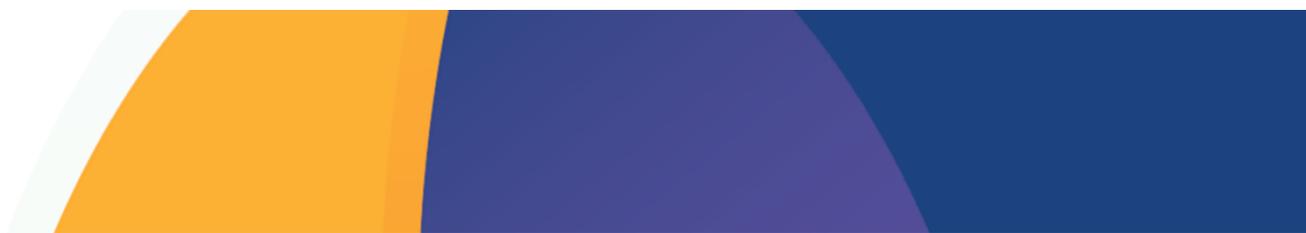


The Health Planning Partnership (Yarra Ranges)

THE COLLABORATION JOURNEY AND ENABLERS 2017-2022



Acknowledgements

The Inner East Primary Care Partnership (IEPCP) interviewed a number of members of the Health Planning Partnership and Yarra Ranges Food Connections working group during 2021. Their reflections were integral to capturing the enablers of the Partnership’s successes and the challenges in establishing and maintaining collaborative local place-based health promotion as it evolved to take a systems approach.

IEPCP was commissioned by the Outer East Primary Care Partnership to document the evolution of the Healthy Active Living Group into the Health Planning Partnership. We thank them for the privilege and opportunity to be able to document the outstanding leadership of this collaboration, in driving best practice health promotion. We also thank all participants for their rich contributions to the content, and for agreeing to share their knowledge and experiences for learning purposes across the sector.





Table of Contents

<i>Background</i>	3
<i>Structure and Governance</i>	3
<i>Building Collaboration</i>	6
<i>Key Enablers</i>	7
<i>Functions critical to the Partnership's success</i>	8
<i>Challenges faced by the Partnership</i>	9
<i>Organisational commitment</i>	9
<i>Membership</i>	10
<i>Communication</i>	10
<i>Future direction</i>	11

Background

Integrated health promotion amongst local level organisations requires considerable commitment to sustained partnership investment, collaboration and shared resourcing. The Health Planning Partnership (HPP) is a model of success in the outer east metropolitan region of Melbourne. This report documents the transition phase from the Integrated Health Planning group overseeing the operational project-based Healthy Active Living (HAL) group, to an integrated strategic entity HPP, that oversees three key priority working groups (refer to Figure 1).

Aside from the physical activity priority group, the work of this Partnership is currently localised to the Yarra Ranges local government area. The HPP is considering expanding their reach into more local government areas in the outer east metropolitan catchment, however, a timeline is not yet established.

The partners acknowledge that a strategic and coordinated approach to planning, and an agreed model for implementation and cooperation, maximises the potential effectiveness of allocating health and wellbeing resources across the Yarra Ranges. This joint approach supports advocacy to improve community health and wellbeing outcomes.

This report aims to document the Partnership's development and learnings in collaborative models and collective impact practice across health services and local government. It does not intend to be an evaluation of the model, or of the health promotion outcomes achieved. Rather, it aims to capture the core components of a successful cross-sector partnership developed to drive collaboration.

Structure and Governance

Figure 1: The HPP Leadership Group Structure



Transition of the Healthy Active Living group a cross-sectoral Health Planning Partnership

Over the past decade, the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs) have shown significant interest in supporting health promotion partners with collaborating on state-based priorities, such as healthy eating and food security. As the established HAL group was predominantly focused on healthy eating, the Primary Care Partnerships, informed by HAL, identified a need to increase leadership capability in healthy eating health promotion strategies and to mobilise community empowerment as focus areas for action. After analysis of local data, a food security approach was identified as only one part of addressing healthy eating. Emerging evidence for taking a food systems approach was instrumental in the HAL group shifting from behaviour change interventions to target and improve the food system for wider population benefit.

Outer East PCP (OEPCP), Inspiro Community Health Service, Eastern Health (EH) and Yarra Ranges Council came together to discuss collaboration opportunities a few years before the HAL group formed. Mid-2018 marked the formal establishment and commitment from all five outer east-based organisations - OEPCP, Inspiro, EH, Women's Health East (WHE) and EACH to support the Department of Health's (DH) efforts to integrate health promotion activity and prioritise a collective impact approach with shared goals to impact the priority health issues. The Executive Officer Community Partnerships and Wellbeing at Yarra Ranges Council (Executive Officer) was approached to join these discussions and the HAL group was formed with agreement to support four mutual health priorities: Healthy Eating, Food Security, Physical Activity and Preventing Violence Against Women (PVAW).

The Executive Officer was recognised as "very much a collaborator with a clear understanding of prevention and the role of Council". The HAL group made a conscious choice to build a collaboration that included both leaders and health promotion staff in decision-making. This meant that partners implementing the work could leverage their skills and influence resource allocation.

DH regional staff facilitated the opportunity for Veronica Graham, Manager Healthy Eating and Physical Activity at the Department of Health, to deliver presentations on the State's prevention position on Healthy Eating and support taking up a wider food systems approach. In other activity, the EMR PCP's collaborated with Health Futures Australia (HFA) to assist in building leadership capacity and to take a food systems approach at a regional level. Engagement of organisation and community leaders was considered a high priority to leverage influence amongst their connections and build motivation for action. The work unfortunately did not achieve the authorising environment anticipated. Regional health promotion practitioners and DH, particularly Inspiro and EH, reflected on what lessons could be taken from the experience and regrouped to acknowledge collective strengths, motivations and likely areas to build upon and progress.

The HAL group as a way forward, moved to local collaboration with a focus on shared implementation of evidence-based prevention in Yarra Ranges area with the Council. HAL ran for approximately three years from 2016 to 2019. The final two years were dedicated to increasing tap water access and reducing the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages in alignment with the VicHealth-funded Council work on Water in Sport, and Council's Water the Drink of Choice Major Initiative Project (MIP). EH and the Inspiro Health Promotion Teams collaborated on supporting a number of schools increase their offering of healthy choices. Partners worked in a variety of settings and shared their resources with an Inspiro Health

Promotion Officer/Dietitian employed by Yarra Ranges Council who led the two and a half year Water in Sport Project funded by VicHealth. Yarra Ranges Council's commitment to improve local community access to water and healthy drink environments was successful and key to driving collective work, and data capture and analysis for future work.

An additional priority that was identified – Preventing Violence Against Women, - was determined to best be positioned with the Women's Health East led 'Together For Equality and Respect' (TFER) Strategy and Partnership. HAL determined it was best placed to focus on leading Healthy Eating and Physical Activity using a collective impact approach. The core members - Inspiro, Yarra Ranges Council, EH, and Belgravia Leisure - supported by DH and the OEPCP, aspired to replicate TFER's successful structure and place-based activity, with collaborative work and collective impact as the mode of working together.

During 2019, the HAL group continued to explore the advantages of developing a shared plan (first raised a number of years earlier), whilst they acknowledged that all partners operated in fundamentally different environments and reporting requirements. For example, EH supports wider organisational and regional priorities, including in catchments and local areas. The HAL group also recognised that Council had relevant health profile data available to share across the group.

The establishment of the Health Planning Partnership

In 2020, the Health Planning Partnership (HPP) was established as a strategic decision-making partnership to lead shared planning and health promotion work on shared priority areas. In 2021, the Partnership developed a shared strategic four-year plan aligning partners' Integrated Health Promotion Plans and the Council's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, and shared indicators. The HPP commenced its guidance of strategic direction and oversight for its new priority working groups: Yarra Ranges Food Connections, Yarra Ranges Gender Equity Working Group and the Outer East Physical Activity Working Group. The new structure and plan formalised the collaborative commitment, shared health and wellbeing direction and set priorities for all partnering organisations to achieve positive change. The HPP's purpose was to provide strategic focus that unites and guides the priority focus working groups.

Building on what the HAL group had achieved from 2016-2019 in healthy eating and food security, the purpose of the Yarra Ranges Food Connections working group expanded from the shared action on promoting healthier choices, including water as the drink of choice, towards collective action to enable a more sustainable, equitable and resilient food system, as reflected in the new name. Each member organisation implements local actions to promote healthy choices with Yarra Ranges Food Connections providing a strategic platform to strengthen the impact of these efforts.

In early 2020, momentum was gathering to improve the sustainability and robustness of the food system to provide healthy local food. The pandemic heightened the need to improve access to healthy and affordable food. Inspiro and EH's leadership with Yarra Ranges Council was essential in broadening the focus to food systems, and to building positive outcomes for the Yarra Ranges' community at large.

At the same time as the broadening of the joint work on Healthy Eating, Council was also implementing a new Liveable Climate Action Plan, which recognised the need to improve

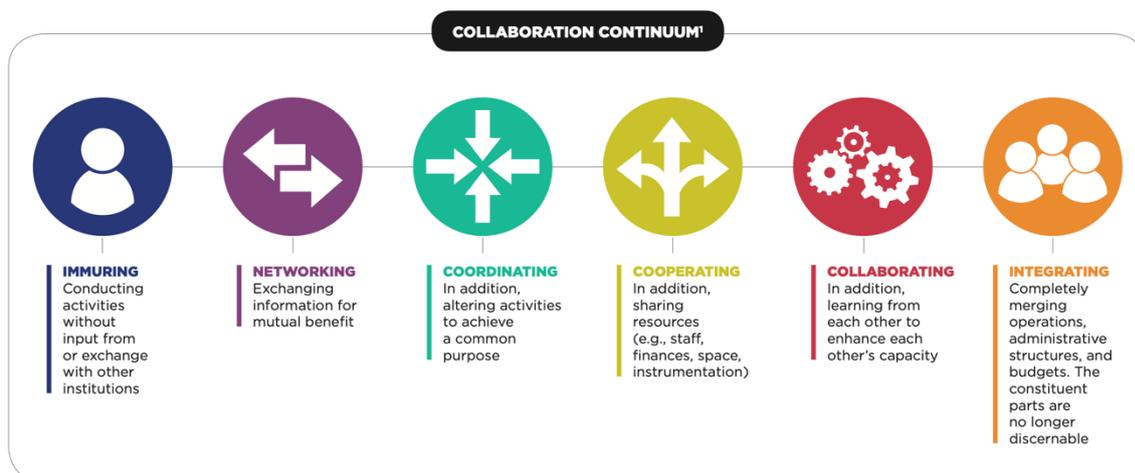
food security, thus members of Council’s Sustainability team joined the discussions on healthy food systems. Inspiro and EH commenced scoping out actions for community health organisations involved in the HPP, to align with Council’s Liveable Climate Action Plan, Health and Wellbeing Plan, and in response to community and stakeholder consultations. Community health organisations in the HPP will work with, and alongside Council to support their areas of focus.

The HPP and the working groups were designed for leaders and practitioners across sectors to connect, explore collaborative possibilities and learn from each other’s practice. Working group members continue their separate activities on the ground, while coming together to ensure the alignment of a strategic shared vision. One of the Partnership’s strengths is that two of the three priority groups are localised to Yarra Ranges. The HPP considered expanding the food systems and physical activity work across a larger region. To strengthen impact, all organisations will continue with specific catchment focus given membership is already quite large. Maintaining a local approach supports the notion that all members are equal partners and promotes contributing collectively to move the health priorities forward.

The change of structure enabled the HPP to renew, innovate, transition and develop new and more effective versions of itself. Each partner brings unique skills and resources and works to their strengths. The mutual respect and trust of the group working collectively and separately for change, enhances the partnership. There is a “genuine desire to make a difference” and a “very solid investment of commitment”.

Building Collaboration

Figure 2: The Collaboration Continuum



The Partnership’s members expressed mixed views of where their agencies work on the collaboration continuum (see Figure 2). Yarra Ranges Council reflected that HPP and the working groups are moving towards ‘collaboration’, however capacity and staff resourcing were identified as critical factors of working in the ‘coordinating’ and ‘cooperating’ stages. These inter-agency attributes are important building blocks in developing collaborative relationships.

Some members reflected that the group may not realistically reach the ‘integrating’ phase. For example, community health and Council are unlikely to integrate unless they identify

external joint funding opportunities. The HPP values its members' individual strengths, high level commitment and taking shared responsibility. Collective effort and collective impact are the main goals. EH highlighted the importance of working together as a collaborative partnership so that they achieve greater impacts in the community. The HPP would like to explore establishing a shared approach to gathering and aggregating data and analysis for shared indicators, and ultimately would like to improve the effectiveness of interventions. Council reflected that "learning from each other all the time" builds greater awareness of what good health promotion practice looks like.

Key Enablers

Secondment is used as a mechanism to increase knowledge and capacity between partnering organisations. The secondment of an Inspiro Health Promotion Practitioner/Dietitian to Yarra Ranges Council has facilitated invaluable information sharing and project investment across Council's departments, as well as enabling improved communication and ease of setting up meetings. Since 2020, the secondment has increased the visibility of joint work on food systems amongst stakeholders and has assisted in developing the shared strategic approach to health planning. The secondment strengthened Council's high level engagement with Inspiro and contribution to the HPP's evolution and progress.

Yarra Ranges Council has been integral to the HPP. Council provides a political arm to the HPP, and is well placed to advocate to State or Federal Government on priority areas. Council can announce to State Government the shared Partnership goals within Council's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, increasing project visibility and potential funding opportunities. Shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic commenced in 2019, the Health and Wellbeing staff involved at the strategic level expanded their internal membership group with other Council departments, such as the Sustainability team. The Sustainability team support the Yarra Ranges Food Connections in defining and implementing healthy and sustainable food system projects. Further consultation is planned to include the Council's Operations team in decisions and actions to improve healthy choices catering.

Council's involvement in the Partnership is recognised as a "powerful way of keeping the momentum moving, connecting the work of Council planners, and various departments and building the trust and respect with community health organisations as health and wellbeing knowledge leaders". In the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2020, a 'Walking - the Way to Go' project promoted the health benefits of walking to Council staff from officers and to directors, which generated support for constructing and maintaining infrastructure that promotes walking as free and widely accessible to the public. Originally, Federal government funding was directed towards closing unsealed roads. The conversation moved quickly to "let's see if we can build some footpaths" and influence walking. This integrated and collaborative work allowed community health organisations to further influence the activation of open space with healthy ageing initiatives, walking groups and other community projects.

In summary, the HPP's common vision was aligned to deliver a priority-based systems approach, focused on gender equality, food systems and physical activity. The group came together with a shared commitment to "keep elevated to the strategic" and "demonstrating the power of working together".

The group members' passion for achieving effective positive changes in community health and wellbeing was instrumental in developing the new HPP model. Inspiro noted that, "there is collective trust and willingness to move together in a new direction". Organisations are committed to having staff members participate in the HPP or working group meetings given successful demonstration of actions generated through the collective. Community health organisations found that including one or more of the HPP priority areas in their IHP Plan strengthened organisational commitment, and justified the time and effort involved in this partnership process.

Functions critical to the Partnership's success

Capacity building was a critical function in developing the Partnership's systems-focused approach. The members are knowledge seekers and regularly attend relevant workshop opportunities. Yarra Ranges Council participated in internal capacity building sessions with support from Catherine Harper, Crondar Consulting ("Health Outcomes Wizard"), to develop the team's shared measures. EH found that endorsement from senior management was key to ensuring that the value of attending capacity building workshops was understood with a direct positive impact on collaboration, workforce readiness and accountability.

The shared strategic plan outlines the HPP's shared goals and direction in a collaborative and coordinated approach. Since the Partnership developed its four-year plan, there has been a greater ability to implement mutually reinforcing activities and to avoid duplicating work. EH felt that the strategic focus of the HPP plan allows the group to "constantly ask what difference can we make; what change are we capable of bringing about; and, who else needs to be at the table". The current plan is critical to elevating the Partnership and to adapting, based on new learnings. Although all members of the HPP collaborate on one or more shared priorities, their work on particular health focus areas is based on what best suits their skills and expertise. The strong sense of teamwork is valued and demonstrated across the HPP and the working groups, regardless of whether the group is working collectively or individually. Inspiro commented that "having that same end goal is what makes collaboration more achievable".

The establishment of the HPP as a strategic group has maximised collective learning outcomes with a greater understanding of decision making and program delivery. Partner organisations across the three priority working groups ensure that appropriate data is collected in order to accommodate the diverse perspectives of partners. EH commended the HPP as being "lucky to have so many strategic thinkers" who demonstrate an openness and willingness to bring their unique skill sets and expertise to the working groups. Yarra Ranges Food Connections members, recognising the need to engage and activate the local community, gained agreement from HPP to develop a new logo and to profile the partnership. The Outer East PCP provided grant funding for the development of a website for the Yarra Ranges Food Connections group, to showcase their work and to support further engagement with community and stakeholders. The grant also funded an initial community and stakeholder engagement workshop in February 2022.

An evaluation over the next four years aims to capture the HPP's successes and learnings in health promotion and engagement, via strategic level documents and infographics, and stakeholder feedback.

In 2018, when the HAL group was maturing, most meetings centred around day to day actions to coordinate efforts. The HPP's renewed strategic oversight allowed for working groups to discuss operational projects and to separate out strategic considerations, ensuring sufficient feedback loops dedicated to each. DH reflected that this well-coordinated approach is "how you get respect from each other", which is a critical element to enable collaboration and integration. The HPP now operates meetings "without getting too bogged down in detail of the operations".

Challenges faced by the Partnership

The Partnership has not been without its challenges. Members expressed a lack of resources as a constant challenge to their aspirations. Inspiro noted "you could always do more with more resources, so it is being realistic with what you can do with the resources you have". In contrast, working collectively is an effective way to best utilise available resources and deal with resourcing constraints. All partners have contributed time and effort to the Partnership's establishment. The HPP identified the need to harness community champions as a key future approach to maximising resourcing and increasing community involvement. Council indicated that health promotion resourcing will unlikely increase in the short-term due, due to COVID-19 recovery imperatives and financing requirements.

Partnership sustainability is another current challenge, particularly with staffing changes. New staff need to be inducted to the Partnership story and structure and effort invested to gain their buy-in and commitment. A recently-developed 'what is a food system video' provides an ideal education tool to share widely, to promote the Yarra Ranges Food Connections' group purpose and to seek additional members. Secretariat support and goodwill to resource coordination and administration is essential for partnership sustainability. Tasks, such as preparing agendas, minutes, meetings schedules, general coordination and registering of volunteers, requires a dedicated position. Having the support of an agency, such as Inspiro to supply this 'backbone' role has proved crucial. For a project such as this, one to two days a week is required to fulfil the necessary tasks. Members reflected on their collective approach, "if one organisation could no longer provide this support, then another member would step up".

In the past, some of the challenges in developing the Partnership's strategic direction were experienced due to not having a common communication platform. Recent changes in technology have enabled members to disseminate documents on a shared platform. Although coordinating online meetings was difficult during the pandemic, regular contact and a clear agenda helped to ease these issues.

Organisational commitment

Reflections on investment in the Partnership

DH continues to provide strategic support and encouragement to this Partnership. In particular, they connect leaders, share updates on policies, advice about evidence-based practice, and provide high level perspective and direction. Their encouragement has also been key to getting a range of organisations on board, knowing that the project was supported by the regional DH.

Inspiro and EH provide health promotion and dietetics expertise, including community engagement, expertise in working with vulnerable groups and within complex systems. Most

of the community health practitioners involved in the Partnership are Yarra Ranges locals with established connections to the Yarra Ranges community and have a strong passion for local community building.

The change in the Partnerships' structure and membership in late 2018 necessitated more sophisticated coordination to develop and deliver future strategic directions. As a new backbone was needed, Inspiro built their "strong investment" in food systems into their new IHP Plan. Inspiro lead the administration of both the HPP and Yarra Ranges Food Connections and has shared development and administration duties with the Outer East Physical Activity Working Group.

Inspiro reflected that an essential role of being a backbone organisation for a partnership is ensuring "other people are heard and (to) give them that opportunity". The ability to actively listen to each other, take on other's feedback and broaden their views was essential to develop the Partnership to where it is today. Communication to support and facilitate cross-sector involvement and to support shared understanding, such as, the Terms of Reference (TOR) that was updated in 2020, ensures meeting agendas are circulated a week before each meeting, with an invitation for collective input, rather than the backbone making those decisions unilaterally. "So, it is making sure other members know that they do have a say".

Membership

The Partnership's diverse membership and their distinct skills sets, passions and knowledge has helped bring different perspectives to each priority working group. Collectively, there is a broad complementary mix of skills and experience, which enhances working together. The benefit of involving numerous organisations provides the Partnership with a greater understanding of the community context and issues and supports development of solutions in the community. Council mentioned one key consideration when expanding the membership is that systems need to be in place to account for a larger group of people. Council recognised "we need more leaders, like the Health Promotion Practitioner/Dietitian at Inspiro!".

Deakin University has joined the Yarra Ranges Food Connections working group, in a consulting capacity. Nutrition colleagues from the Department of Health are available to share learnings and seek feedback. The Department's oversight of rural areas, (Goulburn and Hume) provides opportunity to share learnings given these areas are using the successful Deakin health promotion model 'RESPOND' for bringing communities together to develop collective action.

The 2021 October meeting explored coordinating a new recruitment process and methods for new members to join the HPP including exploring what particularly motivates the community to participate. Using the food system video and Yarra Ranges Food Connections logo and website, there is an intention to raise awareness of who/what the Partnership is and how to get involved.

Communication

The strengths and barriers of communication processes

The HPP and the three priority working groups involve all levels of staff (leaders and practitioners) participating in formal communication (meetings, calls, emails) and informal communication (networking, marketing and website). The next step is to broaden

communications to include external stakeholders, such as promoting the new logo and recruiting new members from the community. Some group members expressed that they were not fully aware of all the current activities occurring between the HPP and the three priority working groups. However, this communication lapse has not impacted the work being achieved. The HPP receive updates and reports from priority working group meetings to ensure this information is documented and published as collective data.

DH acknowledged that “all of the Partnership contributions have enabled a better outcome for the community”. This willingness of all partners to regularly revisit and re-engage ensures genuine shared collaboration.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic commenced in 2020, the Partnership has been reliant on Zoom online meetings and email for their communications. Council representatives commented that this had resulted in reduced incidental and spontaneous communication. All conversations during COVID-19 had been formally arranged and partners viewed this as a barrier. A number are members of other external groups, and when meeting face-to-face would connect and discuss other relevant work. A combination of face-to-face and online meetings would be preferable in the future.

The Yarra Ranges Food Connections working group facilitated an ‘Our Local Food System’ Forum in February 2022. They consulted with the broader community and with organisations keen to join the Partnership. This forum was designed to identify people who would like ongoing involvement, and to extend participation to a larger audience.

Future direction

This report celebrates and reflects on the HPP’s collective impact approach with community health and local government in planning and advocating for a healthier outer east. The partners seek to strengthen the Partnership by involving community champions and additional organisations that are passionate about food, physical activity and gender equity. The Yarra Ranges Food Connections Forum was an exciting opportunity to welcome new members and expand the knowledge, perspectives and capacity in the outer east, to deliver a food systems response to improve health and wellbeing. This community engagement process encouraged people to connect with interrelated factors and boundaries within the system to achieve improved outcomes.

Although the HPP’s aim is not to be integrative, the members value collaborating, sharing resources and working in a trusting environment with a clear strategic direction and shared plan. Collective effort and impact is the goal. The Partnership’s conscious decision to move strategically toward system level change has improved their evaluation methods and results, planning, and delivery of activities within their shared goals.

Council’s collaborative approach across many of their departments strengthened the Partnership’s profile, access to data, grant opportunities and expertise. The Yarra Ranges Food Connections working group of diverse members can now connect with the Council’s Sustainability team who are delivering community education and healthy food gardening projects. This ongoing connection to Council is an asset for the Partnership’s continued growth. The HPP and priority working group members stress the importance of continuing to receive multi-organisational support for staff time and resource contribution.

The Partnership has recognised the well-established TFER strategy as a collective, collaborative and localised approach to PVAW and Gender Equity, and continues to work with TFER in this space. The HPP has been developing toward replicating that structure and strategic focus, undertaking shared placed-based action for their work on food systems, physical activity and gender equity.

The current members' varying catchment boundaries can be a challenge in achieving a common strategy at a regional level across the three priority groups. DH identified that political commitment to healthy eating and physical activity across Federal, State and Local Government is essential to building a collective approach to changing and improving the food landscape.

The Partnership acknowledges that working collectively is one component of measuring progress. Measuring gender equity, physical activity and food system outcomes from the Partnership work will be the biggest test to demonstrate effectiveness in collective impact.

A former member "wished the group well", in this exciting new phase of the partnership process, acknowledging that "the maturity and understanding of the partnership and collective impact processes of all the members has been really key".