, may provide a useful tool for facilitating critical thinking in this area (Levkoe, 2011).
- Consider collaborating with different groups relevant to food security, such as poverty reduction coalitions (Tarasuk, 2001a), to support comprehensive approaches to food security, including action to address the root causes of household food insecurity. Further, as food security is influenced by dynamics at multiple scales of government, it may be beneficial to support advocacy efforts at different levels of government (Freudenberg & Tsui, 2014).
- Apply frameworks to help integrate different ways of knowing into participatory advocacy projects. One example is Toba Bryant's (2002) framework for public policy development, which has been applied by the Participatory Food Costing Project in Nova Scotia (Williams et al., 2012). It is also important to consider how to align project activities with the different knowledge, skills, and expertise present within the group and to provide

opportunities for project members to build their knowledge and skills in areas of interest, such as research and writing (Israel et al., 1998).

- Consider the role of power in public policy advocacy (Freudenberg & Tsui, 2014). For example, it may be beneficial to engage in strategic power analysis in the form of power mapping. As the name suggests, power mapping is an activity that can be used by policy advocates to map out allies, opponents, and individuals who have decision making power, as well as help to create an action plan to pinpoint individuals or organizations to focus advocacy efforts (Cheezum et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2011; Israel et al., 2010; Ritas et al., 2011).
- Provide opportunities and sufficient time within projects for learning and capacity building. For example, presentations from public policy advocates and opportunities to engage with individuals who have advocacy experience may help to facilitate learning. Compiling relevant resources into a participant binder may also be beneficial (Cheezum et al., 2013).
- Consider outside perspectives when formulating and refining the group's advocacy position and engage broadly to raise awareness and generate support for your public policy goal (Themba-Nixon, 2010; Themba-Nixon et al., 2008). In particular, stakeholders with the PWG felt that it would have been beneficial to seek greater engagement from the wider GFSA network early on in the project to generate internal support and awareness for the campaign.
- Recognize that public policy advocacy requires continued effort over the long-term. Celebrate small wins, such as the publication of a letter to the editor, and be prepared to take the long-term view (Nykiforuk et al., 2011; Weick, 1984).

General.

- Consider factors and best practices relevant to the different components of public policy advocacy, including internal group process and wider community mobilization and organizing (Cheezum et al., 2013; Themba-Nixon, 2010).
- Explore strategic areas to focus advocacy efforts, which have the potential to bring together diverse CFS priorities (Ashe & Sonnino, 2013b). At the same time, it is important to consider underlying tensions related to the achievement of a common vision and common ground, as well as which voices may be left out of this process (McCullum et al., 2002).
- Participatory advocacy projects to promote food security bring with them a level of uncertainty, which can result from a combination of factors (i.e. group dynamics, contextual factors, and the broad and complex nature of food security and advocacy). Explore strategies to help communicate, manage, and effectively respond to such uncertainty (Jansson, 2007).
- In terms of engaging in broader advocacy efforts, consider creating spaces that link advocacy groups to those in power, such as a community exhibition (Vaughan, 2014) or a policy forum. In addition, it is important to engage in strategies for effective public policy advocacy. Examples include watching for open policy windows (Kingdon, 2003), employing media advocacy (Wallack & Dorfman, 1996), working with opinion leaders and advocacy champions (Valente & Pumpuang, 2007), and celebrating small wins (Weick, 1984).

Study Limitations

In this section, I outline several limitations related to the study. First, due to the constraints of a master's program, the project had a relatively short-time frame compared to a

typical participatory project. This may have reduced the time upfront that could be devoted to relationship building and influenced the group's ability to achieve tangible advocacy goals.

Second, it is important to note that the project was influenced by contextual factors, such as time constraints and my facilitation skills as a student researcher, which may have affected overall project success. One strategy used to account for the role of contextual factors in the study was the use of thick description.

Third, in relation to the study's qualitative findings, a key limitation of the study relates to my role in the project as both the researcher and project facilitator, which may have biased study findings. Indeed, during interviews, stakeholders may have been reluctant to share aspects related to the project, such as negative feelings, given my dual role. Factors that may have helped to address this limitation include the rapport I developed with the group, the use of multiple data generating strategies, and probing to explore both positive and negative aspects related to the project.

Knowledge Translation

In this study, the participatory nature of the advocacy process is in line with an integrated approach to knowledge translation. This approach emphasizes collaboration between researchers and knowledge users throughout the entire research process and the generation of knowledge that is useful to all partners involved (Graham, Logan, Harrison, Straus, Tetroe, Caswell, & Robinson, 2006). In line with an integrated approach, stakeholders and members of the research team had an opportunity to learn from each other throughout the advocacy project. Further, I performed participant checks, which provided stakeholders with an opportunity to assist with the interpretation of data (Mayan, 2009).

In terms of end of project knowledge translation, the group had an opportunity to engage in a discussion regarding the use of study findings at the final in-person meeting. Through this discussion and subsequent conversations, the group came up with the idea of developing an advocacy resource kit called “Recipes for Policy Change.” Based on this, I have been working with student volunteers to develop the kit, which will include key advocacy concepts used during the study, an overview of findings and study recommendations, and a compilation of policy advocacy resources. This resource kit will be disseminated within the GFSA network, as well as to other interested parties relevant to food security. In addition to the toolkit, I have presented findings at conferences across Alberta. I will also aim to publish findings in peer-reviewed journals.

Concluding Remarks

To address complex issues such as food security, comprehensive and multi-level approaches are required. Although strategies have been implemented to promote food security at a variety of ecological levels, there is a continued need for broader and more integrated public policy action in this area. Engaging in public policy advocacy using CBPR approaches is one strategy that can help achieve this aim.

Informed by CBPR principles and a focused ethnographic approach, this study engaged a group of stakeholders in a 9-month participatory public policy advocacy project to promote food security in Alberta, as well as explored the experience of the group as it engaged in this process. Based on findings from the study and incorporating stakeholder feedback, the study resulted in a set of recommendations. Moving forward, these recommendations may help to inform the PWG’s future advocacy efforts. Further, while the study may not be fully generalizable to other settings, when viewed in context, findings and recommendations may

help to inform the work of community-based researchers and food security groups working to promote food security in other jurisdictions across Canada.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Documents

Recruitment Letter for Current PWG Members

Dear [Name],

My name is Kayla Atkey. As you may know, I am a 2nd year graduate student in the School of Public Health at the University of Alberta, completing a Master of Science in Health Promotion. In fulfillment of my graduate thesis, I am currently working with Growing Food Security in Alberta (GFSA) on a study focused on building capacity to promote food security at the public policy-level in Alberta.

As a member of the GFSA Buzz, you are being contacted as a potential community stakeholder to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of community stakeholders who are participating in a policy advocacy project to promote food security. It also seeks to understand how a participatory approach can be used to facilitate stakeholder engagement.

Your participation in the study will involve working as part of the GSFA Buzz Policy-Working Group to engage in a public policy advocacy project. The study is set to begin in November 2012 and will extend to spring 2013.

The activities that will take place as part of the study are described below. Please note that taking part in the study does not require full participation in all activities.

- A four-hour workshop held the afternoon of November 1st, 2012, in Edmonton. This workshop will provide a refresher on policy advocacy and an opportunity for the group to generate advocacy goals.

If you are unable to attend the above workshop and/or are not planning on attending Food Secure Canada's National Assembly, you will be provided with a detailed information package to review and the option of participating in a follow-up teleconference meeting.

- Monthly teleconference meetings (approximately 1-hour in length). These teleconference meetings will involve activities related to advocacy goals (drafting letters, planning meetings with policy-makers) and building the skills of stakeholders in the area of public policy advocacy.
- A final workshop to summarize project outcomes.
- We are also asking participants to take part in interviews of approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour in length at the beginning, mid and end-point of the study. These interviews will help to capture your experience participating in the policy advocacy project. They will be conducted in a private location either in person or over the phone.

Your participation in this study will provide you with an opportunity to build skills in the area of advocacy and communication. It will also help contribute to an understanding of how food security can be addressed at the public policy-level and ways to engage community stakeholders in this process.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary.

Interested in Participating?

If you are interested in participating in the study, please fill out the attached information sheet and I will contact you with further details.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact one of the individuals listed below.

Thank you for your consideration! I look forward to hearing from you,

Kayla Atkey
MSc Student
School of Public Health, University of Alberta
Phone: 780-492-1964

Kim Raine, PhD, RD
Professor
School of Public Health, University of Alberta
Phone: 780-492-9415

Susan Roberts,
Program Coordinator
Growing Food Security in Alberta

Recruitment Letter for Members of the GFSA Network

Dear [Name],

My name is Kayla Atkey. I am a 2nd year graduate student in the School of Public Health at the University of Alberta, completing a Master of Science in Health Promotion. In fulfillment of my graduate thesis, I am working with Growing Food Security in Alberta (GFSA) on a study focused on building capacity to promote food security at the public policy-level in Alberta.

As a member of GFSA, you are being contacted as a potential community stakeholder to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of community stakeholders who are participating in a policy advocacy project to promote food security. It also seeks to understand how a participatory approach can be used to facilitate stakeholder engagement.

Your participation in the study will involve working as part of the GSFA Policy-Working Group to engage in a public policy advocacy project. The study is set to begin in November 2012 and will extend to spring 2013.

The activities that will take place as part of the study are described below. Please note that taking part in the study does not require full participation in all activities.

- A four-hour workshop held the afternoon of November 1st, 2012, in Edmonton. This workshop will provide a refresher on policy advocacy and an opportunity for the group to generate advocacy goals.

If you are unable to attend the above workshop and/or are not planning on attending Food Secure Canada's National Assembly, you will be provided with a detailed information package to review and the option of participating in a follow-up teleconference meeting.

- Monthly teleconference meetings (approximately 1-hour in length). These teleconference meetings will involve activities related to advocacy goals (drafting letters, planning meetings with policy-makers) and building the skills of stakeholders in the area of public policy advocacy.
- A final workshop to summarize project outcomes.
- We are also asking participants to take part in interviews of approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour in length at the beginning, mid and end-point of the study. These interviews will help to capture your experience participating in the policy advocacy project. They will be conducted in a private location either in person or over the phone.

Your participation in this study will provide you with an opportunity to build skills in the area of advocacy and communication. It will also help contribute to an understanding of how food security can be addressed at the public policy-level and ways to engage community stakeholders in this process.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary.

Interested in Participating?

If you are interested in participating in the study, please fill out the attached information sheet and I will contact you with further details.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact one of the individuals listed below.

Thank you for your consideration! I look forward to hearing from you,

Kayla Atkey
MSc Student
School of Public Health, University of Alberta
Phone: 780-492-1964

Kim Raine, PhD, RD
Professor
School of Public Health, University of Alberta
Phone: 780-492-9415

Susan Roberts,
Program Coordinator
Growing Food Security in Alberta

Appendix B: Information Letter and Informed Consent Forms

Information Letter

Project Title: Building Capacity to Address Food Insecurity at the Public Policy-Level: Exploring the Experience of Community Stakeholders Participating in Public Policy Advocacy

Student Researcher	Supervisor	Growing Food Security in Alberta Program Coordinator
Kayla Atkey MSc Student School of Public Health, University of Alberta Phone: 780-492-1964	Kim Raine, PhD, RD Professor School of Public Health, University of Alberta Phone: 780-492-9415	Susan Roberts, Program Coordinator Growing Food Security in Alberta

Dear Community Stakeholder,

We are asking for your participation in a study. The study focuses on making it easier for community stakeholders to advocate for public policies that promote healthy food access. You have been asked to take part in this study based on your involvement with Growing Food Security in Alberta (GFSA) and your awareness of community food issues. We received your email from the GFSA Program Coordinator.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of community stakeholders who are participating in a policy advocacy project to promote food security. It also seeks to understand how a participatory approach can be used to facilitate stakeholder engagement. The results from this study will be used in support of the student researcher's thesis.

The study will start in November, 2012. It will be about six to seven months in length. You will be given the opportunity to review this information sheet throughout the study.

Study Overview

The Policy Advocacy Project:

As part of the policy advocacy project, you will be asked to take part in the following activities:

- A four hour workshop held the afternoon of November 1st, 2012, in Edmonton. This workshop will provide a refresher on advocacy and a chance for the group to set goals for the project.

If you cannot attend the above workshop, you will have the option of taking part in a follow-up telephone meeting.

- Monthly telephone meetings and activities related to advocacy goals and building advocacy skills.
- A final workshop to summarize project outcomes. This workshop will be held in Central Alberta in April or May, 2013.

Data Collection:

In addition to participating in the advocacy project, we are asking you to take part in three interviews to help us understand your experience. Interviews will be about 30 minutes to 1 hour in length and will take place at the beginning, mid-point and end-point of the project. They will take place in-person or over the phone and will be completed in a private location.

The student researcher will also take notes of participant attitudes and opinions during all group discussions. Only information relevant to the study will be collected. Written material such as flip chart paper and meeting minutes will also be collected as data at all group discussions.

The student researcher will continually show her findings to participants throughout the study to ensure your experiences are accurately recorded.

Benefits and Risks

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant. However, participation in the study will provide you with a chance to build advocacy and communication skills. We also hope this research will contribute to an understanding of how food security can be addressed at the public policy-level and ways to engage community stakeholders in this process.

Significant physical, emotional or social risks are not expected in this study. However, it is important to recognize potential risks to participants. Food insecurity is a sensitive subject and discussion of this topic may cause emotional distress. It is also important to recognize that public policy advocacy is a political activity and may be associated with social risk. You will not be required to participate in any activity that causes you discomfort. You are also encouraged to discuss any issue that comes up with the student researcher or the GFSA Project Coordinator.

Parking and refreshments will be provided at all workshops. Participants will be repaid for travel to the final workshop. A small gift-card will be offered at the end of the study to thank you for participating.

Confidentiality

All personal information that you provide researchers will be kept confidential and stored in a secure location. To protect your identity, you will be given a false name and a coded number so that you are not identified in any research documents. Reports that come from the study will

not identify you, the GFSA, or the GFSA Buzz group by name. Information related to your job (dietitian, farmer) will be retained to help provide context.

If you agree, interviews and workshop discussions will be digitally recorded. This recording will help the student researcher understand the information discussed. Your name will be removed from the interview data.

To help maintain confidentiality, we will ask all individuals taking part in project activities not to disclose the information shared by others during group discussions. However, as these are public discussions we cannot control what participants say outside of project activities.

Due to the group nature of this study, it will not be possible to achieve total anonymity in this study. Other individuals within the GFSA network may be able to identify you even after you have been given a false name.

Voluntary Participation

You do not have to participate in this study. The participation is entirely voluntary.

If you choose not to participate, you will still be able to participate in GFSA Buzz activities. While you will not be able to attend workshops related to the project, you will be able to attend regular GFSA telephone meetings.

If you choose to participate, you don't have to complete any activities or answer any questions that you don't want to. You can also change your mind and leave the study at any time. If you withdraw from the study, we will use data we have collected from you up until the point when you withdraw.

You will have the option of withdrawing your data during each component of the study (i.e. during an interview). Once data collection has ended for each part of the study, you will no longer be able to withdraw your data.

Data and participant information will be stored in a secure location, such as a locked cabinet in the Centre for Health Promotion Studies and in a password protected document on the student investigator's computer. Study data including personal information about you will be securely stored for 5 years after the study is over. At this time, it will be destroyed in a secure fashion.

Uses of Data

Findings of the study will be circulated as part of the student investigator's thesis. Findings will also be published in academic journals and presented in conferences. Participants will not be identified in any publications or presentations.

The Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta has the right to review data from the study. For this reason, they may access the data.

This study has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions about your rights as a participant and the ethical nature of the study, contact the Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615.

Sincerely,

Kayla Atkey
Student Research Investigator
Phone: 780-492-1964

Kim Raine
Supervisor
Phone: 780-492-9415

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Building Capacity to Address Food Insecurity at the Public Policy-Level: Exploring the Experience of Community Stakeholders Participating in Public Policy Advocacy

Principal Student Investigator	Supervisor	Growing Food Security in Alberta Program Coordinator
Kayla Atkey MSc Student School of Public Health, University of Alberta Phone: 780-492-1964	Kim Raine, PhD, RD Professor School of Public Health, University of Alberta Phone: 780-492-9415	Susan Roberts, Program Coordinator Growing Food Security in Alberta

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?	Y	N
Have you read and received a copy of the attached information sheet?	Y	N
Do you understand the risks and benefits involved in taking part in the study?	Y	N
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions about the study?	Y	N
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having a reason?	Y	N
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you?	Y	N
Do you understand who will have access to the study data?	Y	N
I agree to participate in the study.	Y	N
If you agree to participate, do you agree to have interviews and workshops digitally recorded?	Y	N

Who explained the study to you? _____

Signature of Participant _____

Printed Name _____

Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____

Date _____

Appendix C: Addendum to the Information Letter

Title of Study: Building Capacity to Address Food Insecurity at the Public Policy-Level:
Exploring the Experience of Community Stakeholders Participating in Public Policy Advocacy

Student Researcher	Supervisor	Growing Food Security in Alberta Program Coordinator
Kayla Atkey MSc Student School of Public Health, University of Alberta Phone: 780-492-1964	Kim Raine, PhD, RD Professor School of Public Health, University of Alberta Phone: 780-492-9415	Susan Roberts, Program Coordinator Growing Food Security in Alberta

Before beginning this research study, you signed an Informed Consent Form describing the study and your rights as a study participant. At that time, we explained that we would tell you about any new information that might affect your willingness to stay in the study.

As a result of group discussion at the Growing Food Security in Alberta (GFSA) In-Person workshop on July 19th, 2013, we are proposing a change to the study. Please review the proposed change and discuss any concerns you have with the student researcher. This discussion will help to inform final decisions regarding the proposed change.

Participation in the study is voluntary. You have the option of withdrawing your data during each component of the study (i.e. during an interview). Once collection has ended for each part of the study, you will no longer be able to withdraw your data. However, your name will not be identified in any documents that result from the study.

If you are comfortable with the below change and would like to continue participating in the study, sign the bottom of this Informed Consent Form Addendum.

NEW INFORMATION

At the July 19th in-person workshop, members of the group expressed a desire to associate GFSA with the study findings. To enable GFSA to be associated with the study findings, we are proposing the following change to the study:

- Reports that come from the study (the food advocacy toolkit, the student researchers' dissertation, published articles) will identify GFSA by name (i.e. a false name will not be applied).
- To help with distribution of study results, reports will also identify the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention (APCCP).

- A benefit of the proposed change is that it will increase the usefulness of study findings. A drawback of the proposed change is that it may reduce your anonymity as a participant in the study by making GFSA recognizable.

ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Building Capacity to Address Food Insecurity at the Public Policy-Level: Exploring the Experience of Community Stakeholders Participating in Public Policy Advocacy

Student Researcher: Kayla Atkey **Phone Number(s):** 780-492-1964

Co-Investigator(s): Dr. Kim Raine **Phone Number(s):** 780-492-9415

GFSA Program Coordinator: Susan Roberts

I have read all of the new information in this addendum concerning the study I am currently participating in. I have been given the opportunity to discuss the information contained in this addendum. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

This signature on this informed consent form addendum means that I agree with the proposed changes to the study. I understand that I remain free to withdraw at any time.

_____	_____	____/____/____
Signature of Participant	Name (Printed)	Year Month Day *

_____	_____	____/____/____
Signature of Person Conducting Consent Discussion	Name (Printed)	Year Month Day*

A COPY OF THIS ADDENDUM MUST BE GIVEN TO THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Appendix D: Research Team Confidentiality Agreement

Project Title: **Building Capacity to Address Food Insecurity at the Public Policy Level: Exploring the Experience of Community Stakeholders Participating in Public Policy Advocacy**

I, _____, the _____ (specific job description, e.g., interpreter/translator) have been assigned to _____.

I agree to -

1. keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the *Researcher(s)*.
2. keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.
3. return all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the *Researcher(s)* when I have completed the research tasks.
4. after consulting with the *Researcher(s)*, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the *Researcher(s)* (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive).

_____	_____	_____
(Date)	(Print Name)	(Signature)

Researcher

_____	_____	_____
(Date)	(Print Name)	(Signature)

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board (*specify which board*) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix E: Interview Guides

Initial Interview Guide

This study draws on the method of focused ethnography.

Semi-structured interview questions will be employed with the goal of exploring the experiences of community stakeholders participating in the policy advocacy project.

Interviews will be conversation style and will occur in a private location, in-person or over the phone. They will be recorded with the participant's consent.

Goals: To establish rapport, achieve a baseline understanding of stakeholders' role in the community and experiences with public policy advocacy, and to inform the participatory component of the project.	
Preamble: I have prepared a couple of questions so that we can get to know each other and to help me inform the project moving forward.	
Questions	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– What is your role in the community? Specifically, could you describe your involvement in food security initiatives in Alberta?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Obtain understanding of the participant's role in the community.– Probe until past experience has been clearly defined:<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Can you tell me more about that?▪ Do you have any additional roles?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– How long have you been involved with GFSA/GFSA Policy Working Group?– What draws you to GFSA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Understand participant's relationship with GFSA and the context of the public policy advocacy project.– Probe until question has been clearly defined:<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Is there anything else that draws you to GFSA?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– What does public policy advocacy mean to you and why do you think it is important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Understand participant's attitudes, opinions and beliefs related to public policy advocacy.– Probe until question has been clearly defined:<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Could you tell me more about that?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– What has your experience been engaging in public policy thus far?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Understand participants past experience with public policy advocacy.– Inform the participatory component of the study.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Probe until past experience has been clearly defined: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you tell me more about that? ▪ Is there anything else you would like to add?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What skills do you think are necessary to make you more successful in public policy advocacy? To make the group more successful? – What skills and competencies do you hope to gain through your involvement in this project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Inform the participatory component of the study – Probe until skills have been clearly defined. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are there any other skills you think are necessary? ▪ What other skills or competencies are you hoping to gain?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Based on experience or word of mouth, can you recommend individuals, organizations or resources that the group could connect with during the project to help develop these competencies? – (Participants can forward resources after the interview). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Help inform the participatory component of the study

Mid-Point Interview Guide

This study draws on the method of focused ethnography.

Semi-structured interview questions will be employed with the goal of exploring the experiences of community stakeholders participating in the policy advocacy initiative.

Interviews will be conversation style and will occur in a private location, in-person or over the phone. They will be recorded with the participant's consent.

<p>Goal: Explore the experience of community stakeholders involved in Alberta food security initiatives, specifically in the context of their participation in a policy advocacy initiative to promote food security.</p> <p>Preamble: The aim of this interview is to understand your experience participating in the policy advocacy project thus far.</p>	
Questions	Notes
Stakeholder Experience in the Cultural Context of an Advocacy Initiative	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– What has it been like participating in the policy advocacy project thus far?– Can you describe your experience for me?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Aim is to understand the experience of community stakeholders in the context of the policy advocacy initiative.– Understand stakeholders' perspectives, attitudes, experiences, and interactions.– Probe until the participant has outlined key activities and striking aspects relating to their experience.<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Can you tell me more about that?▪ What has been striking about your experience?▪ Is there anything else that has been striking about your experience?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– How do you feel about engaging in public policy advocacy since participating in the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Goal is to understand participant's knowledge, attitudes, opinions and beliefs related to participation in public policy advocacy.– Probe until participant's feelings have been clearly defined:<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Can you tell me more about that?▪ Do you have any other opinions or feelings about engaging in public policy advocacy?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How does engaging in a food security project targeting the public policy level contrast or compare to your typical food security work? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Understand how opinions, knowledge and attitudes contrast and compare between day-to-day work and the advocacy initiative. – Probe until question has been clearly defined: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you think of any other ways the two contrast and compare?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What has it been like working with other community stakeholders on this project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explore stakeholder's interactions with other participants. – Probe until aspects of stakeholder's interactions have been clearly defined. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you tell me more about that? ▪ Is there anything else you would like to add?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How would you describe the atmosphere of the group meetings? – How do you think this influences the group and the policy advocacy project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explore how the dynamics of the group influences participant's experience in the advocacy project. – Probe until question has been clearly defined. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is there anything else you can tell me about the atmosphere of the meetings? ▪ How else might it influence the group?
Participatory Approach to Engagement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What do you think has worked well for the group thus far? What has not worked so well? – What factors have contributed to this? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Aim is to understand what has worked well or not so well in the project from the participant's perspective. – Probe until participant has clearly defined contributing factors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you tell me more about that? ▪ Are those all of the contributing factors? ▪ Can you think of any additional factors?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What specific activities or components of the process have facilitated your engagement? – On the other hand, can you think of things that have acted as a barrier to your engagement? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explore what aspects of the project contributed to skills and knowledge development from the participant's perspective. – Probe until participant has discussed both facilitators and barriers and until all activities or components have been clearly defined. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are there any other facilitators?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you think of any other barriers?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Throughout the project, a number of advocacy resources have been shared with you. Have these been useful? Why or why not? – Is there a particular resource that has been beneficial? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Understand how advocacy resources have influenced engagement in the project. – Probe until participant has clearly outlined resources and their role in facilitating understanding. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were any of the other resources helpful? ▪ Can you think of any other reasons why they were helpful or not helpful? ▪ What characteristics made the resource beneficial?
Exploring Emerging Ideas in the Data	
Lead In: Now I have a couple of questions to ask you that will help me explore and understand emerging ideas in the data thus far.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – One of the ideas that have come up in the data I have collected so far is the idea that the public is disconnected from food. What are your thoughts about this idea? – If yes, does this understanding affect your experience engaging in the policy advocacy project? What feelings or attitudes does it bring about? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Goal is to achieve a better understanding of how this idea influences participant's experience and their attitudes and beliefs regarding policy advocacy. – Probe until question has been clearly defined: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share? ▪ Does it bring about any other feelings?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – I also noticed that members of the group seem to value different things related to food, such as a connection to the land through farming, a cultural connection to their food, environmental sustainability, engaged in the food system as a form of active citizenship and access to healthy, nutritious food. – Are these things something you value? Do you consider all of these things equally important, or do some stand out for you more than others? – Has it been a dividing factor, or do community stakeholders value the diversity? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Goal is to explore the group's values surrounding food. – Goal is to achieve an understanding of these values influence participant's experience in the project. – Probe until question is clearly defined: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you think of other values you consider to be important? ▪ Am I leaving something out?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – I've also noticed that our process of policy advocacy has been kind of confusing and messy thus far. – Is this something you have noticed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Goal is to achieve a better understanding of this idea and its influence on participant engagement and experience. – Probe until question is clearly defined: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you tell me more about that? ▪ Why do you think that is the case?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What are your thoughts on relationship building as it relates to the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Goal is to better understand how relationship and group interactions have influenced their experience in the project

Final Interview Guide

This study draws on the method of focused ethnography.

Semi-structured interview questions will be employed with the goal of exploring the experiences of community stakeholders participating in the policy advocacy initiative.

Interviews will be conversation style and will occur in a private location, in-person or over the phone. They will be recorded with the participant's consent.

Goal: Explore the experience of community stakeholders involved in Alberta food security initiatives, specifically in the context of their participation in a policy advocacy initiative to promote food security.

Preamble: The aim of this interview is to understand your experience participating in the policy advocacy initiative, with an emphasis on the second half of the project. This included development of the position paper, brainstorming and implementing advocacy strategies, taking action and the final in-person workshop.

Questions	Notes
Stakeholder Experience in the Context of an Advocacy Initiative	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Can you tell me what it has been like participating in the policy advocacy project? What stands out about your experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Aim is to understand the experience of community stakeholders in the context of the policy advocacy initiative.– Understand stakeholders' perspectives, attitudes, experiences, and interactions.– Prompt for key events: development of the position paper, brainstorming advocacy strategies and taking action, and the final in-person meeting.– Probe until the participant has outlined key activities and striking aspects relating to their experience.<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Can you tell me more about that?▪ What has been striking about your experience?▪ Is there anything else that has been striking about your experience▪ Can you help me understand that aspect a little more?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How do you feel about engaging in public policy advocacy now that the project has come to an end? – What lessons did you learn through the experience, if any? – On the other hand, what remains confusing? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Goal is to understand participant’s knowledge, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs related to participation in public policy advocacy. – Probe until participant’s feelings have been clearly defined: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you tell me more about that? ▪ Do you have any other opinions or feelings about engaging in public policy advocacy?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What was it like engaging with the other stakeholders in the project? Does anything from the second half of the project stand out? – Do you have any perspectives on relationship building in the second half of the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explore stakeholder’s interactions with other participants. – Understand stakeholder perspectives on working as part of a group to achieve goals. – Probe until aspects of stakeholder’s interactions have been clearly defined. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you tell me more about that? ▪ Is there anything else you would like to add?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What are your thoughts on the atmosphere of our meetings during the second half of the project? – What influence do you think this had? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explore how the dynamics of the group influences participants experience in the advocacy project. – Probe until question has been clearly defined. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is there anything else you can tell me about the atmosphere of the meetings? ▪ How else might it influence the group?
Approach to Engagement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What factors facilitated your engagement in the project? On the other hand, what were some barriers? (process related or wider factors) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Objective is to explore new facilitators and barriers to stakeholder engagement and confirm existing data. – Probe until participant has discussed both facilitators and barriers until all activities or components have been clearly defined. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are there any other facilitators? ▪ Can you think of any other barriers?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – This project aimed to incorporate principles such as co-learning, skill building, collaboration and participation. – In what ways do you think the project was successful and where could we improve? – What impact did such an approach have on your experience? – Can you identify any positive or negative aspects related to this approach? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Goal is to explore how a participatory approach influenced stakeholder engagement. – Probe until stakeholder has discussed the approach and its impact. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are there any other ways you think the project was successful? Any other ways we could have improved? ▪ Did it have any other impact? ▪ Any other positive aspects? Any other negative aspects?
<p style="text-align: center;">Exploring Emerging Themes in the Data</p>	
<p>Lead In: Now I have a couple of questions to ask you that will help me explore and understand emerging ideas in the data thus far.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Some key factors came up in terms of what fostered group members’ desire to engage in public policy advocacy. These include a desire for positive change, a passion for the issue, and a belief that if you want change, you have to be part of the solution. – Do these apply to you? Did anything else drive your involvement? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explore ideas regarding what drives stakeholder involvement. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Any other thoughts? ▪ What aspects are project specific and what relate to public policy in general?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Throughout the project, a lot of diverse perspectives and values were shared within our group. However, it also seemed that as we progressed through the project, our ideas solidified and we were able to achieve a common ground. – I was wondering what your thoughts were on this? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explore emerging ideas related to group diversity and the process of achieving a common ground. – Probe until question has been clearly defined: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share? ▪ Can you help me understand your thoughts a little more?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It also seemed important to consider our individual and group perspectives in terms of how they are perceived by wider society. – What are your thoughts on this? How do you think it relates to public policy advocacy work in general? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explore emerging themes related to group perceptions of the wider systems; advocacy as a link between the group and wider society. – Probe until question has been clearly defined: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share? ▪ Can you help me understand that a little more?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – We also engaged in many discussions over language and clarifying concepts. – What did you think of these discussions? What feelings did they bring about? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explore stakeholder perceptions related to language and gauge how such discussions relate to other emerging ideas (establishing common ground, challenges, relationship to wider society). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you have any other thoughts? ▪ Did they bring about any other feelings?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Aspects of our advocacy initiative seemed confusing at times. Did anything about this process confuse you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explore confusion and its relationship to other ideas in the data (establishing a common ground, challenges). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where any other aspects of the project confusing? ▪ Could you tell me more about that?
<p>Any other comments or questions? Any additional ideas that came up that may not have been covered in our conversation?</p>	