

# Food Roots Incubator programme: Evaluation and learning report

September 2022

## Executive summary

The Food Roots Incubator began supporting 10 food partnerships in London but grew to support 19 to respond to food insecurity and develop strategic joint approaches and activities through a mix of group and individual support provided by Sustain, Food Matters and peer experts.

This document presents an evaluation of the Food Roots Incubator programme, which ran from April 2021 to September 2022, detailing the impact incubator support has had on the partnership. It does not evaluate the impact of food insecurity initiatives delivered by the partnerships through the 'Growth Grant' funding they received separately from the GLA.

Common areas where the Incubator has been helpful in helping partnerships to deliver and develop include:

- Piloting, delivery and learning from specific initiatives to address food insecurity
- Supporting partnerships to make the most of a flexible framework as there is not a one-size-fits all approach
- Sustaining member engagement by identifying clear individual and shared roles and different ways to maintain momentum and buy-in to a shared approach
- Sharing learning and knowledge amongst members
- Securing funding from statutory partners and other funders, as well as considering opportunities for income generation



# What was delivered

Between April 2021 and September 2022, we delivered:

- 6 exchange visits
- 13 online workshops
- 14 Partnership check-ups with tailored feedback
- 4 surgeries with tailored partnership development support and follow-up 1-2-1 phone consultations
- 4 training sessions on wraparound support
- Individual support and advice from the Sustain and Food Matters team
- Individual support and advice from peer experts
- Regular emails with Incubator updates, resources, other information and events

## Workshop topics

<b>General</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductory briefing for all members of initial ten food partnerships</li> <li>• Two face-to-face reflection workshops</li> <li>• Exchange visits to <u>Wandsworth food bus, Growhampton, Walworth food neighbourhood, St Hilda's food coop, Granville Community Kitchen's Good Food Box and Organic Lea's peri-urban Farm</u>, including a joint visit with Cardiff's Good Food Retail network</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting responses to food insecurity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing the root causes of food insecurity</li> <li>• Delivering effective support through crisis hubs</li> <li>• Establishing food coops, food clubs, food pantries, food hubs and more</li> <li>• Taking a cooperative approach and income generation</li> <li>• Maximising income during a cost-of-living crisis</li> <li>• Moving from food reliance to food resilience</li> <li>• Taking a Right to Food approach</li> <li>• Building a sustainable food supply</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting partnership development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships, collaborative working and whole food system approach</li> <li>• Developing a vision and common purpose</li> <li>• Developing a strategy and action plan</li> <li>• Partnership working: Structures and processes</li> <li>• Partnership representation</li> <li>• Tailored one to one support on strategic development</li> <li>• Facilitation of Food Summits and strategic planning sessions</li> </ul>
<b>Wraparound support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tailored 1-2-1 mentoring and coaching to hub leads and food projects</li> <li>• Gave talks at a number of borough food partnership events</li> <li>• Facilitated mapping of borough food networks</li> <li>• Site visits to food projects</li> <li>• Developed tailored training for delivery</li> </ul>

## What did we achieve?

### Indicators

Objective	Indicator	Data
<b>Successfully engage the ten partnerships and their members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of partnerships represented at meetings</li> <li>• Number of participants attending meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All 10 original partnerships have sent representatives to workshop sessions</li> <li>• 5 of the newly joined partnerships have attended a workshop or webinar</li> <li>• 15-20 partnership representatives attended each workshop</li> <li>• 12-18 partnership representatives attended each field visit</li> </ul>
<b>Effectively support partnership development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of partnerships making progress towards their objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Polling at the start and end of sessions generally indicated that a significant majority of attendees increased their knowledge and/or confidence.</li> <li>• 10 partnerships are considering applying for Sustainable Food Places membership</li> <li>• 43% of survey respondents said they felt more resilient as a partnership</li> </ul>
<b>Effectively support responses to food insecurity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of Growth Grant project</li> <li>• Level of knowledge, confidence etc. at start and end of sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Polling at the start and end of sessions generally indicated that attendees increased their knowledge and confidence.</li> <li>• 7 survey respondents felt they were effectively transitioning to more resilient models of support</li> </ul>
<b>Success of the overall approach and delivery of the Incubator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback from partnerships through 1-1 conversations, surveys, forms and face-to-face event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11 survey respondents found the learning aspects of the incubator programme really or quite valuable</li> <li>• 9 survey respondents found the funding really or quite valuable</li> <li>• The final reflection workshop, survey, and group and individual conversations with partnerships has given broadly positive feedback, reporting the incubator programme as a specific highlight</li> </ul>

## What have we learnt about the approach?

Through a survey and various reflection sessions with partnerships we have learnt that:

### **Partnerships have a greater sense of direction and are more resilient**

One of the key objectives for the programme was to support partnerships to develop and strengthen, so they were better equipped to respond to food insecurity in their local areas. This has been a key outcome of the programme,

with 6/21 survey respondents stating they felt more resilient as a partnership whilst no respondents disagreed with this statement.

*“Galvanised interest within our team of letting go of certain objectives and re-focus our operations (in line with fast changing political / economic landscape. Great confidence in how to take on a more strategic approach.”*

*“Food roots has helped us establish a partnership which is a great outcome”*

*“The incubator programme has helped our partners come together, establish relationships, create learning environments where we can dedicate time towards reimagining our local food system and create positive change”*

As a result of the support offered by Food Roots, 10 out of 21 partnerships that responded to the survey are now hoping to apply to become Sustainable Food Places members to continue accessing guidance, inspiration, funding and to be part of a recognised national movement for change. Whilst other respondents stated they were either already members or not ready to apply to become members yet but hoped to in the future.

### **Partnerships are developing new responses to food insecurity**

The incubator programme has opened partnerships eyes to alternative ways to provide for the needs for their community, with 50% of survey respondents stating they felt they were transitioning to more resilient models of support. Through workshops and field visits, partnerships have been able to hear from peer experts about other approaches being used to respond to food insecurity. From cash-first approaches, wrap-around support, food co-ops, and food resilience toolkits, members have been inspired to think outside the box. By working with their members and communities, partnerships are clearer and more confident in ways they can move beyond the food bank to deliver longer-term responses to food insecurity.

*“[The incubator programme]...has given the food alliance more direction and opened our eyes as to future work the alliance could become involved in”*

*“Loved visiting other projects through the Food Roots visits.”*

*“The site visits were great to get people feeling motivated and to see first-hand other models in action”*



**Secured further buy-in from local councils**

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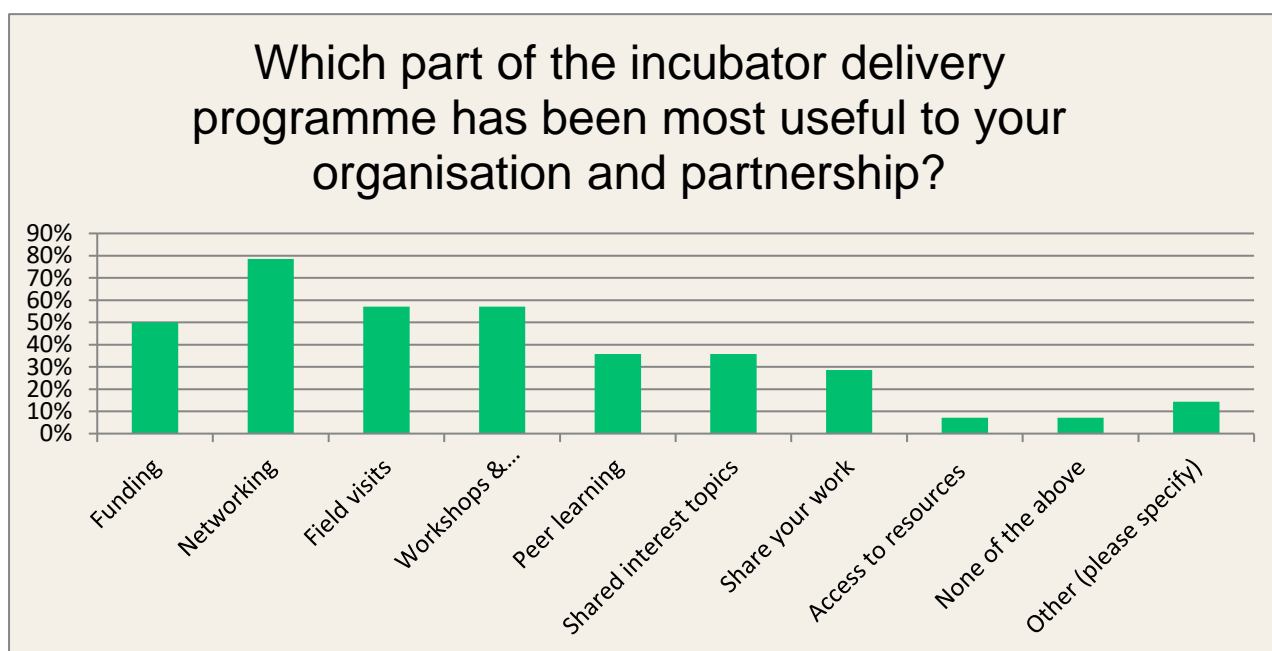
Being involved in the GLA funded food roots programme has given partnerships work more status with their local councils showing the value and importance of their work. In some cases this increased status has helped partnerships secure more funding to continue their work.

*“We have been able to leverage this funding to apply for a tender put out by the London Borough of Waltham Forest in order to tackle food security on a borough-wide level, with their engagement and support. We have been able to state quite clearly in the bid that our approach is a systems-wide approach to food justice, which will include food growing”*

*“Our funded project has led to much interest from counterparts in the council and to some extent from GLA itself which has increased our status but unlikely to directly lead to more funding”*

### **Partnerships feel empowered by a sense of connection and community**

When asked what aspect of the programme had been most useful to their organisation and partnership the answer was always networking. Both through the survey and in face-to-face reflection sessions. Being part of a network of like-minded organisations allowed partnerships to share experiences, challenges and learn from others doing similar work. The incubator programme, through field visits and workshops has facilitated that networking and connection.



*“The incubator programme helped us work with other partnerships and realise shared struggles & see what is happening elsewhere - this kind of inspiration & connection is vital for keeping momentum going.”*

*“The Food Roots programme helped us make time to have these important conversations with peers who are in similar positions or facing similar struggles, while providing access to resources, support and inspiration”*

### **Increased the knowledge and confidence of partnerships and their members**

Through the mixture of field visits, workshops, 1:1 support and food partnership surgeries, partnerships feel more knowledgeable and confident in discussing food insecurity and taking action to tackle it. Not every partnership attended every session, which was always going to be the case, but the majority attended sufficient variety to feel empowered and skilled.

*“Fantastic learning journey that has helped develop my skills and knowledge which has in turn helped our newly formed food network create a vision and mission for the future.”*

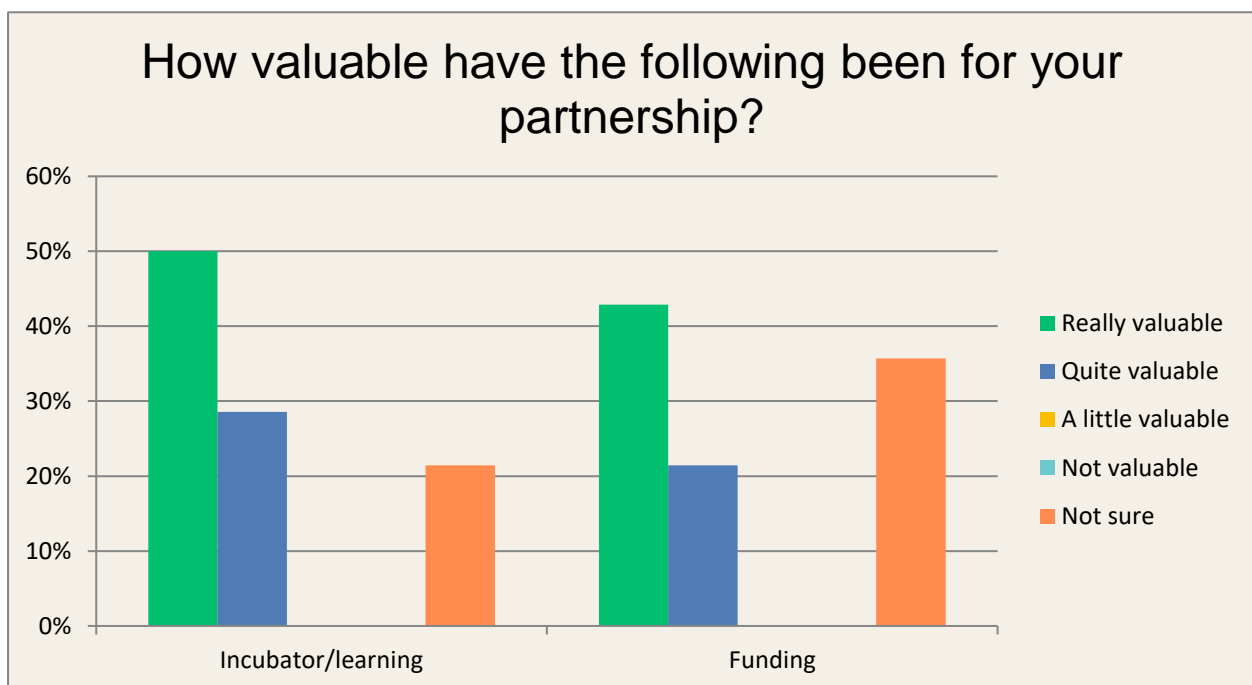


*“Similar to how the funding has supported it (in respect to this tender for Waltham Forest) but with the addition of having provided a framework & language that has helped me personally develop my approach to food security and translate how it can work practically”*

### Funding and learning are equally important to the programme

Every partnership is different, so some partnerships valued the incubator programme more than the funding, whilst others valued the funding. This depended on where the partnership was on their journey. For those who were newly developing a partnership, the incubator programme was invaluable to provide them with a useful framework to develop their partnerships, discussions on topics of importance to their work and connections with other like-minded peers doing similar work. However, partnerships that were more developed valued the funding because it gave them the capacity to take their work to the next level.

*“Without the funding, we would have not been able to establish the Hackney Partnership and appoint a coordinator. We have used the funding to set up 4 successful pilots project that will hopefully continue to run beyond the pilot period”*



## Recommendations for phase two

It is clear from survey feedback, workshops and one to one discussion with partners that the programme has valuable. There is also enthusiasm from members, in workshops and through the survey, for a second phase of the programme, with 85% of survey respondents saying they were very likely or quite likely to take part in a revised Food Roots programme built around their feedback.

Though the incubator programme has helped lay the groundwork for a second phase, various challenges have been highlighted by members which limited the impact of the programme. A new phase must build on the foundations laid and resolve these challenges if it is to meet the needs of the partnerships.

Recommendations to achieve that include:

- **A longer two-year funded programme:** Partnerships felt the short timescales of the programme, both for the initial six months of the programme and the additional stretch meant the learning programme was delivered too intensely over a short period of time. This meant they were unable to attend all the sessions

or have the space to develop their thinking on some of the topics discussed due to their limited capacity. If the programme was more structured over a longer period of time, partnerships felt it would be more effective in supporting their work as they would have more capacity to attend alongside existing work in their communities. 46% of survey respondents would like two years of funding, whilst 15% would prefer a one-year funded programme.

*“The short time scale for both incubator and grant elements were challenging to balance”*

- **Themed focus groups:** Though partnerships welcomed the topics explored in the programme, due to the intensity of the delivery period, and the online delivery for large parts due to covid restrictions and concerns, there was insufficient space and time to explore the topics in more detail and develop their thinking as a group. They would like to maximise the peer-learning potential by forming themed focus groups where they can discuss their progress on specific areas in more detail. This could include peer-facilitated sessions, more workshops led by the delivery team, or action learning sets to create a more reflective space. Topics that partnerships have expressed interest in exploring in this way are community retail, wraparound support, food growing and geographical clusters.
- **Practical skills and training:** Partnerships are aware that to tackle food insecurity and work collaboratively, a range of skills and expertise are needed in addition to knowledge about the wider food system. To help with this they would like the incubator programme to include practical skills on monitoring programmes, managing volunteers, writing successful funding applications and more. This could be incorporated into the programme and perhaps facilitated through paid peer-learning time if sufficient expertise exists on these topics within the cohort.

*“Practical skills workshops such as monitoring projects, funding applications, recruiting and managing volunteers, legal entities and how to form them (constituted groups, charities, social enterprises, co-operatives)”*

- **A London wide food network:** Partnerships are keen to work with other London boroughs, to learn from each other and work together. This network would be hugely valuable to partnerships, especially as the cost-of-living crisis hits households hard. It could offer opportunities to share data, case studies, and tools, develop joint actions to tackle food injustice, promote collaboration across boroughs, and access a network of individuals working towards a shared vision.

*“[A London wide food network would offer ...] Access to best practice - capacity building - taking a pan London approach on things that may impact us all”*

- **Opportunity for new partnerships to join:** Partnerships were aware that not everyone who applied to be involved in the programme from the beginning secured funding so, though they want to continue their involvement, they want others to be involved. However, they also don't want to repeat topics already discussed so this might require two streams of support, one for new partnerships and another for existing to further their knowledge.
- **Continued support for partnership development:** 61% of survey respondents wanted more hands-on support for partnership development. That is because partnerships are at a critical stage, they're either newly developed and in need of continued support to maintain their focus and momentum, or they're embarking on a new programme of work which would benefit from support and guidance, be it from peer-experts or more structured support. Though many want to join the SFP network to receive continued

support, most are not yet eligible to access this, so continued support through Food Roots would help in the short to medium-term.

- **Continued funding and opportunities for joint funding:** Partnerships know the GLA cannot fund their work for ever. However, partnerships involvement in the programme has increased their status amongst local councils and led to further funding being leveraged in some cases. Continued support from the GLA could help partnerships to become more financially sustainable in this regard. It could also open opportunities for joint funding bids from partnerships who want to collaborate across borough lines to increase their impact. Larger bids of this kind could also help them leverage funding from other sources in the future.

*“collaborative funding bids/opportunities (we usually find ourselves in competition for short-term funding that prevents people from being open)”*





## Conclusion



The Food Roots Incubator programme has been delivered over a very challenging period for partnerships due to the impact of the covid-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges faced and the pivots made in delivery as a result, the programme has enabled partnerships to establish themselves, clarify their direction, develop food strategies, tackle food insecurity, build their knowledge and confidence, and leverage further funding to progress their work.

However, with the cost-of-living crisis and inflationary food prices already hitting household budgets, food insecurity is going to continue rising in the capital. Recognising that, partnerships want this to be only the beginning of their journey. They know that if they are to effectively respond to the growing crisis on their doorsteps, they need more support. As evidenced by the word cloud above, they want this new and improved Food Roots programme to include long-term learning that consists of workshops, mentoring, networking, training, funding and more. If delivered, this will help maximise their impact to ensure they are as resilient as possible for the challenging times ahead.

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