

**Collaborative Effort for Systems Change:**

**Views Across the Food Movement**

by

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For all who persist.

## **Abstract**

This research specifically examines how food-focused, collaboratively based multi-stakeholder efforts aiming to address social problems align with and operationalize theories of poverty and food systems change. This research was conducted in order to understand how they implicitly and explicitly conceptualize social issues in the food system and operationalize change from theory to application and what can be learned from this transition. I examine how equity is positioned within the collaborative efforts. I find that the more institutionalized collaborative efforts become, the further they stray from equitably-based outcomes. I then articulate suggestions for collaborative multi-stakeholder efforts to improve their processes.

**Keywords:** collective impact, poverty, food system, inequity

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The relationship we have with our food and the system that provides it is both deeply personal and complex. The problems that plague these systems are simultaneously invisible to some yet very tangible barriers to others. The research herein explores collective approaches to solving problems often deemed unsolvable. For this research, these problems are identified as poverty and inequity in the food system. In the scientific community, these problems are often quantified and analyzed in order to understand and potentially offer evidenced-based solutions or tools towards solutions. Outside of research and in application, projects and programs are created and implemented as a means of addressing these problems. This research studies the underlying ideologies that govern these solutions in order to better understand where initiatives are coming from when they enact approaches to these problems. In other words, this research examines and unpacks the process of group problem solving in community aspects of food systems.

Across the globe to varying degrees, governments provide nutritional assistance to eligible low-income individuals and families on a spectrum of social services from paltry to robust, new technology companies work to bolster the amount of available food by increasing agricultural yields, and nonprofits form to educate people on healthy eating to lower instances of diet-related disease (United States Government 2019; Indigo Ag., Inc 2018; Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness 2016). All of these actions come with a myriad of presuppositions outlined below.

Studying the intended strategies, goals, and actions of these initiatives can provide insight underlying ideologies and reveal biases in approach for potential correction. For example, it can unearth the understanding that fighting hunger ultimately means individuals and families need immediate and temporary access to benefit programs (Food Research and Action Center 2017, 5).

It might shed light on the perspective that there is too little food to sustain the earth's human population and, therefore, greater investment in agricultural productivity solutions is the dominant solution (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation 2011). Alternately, it might unearth that nutrition education is the missing puzzle piece to increase a population's nutritional health and the dominant approach is to educate these populations about how to make healthier choices (Local Food Park, Inc 2019). All three responses are ultimately addressing different aspects of the social problem of poverty and food system inequity and understanding the reason for the chosen approach holds potential for improvement on the approach.

The social problem I aim to explore in this thesis is food inequity as it specifically relates to the social condition of poverty. Food system inequity, for the purposes of this thesis, can be defined as social and political disparities within the food system that historically negatively and disproportionately affect specific communities. Though there are quite possibly as many solutions as views of the problems themselves, this thesis aims to look at initiatives that, instead of operating in a siloed effort, come together with multiple stakeholders in order to address a major social issue that relates to the food system. This research specifically studies Collective Impact (CI) initiatives, a type of collaborative effort often used to bring together a wide variety of stakeholders around a common purpose of addressing a social problem. These stakeholders range from cities, institutions, organizations, businesses and to individuals. This research will specifically examine how food-focused multi-stakeholder CI efforts aiming to address social problems align with and operationalize theories of poverty and food systems change.

## 1.1 Research Problems and Questions

This research views the social issue of poverty through the lens of a community perspective and analyzes the underlying beliefs and ideologies of efforts meant to be collective in nature in order to create a greater sphere of influence. Specific to collaborative efforts, this research asks how food-based multi-stakeholder initiatives implicitly and/or explicitly conceptualize poverty and food system inequity and operationalize change so that future collaboratives have the opportunity to shift strategies in accordance with their underlying identified beliefs about the food-related problems they aim to tackle. My central research question is: *How do collaborative efforts aimed at addressing social problems align with and operationalize theories of poverty and food systems change?* To answer this central question, this research asks three constitutive questions: 1) *How do CI food programs implicitly understand poverty?* 2) *How do CI food program approaches and strategies reflect theories of food systems change?* 3) *How can we learn from CI initiatives' implicit applications of theories on poverty and food system change?*

This research will help readers understand how collaborative multi-stakeholder efforts think about problems within the current food movement and whether their strategies and plans for action and applications reflect their underlying ideologies. This research looks specifically at collaborative projects that aim to address issues within the food system and stake a claim in the ever-burgeoning food movement. Ultimately, understanding these underlying perceptions can potentially help future collaboratives shift strategies in accordance with their underlying identified beliefs about the food-related problems they aim to tackle.

In Chapter Two, I introduce the social problems addressed in this body of work. I outline poverty and food systems inequity and I provide the background for the two main frameworks

this research is based upon: theories of poverty and food systems change. I then introduce the Collective Impact (CI) model, a strict model for creating systems change. I use my frameworks, developed from theories of poverty and food systems change, as lenses to examine CI initiatives that have a food-related component. Last in Chapter Two, I introduce my research questions. In Chapter Three, I explain the methodology and methods used to guide my research. I describe how I use content analysis to examine content of the food-related CI initiatives such as strategic plans, actions and intended actions and I outline how I code this content. In Chapter Four, I present my findings and provide an analysis. I use the content produced by these CI initiatives to present which theory of poverty the models are implicitly operating with and what food systems change strategy the models are implicitly utilizing. Last, I examine what can food systems scholars and collaborative efforts can take away from this analysis. In the next chapter, I elaborate on the background and significance of this research.

## Chapter Two

### **Background and Significance: Social Justice Through Collaboration**

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the social problem this research aims to address: poverty and inequity in the food system. In the first subsections of the chapter, I situate the social problem by defining inequity and poverty. In the next section, I outline theories of poverty. This is followed by an introduction and explanation of inequity in the food system and food systems change theory; I do this first by drawing connections between poverty and food system inequity and then define and explain food systems change theory. I then introduce and contextualize a specific type of collaborative effort called Collective Impact as the only type of collaborative effort I examine in this research. In the last section, I introduce and frame my research problem, overall research question, and constitutive research questions.

#### **2.1 Social Problem: Inequity and Poverty in the Food System**

Poverty and inequity are often steadfast barriers in the food system. There is an identified need among scholars to also examine structural barriers to food, instead of primarily focusing on disparities related to food as Passidomo (2013) calls for. Passidomo posits that there is more to understand in food issues when focus is placed on the larger structure of the food system as compared to measuring outcomes. She asks how power is “structured, negotiated, and maintained” in the dominant food system (Passidomo 2013). For example, Sen (1981) originally outlined in his groundbreaking research that nations of high food production yield still produce food insecure populations. Sen’s research informs us that it is income and poverty status, not access, that fuels food system inequity. Though this research will not explore the myriad potential processes that acknowledge the dynamics of power within the food system, it does acknowledge the presence and process of this power and its relationship between the haves and the have nots.

In other words, the research directly addresses poverty and food system inequity as broad theoretical categories.

### *2.1.1 Inequity as a Social Problem*

Food system inequity is more easily understood at its base – inequity – and then applied to the food system. All social and political hierarchies produce unequal distribution of both economic and social resources (Sen 1999). These manufactured inequities play out among socioeconomic, political, ethnic and cultural lines and affect every system within these social and political hierarchies (Marmot 2007). This includes the food system as the reader will see in the examples below.

As identified at its core, inequity is a complex social problem and there is ample academic literature compiled to explain how inequity can be overcome. Empowerment through control over one's own life, including political voice and participating in decisions affecting one's own life is achieved at the individual level but enacted through nations, institutions and communities (Marmot 2007, 1155). As applied to the food system, dismantling inequities for individuals means solutions must be applied “beyond the farm” in food systems work and encompass not just the technical changes, but the social and political as well (Allen 2004, 16). In other words, these current systems will continue to produce the inequities they currently do within the food system until these structures are examined, understood and reimagined at every level of the system including gender, class, and race.

Inequity in gender and food is easily understood by examining both the socio-cultural space and the labor workforce. A disproportionate amount of the socio-cultural burden historically falls on women in the form of “mental and manual” labor surrounding food (Allen and Sachs 2007, 3). In other words, planning meals, obtaining food, preparing for the household

and ensuring everyone eats enough disproportionately falls on women. Paid work in the form of a formal labor workforce outside of the home and community is also unequally compensated for when positioned against the opposite gender and is in no trajectory to change in the next several decades (Rose and Hartmann 2018). This is compounded in the paid and unpaid labor force of the food system where women and girls bear a disproportionate amount of the burden in the production, processing, and distribution of food (Patel 2012). This is to say that women experience an inordinate and inequitable amount of the burden in all levels of the food system.

Inequity in food, race, and labor is easily understood in its most basic sense by examining the landscape of the food system worker. In the current food system, both women and people of color are the lowest paid workers (Food Chain Workers Alliance and Solidarity Research Cooperative 2016). In production, 6 out of 10 farmworkers in the United States are both undocumented and underpaid (Liu and Apollon 2011). This is not by accident. Our agrarian populist food system was born out of plantations and was driven by the free and underpaid labor of slaves and indentured servants who operated as the full labor force but remained invisible, as “farmer” was a term allotted only to landowners (Allen 2004, 135). For the current 21.5 million United States food system workers from the farm and beyond, jobs are predominantly low-paying, work is unstable, schedules are unpredictable and difficult, and food insecurity is disproportionately experienced (Food Chain Workers Alliance and Solidarity Research Cooperative 2016). Historically and presently, inequity is disproportionately experienced in the food system in connection to race and labor.

Inequity in class and food is easily understood through the privilege that permeates the currently dominant food system. Marketing strategies and current cultural expectations place the onus on the individual to “make the right choices” in purchasing quality healthful foods (Mares

and Alkon 2011, 72). This ideology assumes individual control over ability to do so. However, it does not reconcile the individual or family that cannot afford to purchase healthful food or cannot access stores due to a lack of transportation or geographic isolation. It also fails to reconcile the cultural appropriateness of available food.

To better understand how these structures of inequity are confronted, it is important to understand one of the most powerful drivers of food system inequity – poverty. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, 11.8 million American households were food insecure in 2017 (USDA 2018). I elaborate on this in the subsequent section where I also detail how poverty as a social issue plagues the United States food system and intersects with food insecurity.

### *2.1.2 Poverty as a Social Problem*

This section explores theories of poverty that explain its own existence and persistence. Poverty is a central concept in this thesis research, which asks how we can most effectively respond to it as it is manifested in the food system. I begin with a baseline for how poverty is perceived and treated as a social issue, then I provide global and national definitions for context in assessing poverty on this spectrum. I then move on to theories of poverty that elaborate on technical definitions and immediate qualifiers to explain poverty's origins, functions, and persistence within a community.

There are several dominant lenses through which poverty is currently viewed. I use the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) definition of general poverty to set a baseline to build from in this thesis. This definition articulates that a family is considered in poverty when a household's income fails to meet the federally established threshold and falls below a minimal acceptance level (UNESCO 2017). The minimal acceptance

level as it pertains to the subject matter in this thesis is the federal poverty threshold of the United States of America. The Center for Poverty Research explains that for the United States, “Income thresholds by the official poverty measure are established by tripling the inflation-adjusted cost of a minimum food diet in 1963 and adjusting for family size, composition and the age of the householder” (Center for Poverty Research 2017). These theories of poverty lead and activate a quantifiable method for defining poverty.

This quantitative measure is utilized by government agencies like the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and nonprofits and non-governmental organizations to set standard minimums that allow individuals and families to access assistance services such as food or shelter. According to the 2017 Official Poverty Report, 12.3% of Americans, nearly 40 million people, lived below the poverty line. This income threshold is what governs what and how much assistance these specific 40 million Americans receive (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2017). It is important to note that even though the number of food insecure Americans and the number of those living below the poverty line in America are the same, not all who are impoverished are in geographic areas without nutritious food.

The United States has several agriculture-rich regions. For example, two-thirds of the nation’s nuts and fruits come out of California as does one-fourth of the nation’s vegetables (State of California 2017). This is to say, agricultural products are highly accessible in California, and yet, this area is home to some of the poorest Americans in the country (Allen 2004, 27). Michigan comes in second in agricultural production for the United States and yet 59% of Michigan residents are considered food insecure (Colasanti et al. 2010, 1). In other words, there is abundant healthful food in these areas but the availability is not equivalent to access, therefore, it is important to examine more comprehensive definitions that include a robust discussion of poverty.

In its entirety, this purely quantitative definition of poverty does not expand for a deeper understanding beyond the individual and family units. For example, this definition does not account for large concentrations of individual or household poverty such as neighborhoods known as “poverty pockets”, or the systems that contribute to them in the United States (Seitles, 1998). Scholar Chaim Waxman’s (1977) analysis concluded that regardless of a root cause as cultural or situational or a combination of the two, isolating individuals and communities of poverty will continue to perpetuate the social issue (Waxman, 1977). While these definitions help agencies form quantifiable needs for the individuals, they do not provide an explanation for the existence and persistence of instances of poverty or how these instances of poverty exist in communities. In conclusion, theories that are largely individualistic in understanding and fall short when working to describe poverty that affects entire communities and a more socially situated definition is more appropriate for the sake of this research. I explore these definitions in the next section.

## **2.2 Theories of Poverty**

While poverty is not identical in every instance, having a framework for different understandings of poverty helps to standardize methodology in alleviating it. Many scholars have introduced theories of poverty and this research relies on Bradshaw’s (2005) distilled theories of poverty to understand approaches to addressing it. This research relies on Bradshaw because he emphasizes poverty theories that build up from the individual to the community to explain poverty is created and perpetuated. This approach makes sense for this research which focuses on collective action towards social problems. Bradshaw (2005) offers five major theories in approach to community development programs aimed at alleviating poverty: conservative, culturally liberal, progressive social, geographic and cyclical.

The following list briefly outlines these five theories which are applied in this research to better understand why collaborative interventions create and activate their strategies and ultimately improve these activated strategies:

- The *conservative* approach in programs posits that poverty is the result of personal disability, incompetence, choice and/or lack of motivation to gain adequate monetary compensation. Examples of poverty alleviation that use this perspective are second chance programs, rehabilitation, assistance in accessing safety net services (federal and charity), counseling and skills training programs. Each of these programs illustrate an underlying assumption that the individual is the cause of failure and these individual deficiencies can be remedied through assistance to the individual.
- The *culturally liberal* approach to programming holds an underlying belief of the existence of a subculture that does not conform to societal norms of success and therefore does not seek upward monetary advancement. Here, the blame is not placed on the individual, but on the beliefs, values and skills passed on through generations and are culturally upheld. Approaches to this theory acknowledge a value in alternative socialization such as leadership development within these subcultures to produce outcomes such as asset-based community development.
- The *progressive social* theory places belief in access and accomplishment prevention due to systematic barriers in key social institutions such as discriminating economic and political policy. Advocacy for policy change is the dominant program response to this theory, though the creation of alternative organizations in a more sovereign effort is also a common program response. This

is the first major theory to introduce a comprehensive social aspect instead of relying on a largely individual framework.

- The fourth, *geographic* theory is that poverty is a result of geographic circumstances that concentrate areas of social advantage and disadvantage and builds off of the progressive social theory. Geographic circumstances such as regional isolation can determine the economic viability of a community. The most common responses in alleviation using this theory involve urban revitalization efforts, rural networking and the creation of redevelopment areas whether the reason of isolation is due to human-manufactured circumstance such as red lining or nature-produced geographic isolation.
- The final theory continues to build off of the previous two theories and is a *cumulative and cyclical* approach identified as *cyclical*. It is, perhaps, the most complex and comprehensive explanation of poverty. This theory suggests that what may appear as individual issues are actually interdependent and therefore heavily linked to community deficiencies. This theory explains that a community in crisis can lead to an individual in crisis and that this process is cyclical and cumulative. Programs with this framework acknowledge the importance of addressing both the individual and the community. For example, Community Development Corporation programs that aim to build individual self-sufficiency through individual programming that increase social capital complemented with community asset-based approaches such as improvements to education infrastructure and access to healthcare and social services.

I utilize these five theories to examine why organizations come together to address the social problem this research explores – food system poverty and inequity. There are several ways to understand an initiative’s implicit theory of poverty. The first is to seek any statements on the causes of poverty an initiative might have in their rhetoric. This information is not always readily available which leads to a second viable option – examining programming of the initiative. Bradshaw (2005) clearly identifies different program strategies in his poverty theory analysis. Community led anti-poverty programs such as those found in some collaborative efforts are diverse in approach; understanding the approach can help researchers understand ideologies behind the execution of each individual program. In the next section, I introduce the second main conceptual framework that this research uses to analyze collaborative efforts at addressing social problems.

### **2.3 Food Systems Inequity and Theories of Change**

In this section, I connect poverty with food system inequity in order to help readers understand the presuppositional relationship food systems inequity often has with poverty. In the subsection that follows, I introduce a theory of change that explain food movement approaches. I discuss social problems such as food system inequity with Sen’s (1981) understanding that poverty and hunger are often interlinked. After explaining this connection in the next subsection, I discuss how food movements have responded to food system inequity with a spectrum of solutions. In this research, I utilize the classifications defined by Eric Holt-Giménez (2010) and later summarized by Eric Holt-Giménez and Annie Shattuck (2011). This classification structure makes sense because it acknowledges that food movement solutions span from the individual to the community and on to more global perspectives of change. Before explaining food systems

change theory, the next section establishes in more detail the relationship between food system inequity and poverty.

### *2.3.1 Drawing connections between poverty and food system inequity*

Food is the topic of much popular discourse, though most of these topics center around food itself – the nutritional content of specific foods and the cultural context surrounding relationships with food. There is, however, a growing body of discourse that centers around poverty and inequity through the lens of food. The structural causes of food insecurity and hunger are often addressed with the *individual* poverty theory approach of encouraging individual empowerment and personal responsibility (Pudup 2008). Furthermore, the intersectionality of race and food is rarely translated into structural inequity in food systems more broadly (Passidomo 2013). For example, more community development efforts are adopting an intersectional approach as they attempt to unpack and tackle food-related social problems. The Milwaukee Food Council defines this intersectionality as “the intersections of systems of oppression (e.g. race, class, gender, religion)” (Milwaukee Food Council 2014). Applied to the food system, this means race, class, gender and religion are constructs that still determine health outcomes because of structural inequity (Slocum 2011). I define these separately in the following paragraphs.

Food insecurity is experienced by many but often concentrated and felt more deeply in low-income communities. Extreme geographic concentrations of these spaces are often referred to as *food deserts* and are defined as “an area in the United States with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of predominantly lower-income neighborhoods and communities” (Johnson 2008). In other words, food deserts disproportionately exist in geographic concentrations of minorities (race) with a specific socio-economic status

(class). The term itself, when viewed with the aforementioned theories of poverty other than the *individual* theory of poverty is problematic, as the term *food desert* connotes something naturally caused.

In some geographic instances, segregation and restricted resources created health disparities that were further separated from American baselines through the federal recommendations of redlining. Redlining is a term used for a series of recommendations passed down from a series of federally produced program – the first from the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC). This program created a series of tiers that deemed a community's likelihood to achieve federally-backed mortgages based on a neighborhood's racial makeup (Massey and Denton 1993, 51). This process did well to perpetuate a steady decline in the general socio-economic status of mainly minority communities in specific geographic spaces. Today, these spaces are often overlapped with food deserts. They are a structural creation and some of the above-mentioned theories of poverty outline that there is a connection between food, health outcomes, and communities of poverty (Kurtz 2013, 251; Massey and Denton 1993). In other words, the process of redlining reinforced, worsened and even created pockets of community poverty using guidelines that outlined the racial makeup of a community as increasingly riskier to federally back a mortgage if the community had a presence of non-white residents. These spaces are now largely communities of poverty and food deserts across the United States.

In addition, the common answer to food systems issues calls solely for individual action and local food – shop here, buy local, and know your farmer. However, advocating for local food commits the error of assuming that the system is inherently better if the system is local (Born and Purcell 2006). The neoliberal logic of consumer choice and the individual responsibility to vote with your dollar presupposes that individuals have the monetary resources to participate, as well

as time capital. Expanding this individual understanding of power in the food system to encompass the community level can benefit the individual understanding of food systems structural inequity.

Community-based and structural understandings of poverty and food systems inequity are an important step towards structural change. Focusing on systems can lead to a deeper understanding of power structures and social inequity that create barriers to access and perpetuate states of poverty and food insecurity (Passidomo 2013). This research acknowledges that communities – and not solely individuals – exist within a system which is why the definition of poverty utilized in this research does not limit itself by viewing poverty solely through the lens of the individual. Keeping the importance of structural change in mind, the next subsection characterizes how food movements have responded to create food system change – from entirely individualized to more systemic approaches.

### *2.3.2. Theory of Food Systems Change*

Theories of poverty and food insecurity are myriad and often intertwined. There is a large body of scholarship that analyzes various aspects of food movements' approaches to creating change in the food system. Much of this academic analysis has emerged as the food movement has unfolded and this research has often been conducted with scholars who do research in conjunction with direct food movement application (Mares and Alkon, 2011). This research draws on this direct food movement actions and applications to characterize contemporary approaches to creating food system change; this section explains the conceptual framework chosen for this analysis.

These theories of poverty are often situated in an economic context and often fail to include the human element that separates the individuals from the communities they exist within

and for. For the purpose of this research, the framework chosen to better understand how various efforts in the food movement approach food system change is that of Holt-Giménez (2010). By situating initiatives along the spectrum of this framework, a temperature check to determine where along the spectrum an initiative is situated can be conducted. By figuring out where an initiative is situated along the spectrum, collaborative stakeholders operating within the food movement for social change can unearth where there is potential for divergence and fragmentation in their efforts, which has the potential to limit intended change (Holt-Giménez 2010, 327). Movements can also be reflexive and explicit about the kind of change they seek in their work. The framework is built on Karl Polanyi's analysis that "if capitalist markets were allowed to run rampant, they would eventually destroy both society and their own natural resource base" making a temperature check essential and allowing for consistent measurables across the board for success (Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011). This perspective is key given the prior analysis of poverty theories because these theories can operate as a temperature check.

The framework utilized in this research places strategies within the food movement across a spectrum. This is based off of the Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) spectrum outlining how efforts organize and implement food systems change. On one half of the spectrum, there exists an overarching mission that is palliative. The food movement strategies that sit here aim to mitigate but not alleviate identified social and environmental issues. On the other end of the spectrum, a partial or full restructuring of the food system is called for and, in some cases, conjured. I address each half of the spectrum in what follows, beginning with the palliative side.

The two main categories within the palliative side of the spectrum are *neoliberal* and *reformist*. Neoliberalism's identifiable characteristics are based in economic liberalism, that is, the concept that the market can self-regulate to produce positive outcomes as a part of the food

movement. An example of a *neoliberal* approach to change, as applied to the food movement would be strategies of reclaiming unsold but edible food and selling it at a reduced cost to food insecure populations. This fits this description of neoliberal because the method works within all existing structures and simply reroutes a small section of food resources by utilizing the existing system. Another example is providing tax breaks to chain grocery stores to incentivize them into establishing a store in a low-income low-access area. Again, grocery chain tax breaks work within the current dominant system and do not address systemic issues of poverty that prevent those from accessing the minimal acceptance level of income in order to obtain the necessary resources for living.

The *reformist* approach is similar to, but less extreme than, the *neoliberal* approach in its orientation around working within the system without any major transformation to the system itself. In contrast to the *neoliberal* approach, however, reformist interventions often prescribe a mild reform in strategies and methods. An example of this within the food movement would be the federal and state safety nets that are obligated to provide supplemental nutrition for low-income families or a micro-financing initiative to help those in poverty start a business and operate within the market. Again, although they provide temporary relief, these strategies do not address the underlying problem of poverty and food insecurity.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, food movements are characterized in ways that operate further outside of the dominant market. Movements on this end of the spectrum can be categorized as *progressive* and, on the furthest end of the spectrum, *radical*. The most recognizable term within the food movement that exists on this side of the spectrum is the Alternative Food Movement (AFM), a name that describes a wide range of efforts to confront issues within the food system by supplementing or completely redefining the current food system.

AFMs most often exist within the framework of the current capitalist food system, but often include an element of community action. From the *progressive* point of view, consumer monetary input is the greatest operator. This emphasis on monetary engagement shows up in an emphasis on buying the right foods and comes from a seat of empowerment in the community that addresses not the food itself, but other socio-economic factors that impact one's ability to obtain food such as a living wage. Conversely, the *radical* approach calls for dismantling the existing dominant food system in order to redistribute power and rights and, therefore, access. An example of this is a right-to-food initiative. The right-to-food passes power back to communities to control their own access. Scholar Molly Anderson describes this as the ability to engage in democratic participation within food systems choices, the absence of both human and resource exploitation, "fair transparent access by producers to all necessary resources for food production, including knowledge," and "no impingement on the ability of other people in other locales to meet this set of criteria" (Anderson 2008, 601). The underlying belief outlined in a right-to-food is that everyone has a democratic right to food and sustenance.

If communities have the ability to control their own systems such as growing their own food, sharing ownership and responsibility in growing and controlling distribution of their own food among their community, they have control over a basic human need that is not currently recognized as a right in the United States—the right to food—which would, therefore, require a system overhaul to achieve. These four descriptions of food movement approaches to food system change will be used, along with theories of poverty, to understand how contemporary Collective Impact initiatives are approaching food systems change. The next section describes this as the thesis' research problem.

## 2.4 Addressing Poverty and Food Systems Inequity through Collective Impact Models

In this section, I describe Collective Impact (CI) models which may provide a promising way to address the social problems of poverty and inequity in the food system. Again, the CI model is often used to bring together a wide variety of stakeholders around a common purpose of addressing a social problem. These stakeholders range from cities, institutions, organizations, businesses to individuals. In this section, I first explain the five major characteristics of the CI model: a common agenda, a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and a backbone organization. I next situate the CI model by indicating its potential to address food systems issues. I then explain my research problem, which examines how CI-informed efforts engage theories of poverty and apply methods of food systems change.

Problem solving requires organization, beginning with a clear definition of the problem at hand. CI models organize collaborative work with a high degree of structure. This rigorously structured model is set up for solving a specific social problem, therefore making them an ideal candidate for review when examining social issues (Spark Policy Institute and ORS Impact 2018). They require the following baseline: a common agenda, a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and a backbone organization. CI models, as defined by Kania and Kramer (2011) require a *common agenda*. For the purpose of this research, they require a common social problem for stakeholders to rally around and help address such as high rates of food insecurity in a specific town or low rates of post-secondary education in a community, which can be variously defined by a CI initiative. This common agenda is a specific outcome to that social problem. CIs also require *consensus of measurement systems*. The specific outcome must have agreement across stakeholders for how the progress and success of the outcome is measured and stakeholders must be capable of conforming to these measurements. CIs

also must have *mutually reinforcing activities* and *continuous communication*. Roles within the collective must be clearly defined and supportive of one another while operating with regular contact and using a commonly agreed upon vocabulary. Last, CI models operate traditionally with *backbone support organizations*. Managing, coordinating and facilitating a collective of stakeholders requires staff separate from boots-on-the-ground participating organizations to facilitate the building of trust among stakeholders and to manage the diverse relationships within the initiative. Next, I explain how this research engages CI efforts as defined above.

## **2.5 Research Problem and Constitutive Research Questions**

This research asks how collaborative efforts to address social problems embedded in the food system operationalize and conceptualize theories of poverty and food system change in order to contribute to the betterment of the strategies and efforts of collaborative efforts aimed at addressing food-related issues. In this section, I introduce my overall and constitutive research questions. My overall research question asks, *how do collaborative efforts aimed at addressing social problems align with and operationalize theories of poverty and food systems change?* Next, I introduce and explain my constitutive research questions.

Research Question One: How do CI food programs implicitly understand poverty?

This question is relevant due to the growing popularity of using the CI model to address social issues through the coordinated efforts of many stakeholders. This question aims to examine what poverty framework these collectives are operating with because the framework provides an ideological map. By answering this question, we can learn how these efforts think about the issues they aim to address. Given the relationship between poverty and inequity within the food system making the implicit explicit could help improve the process of food-based CI initiatives seeking to tackle a social issue.

Research Question Two: How do CI food program approaches and strategies reflect theories of food systems change?

The second constitutive research question aims to examine which food movement change theory these collectives employ. CI models that aim to impact food systems change as a part of their outcomes are of specific interest because the CI model often lacks an equity lens and a framework for policy change and these are the changes that would make scaled food systems impact possible (Hoey et al. 2017, 8). This lack of an equity lens includes the historical absence of marginalized populations from these CI approaches when attempting to engage diverse stakeholders (Shapiro et al. 2015). Answering this question documents common trends in approaches and potentially allows for a better understanding of how they can be more effective.

Research Question Three: How can we learn from CI initiatives' implicit applications of theories on poverty and food system change?

This question explores the gaps in knowledge and process and the major successes of the food-based CI initiatives studied in this research. Answering this question may support existing and future collaboratives in better utilizing community system-change strategies.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have elaborated the social problem of poverty and inequality in the food system that this research addresses. I then detailed two major frameworks: theories of poverty and food systems change theory. I have specified a type of collaborative group effort aimed at addressing a social problem that has a systematic method of organizing: the Collective Impact model. Last, I have outlined my overarching and three constitutive research questions. In the next chapter, I explain how I address these questions by detailing my methodology and methods for each.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology and Methods

In this chapter, I explain the methodology I use to unpack the research problem of addressing poverty and food system inequities through food-based CI initiatives. I do this by outlining critical inquiry, my overarching methodological approach, and explain how the use of critical inquiry effectively addresses my research problem. I then explain my own positionality relative to this research problem and offer insight into the knowledge accumulated. Next, I explain the specific methods used to address each research question. I conclude by offering a roadmap of my findings.

Guiding this research are three questions. The first two are designed to examine different parts of my main research question: *how do collaborative efforts aimed at addressing social problems align with and operationalize theories of poverty and food systems change?* They are *how do CI food programs implicitly understand poverty?* and *how do CI food program approaches and strategies reflect theories of food systems change?* The final question was created through an iterative and recursive process; it is synthetic and designed to identify how the information obtained by answering the first two research questions can provide lessons learned to benefit current and future food-related CI initiatives: *how can we learn from CI initiatives' implicit applications of theories on poverty and food system change?* The next section describes the methodologies I use to address these questions.

#### 3.1 Methodology

In order to address the overall research question, *how do collaborative efforts aimed at addressing social problems align with and operationalize theories of poverty and food systems change?*, this research uses critical inquiry and content analysis. The aim of critical inquiry is to

act as an overall approach to asking questions in order to improve the strategies and approaches of these food-based collaborative efforts. I use critical inquiry because the aim is not knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but rather knowledge for the sake of addressing a social problem and improving the situation of the oppressed (Comstock 1994). This methodology is appropriate when examining my research questions because critical inquiry acknowledges that “validity of [a critical inquiry approach’s] concepts, data, and theory is related to the historical aims and purposes of that subject” (Comstock 1994). In other words, how this issue is socially situated is important and key to how the issue is examined. Who is guiding the programming, what the intended outcomes are, and how the outcomes are measured are important aspects to consider when examining these cases.

I examine the outcomes of collaborative efforts at food equity through the methodology of content analysis. I use content analysis because I want to examine these documents with the potential outcome of improving processes (Schreier 2014). The methodology of content analysis also acknowledges that the qualitative process is situated in a specific period of time that influences the way information is examined.

The main focus of this research is on CI initiatives, a specific type of collaborative organizing that was formalized by Kania and Kramer in 2011. This focus was chosen for several reasons. First, it has been a loosely structured form of organizing long before Kania and Kramer put definitive structure to the process. Second, there is a high degree of order and transparency as outlined by the five governing tenets previously detailed for all CI models that includes a high degree of transparency in the creation and dissemination of governing documents and presentations. This transparency greatly increases chances of public access to documentation that provides enough insight to determine the potentially implicit poverty theory the CI initiatives are

using to drive their decisions. This transparency also greatly increases chances of public access to documentation that provides enough insight to determine where these food-based CI initiatives are situated within the spectrum of food movement change theory.

The high degree of transparency outlined above makes CI initiatives an ideal focus for critical inquiry. Third, the CI model is designed to address social issues such as low graduation rates or food insecurity that tend to disproportionately affect lower income populations. In other words, this model is often used to tackle the complicated effects of populations that are affected by varying rates of poverty. Last, studying an already rigorously structured approach makes sense. Social issues are complex and ameliorating these problems is rarely a clean process and having a base governing structure allows for temperature checks along the way that allow flexibility in approaches even if the tenets remain firm.

### **3.2 Positionality**

I was part of the formulation of a youth empowerment project within a low-income, food desert, Community Redevelopment Area of St. Petersburg, Florida. The project aimed to create and orient its structure as a part of a larger Collective Impact initiative. I worked closely in the early stages to help form, organize, and facilitate this process and successfully obtained one year in funding for the project through a local foundation. All stakeholders, including myself, were interested in exploring all avenues that help eliminate the possibility of reproducing inequities.

My involvement with an active food-based multi-stakeholder CI initiative was both within the initiative itself and as a researcher who aimed to gain broader understanding of how these collaboratives operationalize. I am aware of my role in defining and shaping this inquiry; this is to say, I am socially situated within this research as both an analyst and participant (Jensen and

Glasmeier 2010, 82). In the following section, I explain how I answer each of my constitutive research questions.

### **3.3 Methods: Approaches to Answering Constitutive Research Questions**

In this section I explain how I answered each research question. I detail methods for RQ1 and RQ2. The analysis of RQ3 is partially derived from the results for RQs 1 and RQ2 and supplemented by looking at documents that specifically examine CI models. For all three research questions, my unit of analysis is food-related CI initiatives. I chose food-related CI initiatives in order to better understand the implicit beliefs and approaches these initiatives are operating within in respect to the social issues of community poverty and food system inequities. CI initiatives aim to address social problems within specific geographic communities and also engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders.

There is no current comprehensive and exhaustive list of CI initiatives within the United States and the purpose of this research is not to amass this data. For all three research questions, I chose a scope of CI initiatives that were located within the United States only and explicitly followed the Kania and Kramer (2011) Collective Impact goals of shared measurement, continuous communication, backbone support, a common agenda and mutually reinforcing activities. That is, each food-based CI initiative examined had to have written documentation that they were following the principles of Collective Impact. I considered CI initiatives that made documentation open and easily accessible to the public. I collected these data on existing CI initiatives through Google searches and word of mouth from current CI initiative participants followed by internet searches to locate them.

I initially identified twelve self-named United States-based CI initiatives in various phases of operation. Of these initiatives, I selected those that either had information readily available

online or information that was easily accessed via phone call or email. I eliminated all that did not have a clear indication of the CI process. CI initiatives that did not clearly acknowledge issues of low-socioeconomic status and poverty but still engaged in food-based issues were also removed. Last, I removed all that did not indicate goals, strategies, and outcomes alongside mission and vision statements. I emerged with the Montgomery County Community Health Improvement Plan, the West Dayton Food Access Project, the Michigan Good Food Charter, and the Milwaukee Food Council.

From there, I identified all relevant information within the set of food-based CI initiatives selected. I concluded that for this study, my units of observation were documents produced by these CI initiatives. This makes sense because these documents adequately represent the ideologies and actions of the initiatives and they are easily accessed through internet searches or obtained from the program coordinators of the initiatives themselves. Of the documents produced by the food-based CI initiatives, I focused the research and examined cases that report the most up-to-date information while also remaining comprehensive enough to study. I picked the most robust documentation, most representative and recent, and looked at programs within the last two years with the most comprehensive information. In some of the cases, I examined intended actions and strategies where existing programming had been identified publicly to date.

I sifted through these cases using content analysis as defined by Schreier (2014). I sorted through content for poverty theory categories as outlined in Research Question One and food systems change theory categories as outlined in Research Question Two. I deductively sought concepts utilizing the categories provided through a lens of poverty theory as defined by Bradshaw (2005) for Research Question One and a lens of food systems change theory for Research Question Two. This is appropriate because the coding process offered in content

analysis allows for looser categories and allows for themes and concepts to emerge instead of limiting a wide scope of content to specific phrase searches. This is explained in the three subsections that follow on the methods I employ for my constitutive research questions.

### *3.3.1 Research Question One Methods*

My first research question, *how do CI food programs implicitly understand poverty?* was answered by using Bradshaw's (2005) theories of poverty as a lens to deductively search for themes within the content available to me in strategic plans, reports and presentation documents from food-based CI initiatives based in the United States. To examine how CI discourse implicitly utilize theories of poverty as described by Bradshaw (2005), my units of observation were presentations, reports, logic models and strategic plans made public by the CI efforts themselves to ascertain what these initiatives self-reported. Using these units of observation, I analyzed goals and actions or outcomes self-reported by the initiative. Specifically, I conducted a content analysis on the most comprehensive documentation available for each initiative and combed through my cases in search of themes already laid out and well defined by Bradshaw's (2005) theories of poverty: *conservative, culturally liberal, progressive social, geographic and cyclical*. These theories were outlined in greater detail in Chapter Two.

These themes are not explicitly indicated within the CI documents, so I collected data and read each document and coded for passages that identified goals and actions or intended action taken to achieve program goals and actions or outcomes. I then categorized these identified efforts by grouping them into Bradshaw's theories of poverty based on the program types associated with each individual theory of poverty. I was able to attribute a theory of poverty to each CI initiative.

### 3.3.2 Research Question Two Methods

My second research question, *How do CI food program approaches and strategies reflect theories of food systems change?*, built off of Research Question One and was answered deductively using the Holt-Giménez (2010) food systems change spectrum as a lens to search for themes within the content available to me in strategic plans, reports and presentation documents from food-based CI initiatives located in the United States. Of these cases, my possible units of analysis were missions, visions and strategies. To examine how CI food initiatives strategize to achieve change within food movement categories, my units of observation were presentations, reports, logic models and strategic plans made public by the CI efforts themselves to ascertain what these initiatives self-reported.

I then conducted a content analysis on the most comprehensive documentation available for each initiative and combed through my cases in search of clues to what theory of food movement change explained by the Holt-Giménez (2010) spectrum was governing the strategies and missions of these initiatives. This spectrum operates as a food movement inequities framework and identifies efforts within the food movement across a spectrum of strategies as described in greater detail in the Chapter Two: *neoliberal, reformist, progressive and radical*.

These themes are sometimes overtly found within the literature and sometimes they are not, so data was collected and each document read and coded for mission statements and strategies to address their named problem. I then categorized these identified efforts by orienting them along the spectrum based on the discourse and orientation displayed in the data. I was able to place each CI initiative within this spectrum.

### 3.3.3 Research Question Three Methods

My third research question, *how can we learn from CI initiatives' implicit applications of theories on poverty and food system change?* was answered inductively by utilizing the findings of poverty theories and food systems change theory in the first two research questions. I discuss the parallels found from answering the two research questions. In addition to the cases utilized to answer Research Question One and Research Question Two, I also seek to explain these findings utilizing literature written specifically about the CI model and how the CI model is activated within food systems work. I used the same two frameworks described in my first two research questions: theories of poverty and food systems change theory. My scope remained the same and United States-based CI initiatives that had a food-based element were used. To examine what we can learn from CI initiatives' implicit applications of theories of poverty and food system change, my units of analysis were cases from Research Question One and Research Question Two as well as academic discourse written about CI models to help explain findings from Research Question One and Research Question Two. My units of observation were the results and analysis from the first two research questions. Initiatives discussed and analyzed in this research question had to have been previously analyzed in this research.

In conclusion, this chapter detailed the methodology of critical inquiry and content analysis and provided context for their use in this research. I situated my own work within the context of choosing this subject matter as a model to examine poverty theories and food movement change theory. Last, I reiterated my overall research question and detailed my three constitutive research questions that aim to provide insight into my overall research question and I outlined the appropriate methods needed to answer the questions. In the next chapter, I introduce my results, analysis and contribution. I then provide noted areas of potential improvement to my

methodology. Next, I situate collective impact within the community to provide the necessary context for all three research questions. I then provide the results and analysis for my first two research questions along with necessary info to contextualize them and provide a brief summary for each. Last, I utilize my third synthetic research question to provide my overall contribution.

## Chapter Four

### Results, Analysis, and Contribution

Macro is micro. How an organization addresses the root issue of poverty can inform how they address individual issues of food insecurity. Given the immense amount of collaborative efforts aimed at addressing food-related social issues that intertwine with poverty, the positionality of these efforts warrant analysis. Underlying ideologies shape how collaborative efforts choose to mobilize to address social problems.

This research explores collective approaches to addressing problems often deemed unsolvable that are specific to the community aspect of food systems. My primary research question is: *How do collaborative efforts aimed at addressing social problems in the food system align with and operationalize theories of poverty and food systems change?* The question is answered through three research questions. Research Question One asks, *How do CI food programs implicitly understand poverty?* Research Question Two asks, *How do CI food program approaches and strategies reflect theories of food systems change?* Research Question Three asks, *How can we learn from CI initiatives' implicit applications of theories on poverty and food system change?* I have conceptualized these answers through extrapolating information through a scientific process.

In the following section, I situate the model I examine – collective impact – within the context of community. I then provide additional context for theories of poverty and provide the results in conjunction with my analysis for my first research question. Next, I detail the results in conjunction with my analysis of my second research question. Last, I address the third research question, which explains the contributions of my research and draws on the results and analysis of my first two research questions.

#### **4.1 Situating Collective Impact Within the Community**

In order to understand the themes that emerged from coding data sources produced by the CI initiatives themselves, some context is necessary. This subsection provides context specific to CI models and to help situate the results for my first two research questions.

The CI model is used with the main goal to produce “substantial impact on a large-scale social problem” (Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer 2012). It can also be applied to the food system. Some social change efforts link themselves directly to food and food system-based solutions from inception, such as the aptly named Michigan Good Food Charter. Others incorporate food systems issues into part of what they aim to address, like the Montgomery County Community Health improvement plan that looks at overall community health and operationalizes tactics that touch of food system issues.

In order to understand initiatives in their broadest sense, it is imperative to recognize that CI initiatives truly have a broad group of stakeholders involved in the change making process. The smallest CI initiative in this research, West Dayton Food Access Project, represented 15 participating stakeholder organizations while the largest and oldest CI initiative, the Michigan Good Food Charter, reported bringing 376 different organizations together to the table and also documented an additional 511 individuals who did not represent specific organizations (Homefull 2018; Colasanti 2015). Furthermore, each stakeholder holds their own standards and perspective in what an effective measurement of these potential outcomes which has resulted in stalled effort (Hoey et al. 2017, 5). These organizations all come to the table with their own missions to uphold, which could result in tension between the mission and goals of the CI initiative and individual organizational mission and goals.

Ultimately, a CI initiative strives for unity in the common agenda across all stakeholders. This common agenda can be difficult to achieve when stakeholders come from a spectrum of backgrounds from CEOs to community members (Hoey et al. 2017). It is important to note that all of these initiatives are self-described as organizing as CI, but it is possible some have incorporated elements of the CI model without fully engaging all five presuppositions outlined in Chapter Two: *a common agenda, a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and a backbone organization*. Table 4-1. Food-Based Collective Impact Initiative Landscape outlines initiatives with available documentation:

Table 4-1. Food-Based Collective Impact Initiative Landscape

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Backbone</b>	<b>Year Launched</b>	<b># of Organizations</b>
West Dayton Food Access Project	Homefull	2017	14
The Michigan Good Food Charter	Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems	2009	376
Milwaukee Food Council (MFC)	MFC nonprofit status achieved – role still unpaid	2016	55
Montgomery County CHIP	Public Health - Dayton & Montgomery County (PHDMC)	2016	35

While specifics differ between CI initiatives, the questions addressed herein can be applied broadly to CI food programs across the board. Their definitions and understandings of the underlying issues of food insecurity inform their approaches to those problems, and ultimately the results they achieve.

## 4.2 Research Question One: Results and Analysis

The question, *How do CI food programs implicitly understand poverty?*, examines the solutions posited by CI initiatives in order to elicit implicit community poverty theories potentially in play as outlined in Chapter Two: Background and Significance. By coding initiatives' documents according to the procedures outlined in Chapter Three: Methods and Methodology, initiatives' implicit understanding of poverty revealed that several theories of poverty were employed. As outlined in Chapter Two, understanding how poverty is thought about and categorized might help to frame predictable responses to issues that are often linked to poverty within the food system. Perhaps programs and actions implemented by the initiatives can be strengthened by understanding the underlying perception within that initiative.

### 4.2.1 Understanding Programming to Map for Poverty Theories

The major theories of poverty outlined in Chapter Two depict the basic characteristics of each theory. There are many ways to match theories with CI initiatives and for this research, I use actions and types programming because these applications are both clearly detailed in the theories and in the CI initiatives. In order to better understand which categories initiatives might fall under, additional context to understand how learning about the kinds of programming can help place the initiative in a theory of poverty is needed. This section continues to build on Bradshaw's (2005) theories to explain the programs that most often come out of each theory of poverty.

The *conservative* theory of poverty tends to focus programming that specifically targets the individual. This often comes in the form of assistance such as connecting individuals to existing services such as job finding programs or behavior changing programs for individuals. The *culturally liberal* theory of poverty builds on the *individual* theory and adds family to the equation as the locus of control. Programming in this camp tends to focus specifically on

changing family behaviors through redefining culturally appropriate strategies. Alternative socialization programs that specifically focus on youth as the agents of change for a family are also popular with this view. The *progressive social* view places emphasis on policy change and minor tweaks to the existing system. Examples include alternative structures such as charter schools. The *geographic* view builds on the previous theory but believes in a hyper-local improvement including industry competitiveness. Examples include Community Redevelopment Areas and Enterprise Zones, affordable housing opportunities, infrastructure investment and community organizing. The final *cumulative and cyclical* theory also builds off of the third and fourth theory. It acknowledges deep systemic cycles such as poor funding through property tax-based systems to fund schools that in turn do not perform well. Approaches are diverse and inclusive and involve community health equity work and supporting communities to create their own solutions. These program outlines help to determine which theories of poverty the initiatives fall under. The following subsections provide both the results from examining these programs and intended programs and an analysis of these results.

#### 4.2.2 *Montgomery County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)*

Some initiatives were comprised of mostly higher-level institutional representation. The Montgomery County CHIP initiative brought together 35 different organizations from a variety of public and private sector institutions including both the city and county governments, healthcare providers and insurance communities, fire and EMS, local law enforcement, local universities and businesses, foundations, nonprofits and civic groups (Public Health – Dayton and Montgomery County 2016, 4). For the Montgomery County CHIP initiative, it was possible to examine both the goals and the progress on goals. The overarching goals of increasing food access and decreasing the number of food insecure children were set as a part of a larger CI initiative to

address health disparities in the county. The county identified food access and security as priorities because 29.6% of the county population lived in a food desert and had low access to food. However, only 9.1% of the population were both low-income, lived in a food desert, and had low access to food (Ebron 2018, 13). The initiative worked to reconcile these food disparities through goals that aimed to activate access.

There were two main food systems-related goals set for this. The first goal, “increase access to healthy food,” was to be implemented by decreasing food deserts by 10% in Montgomery County. In the two-year progress report, the “number of retail and community venues offering quality, fairly-priced healthier food options within food desert census tracts increased by 37% from its baseline of 27 stores to 37 (Ebron 2018,14). No measurement was provided to determine the percentage of area reduced from a food desert status with the increase in number of stores providing access to healthy food, but it can be posited that an increase in availability of healthy food locations did reduce the percentage of food desert area.

The second food-related goal, “increase healthy eating in children,” was to be implemented by increasing the number of children who eat a healthy balanced diet by 10% (Ebron 2018, 12). In the year two progress report, the effort was operationalized by increasing the number of sites participating in summer meal programs. The number of sites were not available in the analysis but the number of children with food insecurity increased by 9.6% (Ebron 2018,17). The implemented steps are available, but currently there are no reported results as they are still in progress (Public Health – Dayton and Montgomery County 2018). Even without this information, the logical thought process is clear – increasing access to healthy food could lead to an increase in healthy eating in children.

The approach to both goals was technical and strategic. If nutritious food was incentivized, then more would be provided in areas in which it had previously been absent. If instances of nutritious food increased, consumption of nutritious food would increase for children. The Montgomery County CHIP worked with existing stores and markets and other venues to negotiate and incentivize the addition of more and, in some cases, any nutritious food. They also focused specifically on assisting children for their second main goal. They measured this progress using emergency food distribution techniques that do not address the problem of hunger and food insecurity itself. This technical approach places the program with an implicitly conservative approach to poverty.

#### *4.2.3 West Dayton Food Access Project*

Some initiatives began with tremendous participation of the area they aimed to serve. The West Dayton Food Access Project formed and acted on goals within the year. was comprised of 14 partners representing nonprofits, churches, local government and a community center and a garden (Homefull 2018). The goals set to accomplish food access were measurable and listed as follows: 5 West Dayton community and school-based gardens revitalized or built, 15 participants trained and provided direct labor to gardens and markets, 100 customers served at West Dayton food events and pop-up markets, 386 Gem City Market grocery co-op shares sold to W. Dayton residents, 555 SNAP-EBT customers served at The Market at Wright Stop Plaza and 2nd St. Market, and 15,000 pounds of food produced, distributed, or sold (Homefull 2018). The CI initiative's results are as follows: 4 West Dayton community and school-based gardens revitalized or built, 24 participants trained and provided direct labor to gardens and markets, 105 customers served at West Dayton food events and pop-up markets, 291 Gem City Market grocery co-op shares sold to W. Dayton residents, 353 SNAP-EBT customers served at The Market at Wright

Stop Plaza and 2nd St. Market, and 7,174 pounds of food produced, distributed, or sold (Homefull 2018). Though the goals they outlined were short term, they exceeded in their goal measurement for trained labor co-op shares sold, narrowly missed achieving their garden revitalization and construction goals by one garden and hit around the midway point for their SNAP-EBT customer target and their produce goal.

There are several strategies at play here. The bulk of the work was towards small incremental instances of change, like the increase in produce at an existing store and the cleanup of existing gardens point to individual understandings of poverty. However, the most notable component is the creation and perpetuation of a grocery cooperative. Solutions are oriented around working with the group or community to redefine culturally appropriate strategies such as cooperative businesses that aim to empower a specific community (Bradshaw 2005, 9). It is a culturally liberal approach to create and implement alternative business strategies. This makes sense as the culturally liberal approach builds on the conservative approach.

#### *4.2.4 Michigan Good Food Charter*

Some initiatives take their time to plan. The Michigan Good Food Charter is a CI initiative that began convening in 2009 with the first full release of the Charter in June of 2010 that all centered around health, economic and equity goals. In a presentation given about the Michigan Good Food Charter in 2015, there were 375 organizational partners from the public and private sector and 511 individuals involved (Colasanti 2015). It is difficult to assess the Michigan Good Food Charter's direct impact on these measures, though this is expected given the large number of contributors and stakeholders. There are several notable approaches in the efforts to achieve good food standards as previously outlined that provide insight to implicit understandings of poverty.

Given the immense amount of materials that document this specific initiative, this research examines the Michigan Good Food Report Card (2018) as a way to check the temperature on the goals that have been and their progress gearing up to the 2020 goals of the Michigan Good Food Charter (Colasanti et al. 2010). The results have been distilled from the progress report and are detailed in Table 4-2. Michigan Good Food Charter Goals and Outcomes (Kelly et al. 2018).

Table 4-2. Michigan Good Food Charter Goals and Outcomes (Kelly et al. 2018)

<b>Goals</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Goal 1: Michigan institutions will source 20% of their products from Michigan growers, producers and processors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased the number of institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.) and the amount of local food purchasing they were doing.</li> <li>▪ Michigan growers accounted for 14% of this total spending.</li> </ul>
Goal 2: Michigan farmers will profitably supply 20% of all Michigan institutional, retailer and consumer food purchases and be able to pay fair wages to their workers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There was not enough evidence to directly state an increase percentage but relationships have been well established for farmers to increase sales across consumer groups.</li> <li>▪ Direct impact is difficult as Attorney General Bill Schuette does not support even a minimum wage mandatory for small farms and Michigan agriculture is heavily reliant on seasonal and migrant workers who are paid less than the local minimum wage.</li> </ul>
Goal 3: Michigan will generate new agrifood businesses at a rate that enables 20% of food purchased in Michigan to come from Michigan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A private loan fund, the Michigan Good Food Fund, was created and has invested \$11 million in 28 business and provided technical assistance to nearly 30 enterprises.</li> <li>▪ Public and private institutions invested money in related businesses that created a minimum of 16,000 jobs in the field.</li> <li>▪ A center opened to help agribusinesses innovate and grow.</li> </ul>
Goal 4: 80% of Michigan residents (twice the current level) will have easy access to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The number of food insecure households is shrinking but more and</li> </ul>

affordable fresh healthy food, 20% of which is from Michigan.	<p>more are not meeting the federal standards for government assistance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The number of farmers markets is increasing. However, total sales (standard and SNAP) are decreasing.</li> <li>▪ The number of food policy councils is increasing.</li> <li>▪ Several Michigan towns are undergoing assessment to understand healthy access in their towns which will help inform other Michigan towns.</li> </ul>
Goal 5: Michigan Nutrition Standards will be met by 100% of school meals and 75% of schools selling food outside school meal programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All schools met federal standards for school meal programs and nearly 50% participate in salad bars and farm to school programs.</li> <li>▪ State policies lack national standards for serving fruits and vegetables in schools.</li> </ul>
Goal 6: Michigan schools will incorporate food and agriculture into the pre-K through 12 curriculum for all Michigan students, and youth will have access to food and agriculture entrepreneur opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There are over 113 Career and Technical Education programs.</li> <li>▪ Nearly half of the farm to school programs include an education component.</li> <li>▪ There has been a 12% increase in FoodCorps educators in schools since 2016.</li> </ul>

The actions taken are broad – from creating an innovation center to providing loans to small food enterprises. However, even though there is mention of policy in some of the rhetoric, there is no action associated with the mention. Policy change or alternative major systems introduced are the two major pieces that introduce a greater social perspective to poverty (Bradshaw 2005, 11). There is a slight shift in the language – the Michigan Good Food Charter Progress Report names a distinct issue tied up in policy. Namely, the progress report mentions that farm workers are subjected sometimes to below minimum wages and that this standard is reinforced by the Attorney General (Kelly et al. 2018, 3). These results show a clear indication of a culturally liberal implicit understanding of poverty. However, though there are no steps outlined

towards change, naming their deficiency is perhaps the Michigan Good Food Charter’s tip toe into a progressive social perspective on poverty.

#### 4.2.5 Milwaukee Food Council

Some initiatives do not leave the planning stage. The Milwaukee Food Council finished formalizing as an entity in 2016 though members have record of meeting as early as 2014 (Milwaukee Food Council 2016). Their current structure does not allow for formal organizational members so only individuals, regardless of affiliation with organizations, are recognized as partners with 55 individuals listed as members alongside two recognized affiliated partners – a consultant and a church (Milwaukee Food Council 2019). No reference materials currently exist for reported outcomes, as there has not been a formal convening or evaluation of any kind to date but there has been a substantial amount of material produced surrounding their creation. Since there are no actual outcomes detailed by the food council, this research will examine the intended outcomes as a guide to determine implicit poverty theory.

Though there were many overarching goals, this research examines the specific intended goals which were as follows in Table 4-3. MFC Overlap Impact Area Table:

Table 4-3. MFC Overlap Impact Area Table

Goal	Outcomes
Health Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reduce food-related deaths and physical illnesses in Milwaukee County.</li> <li>▪ Increase sales of fresh fruits and other healthy foods in targeted zipcodes at participating retail outlets.</li> </ul>
Ecologically Sustainable Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Re-use all organic matter produced in the city to enhance soil quality.</li> <li>▪ Decrease use of fossil-fuels – in transportation, chemical application etc.</li> </ul>

Economically Vibrant Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase total acreage of food grown in the city for sale, barter or for personal use.</li> <li>▪ Increased garden education.</li> </ul>
Equity and Justice Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create access to culturally appropriate local and non-local healthy foods in all neighborhoods.</li> <li>▪ Promote local food education.</li> <li>▪ Identify food insecure areas and the resources for those communities.</li> <li>▪ More retail outlets for good food in low-income neighborhoods; even distribution of good food sources that are walkable and not dependent on income.</li> <li>▪ Young people engaged in farming food.</li> <li>▪ Increase the presence, concerns, and voice of both youth and elders in issues of food justice.</li> <li>▪ Increase access to reasonably-priced organic food.</li> <li>▪ Dismantle the grocery store inequity in Milwaukee.</li> </ul>
Food Culture Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase number of businesses, organizations and institutions engaging in low-income consumers.</li> <li>▪ Halal and kosher food labeling; gluten-free, sugar free, wild rice etc.</li> <li>▪ All people have easy access to high quality good food that is in keeping with their cultural heritage – it would be affordable and attainable.</li> <li>▪ Increase funding for healthy fast food (KivaZip, Waukesha model)</li> <li>▪ More potlucks and food centric meetups.</li> </ul>

These anticipated outcomes are vast in their approach. Some anticipated outcomes have been noted in all initiatives so far such as increasing healthy food options in existing locations, though the call is also made to increase the number of places regardless of current existence.

Education is also mentioned several times. This heavy emphasis assumes that knowledge is not present and if knowledge was present, the target population would make better decisions. An interesting addition here is increasing the number of businesses, organizations and institutions engaging in low-income consumers. The assumption that low-income consumers are not making healthy eating choices due to a lack of education or sincere engagement, highlights a disconnect that treats healthy choices as commodities. This specifically places healthy food and even hints that healthy choices need to be better marketed for the consumer and not the citizen. In all, this approach also lacks the underpinning of policy change and/or alternative structures that work outside of the insufficient policies and, therefore, this approach holds a culturally liberal approach to poverty.

#### *4.2.6 Summary Analysis*

In all, CI initiatives bring a tremendous amount of energy to an effort from a wide variety of backgrounds and I was surprised to see the element of equity lacking in approaches though every initiative provided rhetoric about equity. It was not surprising that the initiative most representative of large entrenched institutions, Montgomery County CHIP, employed basic conservative and incremental tactics centered around individual change as the institutions themselves represent with a high degree of quantitative measure in success. The belief that increasing the instances of nutritious food in a geographic region – which for this goal was the geographic areas of food deserts – would result in increased consumption to any degree holds many assumptions. It carries the assumption that this nutritious food is culturally appropriate to the demographic. It carries the assumption that it is the individual's job to seek out and recognize that this change in availability has occurred. It also makes assumptions about the consumer such as the individual's ability and availability to spend time preparing food.

The belief of Montgomery County CHIP's second goal is also clear and holds many notable assumptions. The goal of increasing healthy eating in children is employed by increasing the amount of locations that offer free meals for food insecure children. The underlying assumption is that increased meal locations might result in fewer instances of food insecure children. It also assumes that children are the locus of control in their food insecurity and have the ability to access this supplemental food. This approach does not acknowledge other possibilities, such as food insecure households or low-income households that cannot afford meals which would require a deeper more intricate structure to address the problem.

Last, the Michigan Good Food Charter did both mention equity and begin the planning process of including equity (Colasanti et al. 2010). This does, however, reinforce the notion that institutions that exist within an inequitable system will have difficulty avoiding the reproduction of these instances (Allen 2004, 112). The Michigan Good Food Charter has been published since 2010 and even though equity outcomes are listed, only incremental steps have been made to date.

The myriad assumptions assigned to the individual as the locus of control is an anomaly among the other initiatives. All other initiatives were culturally liberal in their implicit beliefs given the actions taken at reaching their goals and reflected a step out from the individual conservative approach of poverty that Montgomery County CHIP holds. This is significant because the implication in the culturally liberal theory of poverty is that the beliefs, values and skills are passed on through generations and are culturally upheld and therefore can be changed without questioning the dominant system (Bradshaw 2005, 9). However, all three initiatives that show clear signs of implicitly holding this belief also indicate a desire to enact change outside of the dominant system, which could potentially enact momentum at addressing the social problem.

### 4.3 Research Question Two: Results and Analysis

Research Question Two, *How do CI food program approaches and strategies reflect theories of food systems change?*, was answered by building off of the results and analysis of Research Question One. By coding CI initiatives' missions, visions and strategies for implicit and/or explicit understanding of food systems change according to the procedures outlined in Chapter Three, several themes emerged relevant to the categories along the food systems theories of change spectrum: *neoliberal, reformist, progressive and radical*. The analysis for these themes builds from the data acquired to answer Research Question One but also looks to the origins of these initiatives. The formation of an initiative through their vision and mission statements helps to situate them within the food systems change theory spectrum. The following subsections provide both the results from examining this data and an analysis of these results.

#### 4.3.1 Montgomery County CHIP

As noted previously, the individual's relationship with food is complex and personal, but also informs every other aspect of their health. The Montgomery County CHIP initiative began as an overarching project to achieve better health outcomes for Montgomery County. Montgomery County CHIP began as a collaboration between Montgomery County Family and Children and United Way of the Greater Dayton Area found that the subject of food access emerged from panel discussions among community members when examining broad social problems in the area as outlined in their strategic plan (Ebron 2018). The emergence of this category led to specific attention devoted to food access and eventually a separate effort broke off to create the West Dayton Food Access Collective Impact Project ("Dayton Montgomery County Food and Hunger Coalition" 2017). Though both came to utilize an approach that identified food as a driver, they were created out of two different avenues – the latter seeking food as a driver from the start of the

project and the former doing so from emerging themes that remained a small part of the larger social impact frame. Both, however, utilize food as a combative tool for the community's social issues.

The main vision of the Montgomery County CHIP addresses an overarching vision of improving health in which food-related subjects exist. Their understanding of health equity is that “every person must have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to lead healthy lives. Everyone must be treated equally and avoidable health inequities and health disparities should be eliminated” (Ebron 2018, 8). Their overarching vision is that all residents of Montgomery County should have: “access to resources that promote a healthy lifestyle, an environment that promotes health and wellness, social support and community connections and knowledge about healthy choices and behaviors” (Ebron 2018, iii). This vision slots food-based initiatives into a few categories.

The Montgomery County CHIP initiative's two main food-related goals of increasing access and decreasing food insecurity in children might deceptively land the initiative in the reformist category of food systems change theory with the second half of the stated goal; food security is largely the language of the reformist movement and access is discussed across the entirety of the spectrum (Ebron 2018; Holt-Giménez 2010). However, there is a notable demographic that alters the orientation.

The initiative specifically focuses on food insecurity in children. Even the most conservative view of poverty and neoliberal approach to change acknowledges that there are subsets of populations that have no control over their circumstance – namely children, the elderly and the disabled (Bradshaw 2005, 8). They are recognized in nearly every community as without blame for their status and programs that focus solely and specifically on these demographics fall

directly in the far side of the spectrum in the neoliberal category for food systems change, which also is demonstratively not representative of system change, but of small incremental steps utilized within the dominant system.

#### *4.3.2 West Dayton Food Access Project*

Collaboration and cooperation could be considered the cornerstone of any CI, but the inclusion of the intended beneficiaries in the process is not always a focus or even a footnote of the mission statement; however, the goals and outcomes outlined in Research Question One were centered around a common mission for both the residents of West Dayton and the West Dayton Food Access Project. The overarching mission of the initiative is to,

ensure that the origin of healthy food (production) and the final markets (distribution) are conducted by and ultimately benefit, residents of West Dayton already living in food deserts. The target population will be provided direct access to local, nutritious, affordable food itself as well as to food related jobs and education, leading to improved health for them, their families and their community. (Homefull 2018)

This mission declares a central benefitting geographically-based group that reads almost as a directive. The target population is expected to both conduct and benefit from these changes.

Given the approach to provide a specific and small geographic demographic with access and jobs and food in order to improve overall health, the framework seems to follow a neoliberal understanding of food movement change. The key in understanding this is in phrasing. Within the mission statement, the statement, “the target demographic will be provided” connotes that assistance to resources is the issue and outside help is the answer. However, the mission does begin with the charge that production and distribution will happen through West Dayton residents and ultimately benefit West Dayton residents (Homefull 2018). This staunchly places the mission

in a discussion of food sovereignty, making the mission statement a reflection the activist side of the spectrum and furthest from neoliberal in distinction.

It is, however, essential to note that actions reported and listed in Research Question One: implementation in school gardens, gathering and training of volunteers for gardens and markets, attention to building market customer base and greater access for SNAP-EBT customers all point to working within the current dominant system for incremental change. Steps towards establishing a grocery cooperative is a progressive action, but the majority of these actions are highly neoliberal. The last piece of the mission named – the production and distribution of produce – is difficult to place without more context which is absent in the documentation. In all, though the ideal story depicted holds strong in the radical category, the goals persist as mostly neoliberal in formulation and even on to application of action steps.

The implications for this drastic difference in potential expectation are numerous. With multiple stakeholders coming together to solve the issue of food access, each bring their own expectation and this can drastically alter trajectory of action steps taken beyond the curation of the mission statement. The timing is also important to note for this specific initiative. The West Dayton Food Access Project broke away from the Montgomery County CHIP initiative to form their own initiative in 2016 and the initiative was already reporting results in the second half of the following year.

Addressing food systems issues through the CI model requires continuous communicated context to ensure that all stakeholders remain on the same page and this takes time (Shapiro et al. 2015, 5). Though the number of convenings is unknown for this group of stakeholders and the process of communication is also unknown, perhaps the West Dayton Food Access Project might

have benefitted from a slower pace and more temperature checks among stakeholders while moving to the implementation process.

#### *4.3.3 Michigan Good Food Charter*

Unlike the West Dayton Food Access Project, the Michigan Good Food Charter moved through the planning and developing phases slowly. The Charter was formulated over a year's worth of effort and took time to collectively define a term that repeatedly shows up in their mission and strategies: good food. Their definition proclaims that good food is healthy, green, fair and affordable. Specifically, good food provides nourishment and enables people to thrive, is produced in a manner that is environmentally sustainable, that no one along the production line is exploited for its creation and that all people have access to it (Colasanti et al. 2010, 4). This careful collective definition ensured all stakeholders were aware of and agreed upon the formulation of this meticulous definition which eliminates potential confusion when implementing strategies.

This definition was originally utilized in the first vision of the Charter. It called for “a thriving economy, equity and sustainability for all of Michigan and its people through a food system rooted in local communities and centered on good food” (Colasanti et al. 2010, 2). The key word utilized in the Charter's self-proclaimed intention mentioned in every iteration of itself yet also is absent in strategies: equity. “equity and sustainability for all” is imagined but not spelled out in the implementation expounded on in Research Question One (Colasanti et al. 2010, 2). This lack of equity application excuses the initiative from an entire half of the food movement spectrum, as there is no robust application of empowerment or entitlement and efforts are largely centered around creating more robust existing structures, mainstreaming the local process and providing a small mount (14% increase) of local but not equity-based food for Michigan (Table 4-

2. Michigan Good Food Charter Goals and Outcomes (Kelly et al. 2018)). This places the Charter's efforts in the reformist category.

In a presentation given five years after the Charter was written, the vision statement is expanded. It read: "We envision a thriving economy, equity and sustainability for all of Michigan and its people through a food system rooted in local communities and centered on Good Food – *food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable*" (Colasanti 2015). This expansion comes at a surprise, as the definition of good food was clearly established in the initial Charter. It is, perhaps, a reinforcement provided for additional measure to keep equitable outcomes on the forefront of the minds of stakeholders.

The lack of focus on equity has not gone unnoticed and has other potentially interesting implications. In 2018, eight years after the creation of the Charter, a 2020 and beyond plan is published and acts as an overall temperature check. Under future considerations, it lists "equity and diverse representation are critical to every step to this process" (Public Sector Consultants 2018, 11). The implications are clear. Though equity has been a part of the conversation, it has not been critical to every step of the process and an outside consultancy has gently reminded them to practice what they preach.

#### *4.3.4 Milwaukee Food Council*

The Milwaukee Food Council's goals are reflective of a wide cast net as detailed in Research Question One. The goals covered health, ecological sustainability, economic vibrancy, equity and justice, and food culture (Calloway 2012). Unlike the previous initiatives, these goals were shaped by a vision because both the vision and mission were drafted later in 2016. The 2016 drafted mission called to "address food insecurity in the greater Milwaukee area through collective impact collaboration of the Milwaukee Food Council and its partners" with an

overarching vision “that everyone has access to affordable, desirable food” (Milwaukee Food Council 2016). However, this was not the first iteration of commitments for the Council. In 2011, before the group formalized as a Collective Impact initiative, the group loosely penned the following commitments: policy change and advocacy, equity and justice, respect for diverse food cultures, economic vibrancy, ecological sustainability, and forming around a collective impact structure (Lawless, Calloway and Allen 2017, 176). The process is clearly built off of the goals initially set in 2012.

The stark difference displayed in the mission and vision paired with previous goals is problematic. The mission utilizes the language of the reformist by declaring a specific interest in addressing food security and addressing the food-related issues by working mostly within existing systems (Holt-Giménez 2010, 3). This example places the initiative in the reformist category for food systems change as determined by how I chose to measure the category requirements. However, the goals detailed in Research Question One speak the language of food justice and, therefore, lean towards a more progressive approach. This would place the initiative working somewhat outside dominant food systems.

The implication is a notable one that pivots the entire approach from food justice to food security while still operating under the assumption that the same food justice-based goals would be achieved. This is, perhaps, one reason why this initiative in particular has not made any additional progress to date. The internal struggle of what the Milwaukee Food Council aims to accomplish is unclear and the process from planning to developing to implementing as a Collective Impact initiative did not happen smoothly. This agreed and continuous communication and quite possibly the shared measurement is crucial to the healthy development of a CI initiative (Shapiro et al. 2015). In fact, the development of goals preceded the unified agreement among

stakeholders. Perhaps stakeholders all held their own views for how to carry out the accomplishment of these goals and this was never unearthed and acknowledged.

#### *4.3.5 Summary Analysis*

In summary, the West Dayton Food Access Project, the Michigan Good Food Charter, and the Milwaukee Food Council all fit into the reformist category of food systems change as determined by their missions and visions. There were also several contradictions noted in all three. All held aspirations of working outside of the dominant system and towards the progressive category. Ultimately, the dominant position of reformist in the realm of food systems change theory aims to mitigate but not alleviate the identified social problem, though with enough social pressure, the palliative efforts can turn towards conjured systemic change (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011, 3). There is, however, potential for these initiatives, as they clearly seek roots towards more effective methods of change. The outlier was once again the Montgomery County CHIP, which was firmly entrenched in small incremental change fully utilizing only the existing dominant food system and this strategy will not yield significant or effective results towards social change.

#### **4.4 Research Question Three: Contribution**

Notable trends and a few anomalies emerged through answering Research Questions One and Two and the final research question, *How can we learn from CI initiatives' implicit applications of theories on poverty and food systems change?*, weighs these findings alongside other documents that specifically analyze CI initiatives and the model itself. It is clear that a tremendous amount of time and thoughtful consideration was given towards all CI initiatives examined in this research – a worthy feat given the incredibly difficult task of tackling a social problem. With an understanding that no right answer has been soundly established within the

scientific community that spells out a clear step by step process at eradicating the complex issue of any social problem, this question aims to offer lessons learned from examining these CI initiatives. In this section, I first offer potential areas of improvement in my methodology and then detail the major findings and anomalies of my inquiry and provide some suggestions for multi-stakeholder groups aiming to tackle geographic-specific social problems.

#### *4.4.1 Room for Improvement*

As more documents amassed for the chosen initiatives, it became clear the initiatives were at varying stages of the CI process – from planning to implementation. This was true regardless of timeline. The Milwaukee Food Council was still firmly in the planning and development phase, while the other three were already in the implementation phase and had measured results to report. All four initiatives occurred over different timeframes and some moved at a faster pace than others. For example, the West Dayton Food Access Project began a year after the Milwaukee Food Council and yet already had measured results to report. The very act of producing collaborative efforts and bringing together multiple and diverse stakeholders means that each initiative has a unique set of actors and obstacles (Shapiro et al. 2015, 5). These obstacles range from local politics to funder infrastructure, making it impossible to evaluate the efficacy of an initiative on time alone. However, future research would benefit from examining initiatives that are at similar planning or implementation phases if conducting similar research.

#### *4.4.2 Findings*

The most notable findings of this research were the relative consistency across poverty theories and food systems change theory with one anomaly. In indicated action steps, the West Dayton Food Access Project, the Michigan Good Food Charter, and the Milwaukee Food Council worked towards forms of alternative socialization to help the target demographic access assistance

programs and business assistance. All three were also positioned in the reformist category of the food systems change theory, which reflects incremental change within the system, but with rhetoric and future hope that demonstrated expectation to veer away from the more palliative side of the spectrum and head towards a conjured approach. Again, this action is possible within the reformist category but only if there is tremendous social pressure to do so (Holt-Giménez 2011, 2). The ongoing expectation to activate equity found within the Michigan Good Food Charter is a positive sign towards breaking away from the palliative side.

Though only four initiatives were examined, one initiative clearly differed in both implicit understanding of poverty and food systems change theory. The Montgomery County CHIP initiative's conservative approach to understanding poverty is clear. Only individual interventions were actioned and incremental dominant food system change was employed with no expectation of activating equity. No evaluative measures even highlighted a lack of equity in their approach as the Michigan Good Food Charter did, despite a decision to define the term in the initial plan. This is, perhaps, due to the makeup of the initiative itself. Ultimately, the long-term stakeholders named were city entities and large institutions. This top-down way of curating answers clearly lacks the community voice of the target area. This lack of awareness is easily highlighted by the small action steps that were outlined as measurables. It is even possible that the initiative simply cannot see where it fails in activating equity which is better detailed below and, therefore, cannot name its absence.

Another trend that surfaced in this research is the baseline of defined equity that exists for all initiatives. All initiatives defined an element of combating inequity as detailed in the table below. Most notable was Montgomery County CHIP. Even though the initiative held an implicitly individualistic approach to understanding poverty – conservative – there was an immense amount

of detail and care given to name and define key terms that pointed towards a more comprehensive understanding of poverty. Namely, terms like *health equity* and *social determinants of health* outlined a clear understanding within the original community health plan document that the health of a community cannot be tackled through the individual alone and actions must elevate the well-being of entire community (Public Health – Dayton and Montgomery County 2016). Without a baseline definition of equity, and a commitment to strive for it, it is difficult to produce actionable steps in that direction; demonstrated in the table below, we find declarations to address inequity that may or may not align with steps actually taken by organizations.

Table 4-4. Initiative Intention to Address Inequity

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Declaration to Address Inequity</b>
Montgomery County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)	“every person must have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to lead healthy lives. Everyone must be treated equally and avoidable health inequities and health disparities should be eliminated” (Ebron 2018, 8).
West Dayton Food Access Project	“Ensure that the origin of healthy food (production) and the final markets (distribution) are conducted by and ultimately benefit, residents of West Dayton already living in food deserts. The target population will be provided direct access to local, nutritious, affordable food itself as well as to food related jobs and education, leading to improved health for them, their families and their community” (Homefull 2018).
Michigan Good Food Charter	“a thriving economy, sustainable resource use, and equity for all in Michigan” (Public Sector Consultants 2018, 5).
Milwaukee Food Council (MFC)	“Our vision is that everyone has access to affordable, desirable food” (Milwaukee Food Council 2016).

Another trend was discovered after examining the intentions and actions were examined in Research Questions One and Two. Though inequities are spelled out in the planning phase for all four initiatives, achieving food system equity is often absent in both late planning stages and application in these initiatives. For example, the Milwaukee Food Council reported food justice and equity in their early convening in 2011. Their 2014 iterations of interest gleaned from additional surveys produced interest in: improving food environments, incorporating good food and community life, promoting food justice, improving food quality, making good food affordable, developing educational strategies and growing more food in the cities as the areas of interest (Lawless, Calloway and Allen 2017, 176-179). Perhaps equity is understood with the reconfigured areas of interest, but it was no longer directly spelled out. Had the organization developed more formally and moved into the implementation phase, there would be more data to assess outcomes and actions could be assessed as well.

Conversely, the Michigan Good Food Charter has had vigorous implementation since the plan was formalized in 2010 and has had equity at the forefront of the discussion (Colasanti et al. 2010, 2) even though they are self-reported to have fallen short on equity measures (Kelly et al. 2018, 3). It almost seems impossible given the care taken to define ‘good food’ thus providing the clearest possible communication surrounding what kind of food-based initiative they aimed to create. One of the Michigan Good Food Charter’s definition included that no one along the production line is exploited for its creation and that all people have access to it and yet Michigan continues to rely heavily on temporary underpaid agricultural workers for the bulk of their labor (Kelly et al. 2018, 3). This is a clear example of exploitation along the production line which works in opposition to producing equitable outcomes. Equity was also imagined in the West Dayton Food Access Project’s mission statement, though results fell short and centered around

quantified measures attached to individuals and instances such as how many cooperative grocery store shares were sold or how many gardens were created or rehabilitated.

This highlights a criticism of the Collective Impact process. This criticism can be applied to many multi-stakeholder engagements – there is limited guidance for how to implement the chosen plans (Hoey et al. 2017, 3). For the Milwaukee Food Council, this lack of clarity for how to move forward might have contributed to its inability to formalize and move forward with progress. Conversely, if their food systems change theory were better understood, this could have led to a deeper understanding of how to move forward.

A major lesson was found in a survey distributed by the West Dayton Food Access Project which revealed a significantly small number of people who were a part of the target population were a part of formulating the solutions. A 2017 survey of 55 respondents revealed interesting results about shopping habits at the Wright Stop Plaza market located within the West Dayton food desert. Efforts were made to provide more nutritious foods for sale at this store location. The question was posed: *Have you increased your fresh nutritious food intake as a result of them being more available in this store?* Of the 55 respondents, 58.2% responded that they had increased their fresh nutritious food intake as a result of their increased availability at that location. However, another poll providing the zip codes of the respondents was conducted and only 16.4% of the respondents lived in the same zip code as the store (Homefull 2018). Through this poll, it becomes clear that the population participating in formulating plans is not necessarily the same as the population intended to benefit from the implementation of strategies. It highlights a top-down approach instead of bottom-up, which, as stated in the mission, was not the original intention (Homefull 2018). This highlights the need for actionable steps to flow logically from a mission statement, rather than reverse engineering a solution. There was not enough information

on stakeholders and target populations to ascertain whether this was true for other initiatives, though it would be a useful contribution to add.

There are some relevant reflection steps that can be taken to better understand and parse out process in the early stages of these multi-stakeholder collaborative efforts. First, this research shows it is important to involve the community. The process would benefit if the target community was included at all stages of the process. At a minimum, discerning what level of participation is desired from community stakeholders could give indication of whether the social problem can be addressed. Second, overall ownership of the project and who has ultimate control of final decisions is important to spell out early on. If institutions have final decision over major aspects of the project and this is not unearthed until well into the project, unrest and distrust can easily derail the best of intentions. Third, beliefs in equity for each stakeholder as well as the overall goal in equity needs to be defined early on. Jargon that seems obvious within certain cultures, organizations, and institutions can seem obvious to those who live that world. However, other stakeholders might use the same word – equity – and have a different understanding of what it means and how to work towards it. Fourth, consider how compensation is acquired for each stakeholder. Many stakeholders are compensated monetarily for the time they spend working collaboratively. This is rarely true for individuals and community representatives and can lead to a divisive atmosphere for those who have much to contribute. Last, determine early on what kind of consensus-based process will be utilized for each phase. If it is decided within a small core group that decisions need to be made without consensus early on in order to engage certain higher-level stakeholders such as city governments and school systems, this needs to be clear.

In all, there are many lessons to learn from understanding the implicit beliefs around poverty that these initiatives have as a collective. There are also lessons learned in building from

this and understanding where these initiatives sit in theories of poverty and on the food systems change spectrum. Social problems are difficult to address even if the initial intention is there and unearthing and unpacking underlying beliefs can potentially help us to address social issues more effectively. It is also apparent that these initiatives work predominantly within existing systems and it might not be possible to dismantle inequity through systems that are inherently inequitable to begin with. Hoey et al. (2017) argue that groups seeking food systems change could utilize the CI model as one of many to guide their work, but only if the capacity for policy and equity-based change is fostered by relationship development and trust building between stakeholders (10). In the next chapter, I will reiterate major takeaways from this research and detail potential next steps, as well as discuss the practical applications of this research.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion: So, What?

The purpose of this research is to help readers understand how collaborative multi-stakeholder efforts think about problems that they attempt to address within the current food movement and how they orient themselves with respect to food system change and poverty. This research helps current and future stakeholders of existing and future initiatives that have decided to organize collectively in a multi-stakeholder commitment to address social issues. Specifically, this research has shown that equity is often a part of formulating conversations in the early days of organizing. Unfortunately, this conversation rarely carries over into the finalized strategies, goals and objectives or in the application of programming. In short, regardless of the development and planning, equity is rarely included in the implementation of these plans and initiatives must, therefore, be vigilant.

In line with my first research question, it makes sense that equity is not a part of the implementation if the underlying ideology of the initiative does not see the playing field as level in the food system. If achieving equity is up to the individual alone, inequities will continue to be reproduced, as it takes acknowledgement and consistent application from all stakeholders. In other words, initiatives must first align stakeholders and ensure that implicit biases are understood before change can occur. Furthermore, the results of my second research question made it apparent that all cases studied in this research did most of their work within existing institutions. This begs another question, *can equitable systems be created by utilizing existing systems that are already inherently inequitable?* More research would be needed to determine this.

Only four initiatives were examined for specific implicit theories on poverty and food systems change theory and the implications these theories hold for the initiatives. Each of these

four initiatives are far more complex than could be fully explored in this research and, therefore, this research only touches on intricately specific areas of these initiatives. More systematic research is needed for a deeper understanding of these processes, but the research contained herein has provided framework that can be used by CIs in the process of forming their mission statements.

I hope this research provides an opportunity to pause for those in the early stages of forming a collaborative effort around a food system social issue. If there are elements of equity in the forming stages of an initiative and this research shows this often falls away as the initiative formalizes and heads towards implementation. Initiatives can be aware of this issue and analyzing their own motivations can allow greater success in implementing more equitable strategies in food system change. In the very least, I hope this research helps initiatives acknowledge their own potential shortcomings and potential to reproduce inequities. Though this research is not considered a panacea strategy for how to address every social issue within a community, perhaps it will serve as a guide to encourage others to examine the beliefs and strategies organizations and collectives might employ when tackling their own social issues in the future.

While we often like to think that “teamwork makes the dream work,” the ultimate truth unearthed in this research is that culture often overtakes strategy. Culture that has been shaped by poverty and inequality will devour any strategy that does not address poverty and inequality from the very beginning. It is clear from the Montgomery County CHIP initiative that institutional culture can do the same thing. It is my hope is that the research contained in this thesis will serve as both a warning and encouragement to current and future multi-stakeholder collaborative efforts towards addressing social issues – because of the complex and myriad issues responsible for

poverty and food systems issues, equity must be paramount in all aspects of any organization's efforts to address it.

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