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**DAISA Enterprises** works at the nexus of food, health, economy and community. We provide strategic, operational and evaluation services to social enterprises and investors, and innovate new programs and technologies to develop a more equitable food system. DAISA serves as a national strategic partner with an extensive network, with decades of food and agriculture sector experience as practitioners, leaders, and consultants.

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# INTRODUCTION

## The Vision of Equitable Food Oriented Development

Food is central to the health, well-being, economic resilience, cultural heritage, and self-preservation of communities. Healthy, sustainable, accessible foods can relieve crucial threats such as diet-related illnesses, food insecurity, social isolation, and environmental degradation.

However, interest in food enterprises and projects has more recently been used to distance many communities from their power, becoming instead a trend to be capitalized on, with public and private investments in grocery store development, vertical farming, meal delivery kits, or commercial shared-use kitchens - projects with many positive outcomes but that can often exclude low-income residents, are imposed on communities with little input, and contribute to land loss and gentrification, and loss of community identity and cohesion.

The stakes for food-based community development that builds power are high. Increasing economic and health disparities prevent people of color, immigrants, and other marginalized groups from benefiting from economic gains felt throughout the country as a whole. A recent Brookings analysis found that of the 30 U.S. metro areas that increased their productivity, average wages, and standard of living from 2010 to 2015, only 11 metros achieved inclusive economic outcomes, measured by improving the employment rate, middle-class wages, and relative poverty.<sup>1</sup>

Equitable Food Oriented Development (EFOD) is a framework, and growing movement, to reap the powerful benefits of food projects and

enterprises as vehicles for community development and health, while investing deeply in the self-determination and leadership of community residents.

## Who We Are

The impetus and driving force for this EFOD thinking has come from a collaborative of practitioners, leaders, organizers, and holistic thinkers with deep connections to community, driving food oriented development by and with historically marginalized communities. We have joined together as the EFOD Collaborative to urge food system leaders, lenders, and funders to join us in changing the way community-led work is supported.

## History of the EFOD Collaborative

As leaders in the field of community development, Dana Harvey, the late and much-beloved Founding Executive Director of Mandela Partners, and Neelam Sharma, Executive Director of Community Services Unlimited, talked frequently about the holistic nature of the work being catalyzed by their respective organizations, which explicitly served the communities of color in their neighborhoods. They shared a frustration that funders and investors bypassed investment in their organizations in order to fund largely outsider-led and -serving enterprises, failing to recognize or measure the deep social, health, and economic impacts possible when investments are made in the expertise of on-the-ground leadership.

In 2015, Mandela Partners, Community Services Unlimited, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, and the Social Justice Learning Institute gathered in Oakland, CA, to discuss

<sup>1</sup> Shearer, C. and Berube, A. (2017), The surprisingly short list of US metro areas achieving inclusive economic growth, Brookings Institute "The Avenue" blog.



what was at the very heart of their work. The gathering sought to take ownership of the language that bound the group, in part to prevent its co-optation or dilution by conventional developers, funders, or other non-practitioners. This initial meeting led to a series of dialogues, gathering more practitioners and allied stakeholders to document and differentiate their innovative community initiatives from conventional food-based projects. The EFOD Collaborative that emerged has since **jointly developed the common values and defining criteria of EFOD work**. The Steering Committee of the EFOD Collaborative includes organizations that are both embedded in communities and are also leading national voices such as Mandela Partners (Oakland, CA), Community Services Unlimited (Los Angeles, CA), Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (Detroit, MI), Nuestras Raíces (Holyoke, MA), La Mujer Obrera (El Paso, TX), Inclusive Action for the City (Los Angeles, CA), Planting Justice (Oakland, CA), and Sankofa Community Development Corporation (New Orleans, LA). Self-Help Federal Credit Union, Capital Impact Partners, and the Wallace Center at Winrock International have been key thought partners. It continues to expand with new members and allies.



EFOD practitioners during the Spring 2019 Convening, at New Communities' 1,600 acre retreat in Albany, Georgia.

## FIELD RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

### Research Approach

In 2017, the growing EFOD Collaborative invited DAISA Enterprises, a firm with a deep history of food systems, entrepreneurship, and social change work, to support drafting a body of work that would encompass the collaborative's collective understanding. A field scan and analysis were conducted to document, better understand, and define a practitioner-led EFOD framework. **This research analyzed over 800**

**organizations** throughout the United States and identified 88 'EFOD qualified' organizations. DAISA then conducted an in-depth exploration of 48 of these organizations, including an analysis of community demographic indicators,<sup>2</sup> organizational metrics and online presence, and interviewed executive-level staff at 27 EFOD organizations and 5 key stakeholders in community development finance and policy.

<sup>2</sup> For a list of all 88 identified EFOD organizations, including an analysis of budget and staff size, visit [www.efod.org](http://www.efod.org).



# Summary of Findings

## 1. EFOD is a growing field of work happening in the most under-resourced communities in the country.

The communities within which EFOD organizations work are intimately familiar with built environment or political challenges to health and wealth creation. These communities are often isolated from the strategies, resources, and institutions that promote economic opportunity – and EFOD organizations use community-based knowledge and expertise in food enterprises to spur localized physical and financial investment to upend those dynamics. By pairing the entrepreneurial experience and expertise of marginalized communities with technical training, market access, and financial and civic resources, EFOD organizations leverage food to support threatened communities and increase self-determination and socioeconomic inclusion.

### WHY FOOD?

Food systems are particularly useful in health and community development precisely because many low-income communities have a rich heritage of expertise in food production (over 50% of refugees have agrarian backgrounds)<sup>3</sup>; calling upon this expertise is an approach to asset-based development. Food and culinary practices are often expressions of cultural identity, and provide ways of engaging all ages and skill levels, lending themselves to inclusive community development in highly-visible ways. Lastly, food enterprises, though requiring capital, are accessible and have relatively low barriers to entry for low-income entrepreneurs. Community food systems work can holistically contribute to multiple elements of a vibrant, healthy community - environment, nutrition, social cohesion, and economic.



The family of Los Originales Tacos Arabes de Puebla, one of the businesses supported by Inclusive Action's micro-loan fund in Los Angeles, CA.

## 2. There is a need for greater connections between practitioners, including a community of practice.

Most interviewed EFOD organizations described lacking an adequate field of practice to further their work. Though they referenced multiple forums and conferences in the food/agriculture and community development space, none were seen as matching their specific needs for peer learning, growth, or shared identity. They cited a desire to strategize around shared challenges and complex social change.

<sup>3</sup> Mancari, J. (2017), Refugee Farmers Growing in Houston's Food Desert, Bittersweet Monthly.

### **3. There is a demand for clear guidelines and practitioner leadership from relevant lenders and funders.**

Many national foundations, regional funders, and investors are involved in supporting food- and agriculture-based organizations and initiatives. Interviewed supporters in these allied fields also recognized that more can be done to support grassroots movements for justice and equity, rooted in building a local food economy. They identified shortcomings of existing lending and philanthropic financing products, which do not provide capital access to community-led food system solutions. EFOD practitioner expertise is needed to educate funders and investors so their practices can realistically support community-led work.

### **4. EFOD work requires different financial instruments than those which serve FOD or traditional community development.**

The emerging EFOD field of practice recognizes that to realize the visions of impacted communities, existing finance products and underwriting mechanisms used by banks and community development lenders are often insufficient.<sup>4</sup> As we seek to promote equity in food oriented development, we must also seek to grow an environment around these projects that will help them flourish-- an equity-driven finance industry is critical to this. EFOD projects to date have all relied on complex and unusual lending programs and bold investments to start and grow. EFOD requires strong connections between philanthropy and community development finance to provide appropriate capital for different phases of organizations and projects. From character-based loans to “patient” investments with forgivable principals, the growth of EFOD projects will require more innovation in financial services in order for projects to acquire the capital they need to serve the communities they are located in.

### **5. EFOD practitioners want and need the values, frameworks, and impacts of their work rigorously defined and articulated.**

The desire to articulate the vision of organizations using an EFOD framework reflects the importance of self-definition and -identification by practitioners, recognized by key allies in the health and development fields. By devoting their programming upstream on the social and environmental factors that create equitable development, EFOD organizations are dedicated to the necessary - and difficult - work of long-term change. However, the effectiveness of this work is notoriously challenging to measure in easily-understood data metrics. Interviewed organizations shared a desire for further study of the connections between community power-building and health and economic equity, as well as the development of shared metrics across the field to demonstrate such movement.

<sup>4</sup> More information on financing obstacles encountered in our research can be found on [www.efod.org](http://www.efod.org).

# DESCRIBING THE PRACTICE OF EFOD

## Why Now, A Unified Larger Purpose

This field building work is itself a response to the call for a paradigm shift in how communities are built. While there are now many conferences and forums for community food systems and development, there is a gap and need for a clear definition and a field of practice. Both EFOD philosophy and physical projects must be transparent and democratic so others can learn and replicate. EFOD projects are themselves their own “call to action,” and the field of practice intends to share the work in such a way that the concepts, tools, and systemic approaches are accessible to all value-aligned practitioners.

There is often overlap between EFOD and the practice of creative placemaking. EFOD initiatives prioritize protecting and preserving the cultural identity of a community, and then celebrating and sharing that culture across communities and generations. EFOD initiatives produce and may sell cultural foods, create shared cultural spaces, construct buildings with strong cultural icons or architectural markers, showcase public art in food production spaces, sell food alongside crafts in markets, and celebrate that cultural identity with vibrant displays of food and arts.



Plenero dancers at Nuestras Raíces' annual Harvest Festival in Holyoke, MA.

## Defining EFOD

The origins of the term “Equitable Food Oriented Development,” and the desire to articulate the vision of organizations using such a framework, reflects the importance of co-creation between practitioners and key allies in the health and development fields. After several months of EFOD Steering Committee meetings, research and drafting by DAISA, and building upon a white paper written by Dana Harvey<sup>5</sup>, the following working definition of the EFOD practice was co-developed:

**Equitable Food Oriented Development is a development strategy that uses food and agriculture to create economic opportunities, healthy communities, and explicitly seeks to build community assets, pride, and power by and with historically-marginalized communities.**

## Defining Criteria of EFOD in Practice

The criteria on the next page represent practitioner-defined intentions behind EFOD initiatives and the vision for community self-determination that builds on the histories of food-based struggles for economic autonomy and civil rights and recognition. More importantly, however, these criteria provide a way for organizations to self-assess their alignment with the principles of EFOD practice, as well as the starting point for a set of assessment criteria for developers, funders, and investors.

<sup>5</sup> Harvey, D. (2017), Equitable Food Oriented Development, [www.mandelapartners.org/efod](http://www.mandelapartners.org/efod).



# EFOD Criteria

	INDICATORS OF EFOD	CONTRADICTION OF EFOD
<b>Equity- and justice-first</b>	Equity & justice are part of mission, unapologetically represent a historically marginalized community, clearly working on systems change, power change & accountability in operations; ongoing commitment to teaching/including larger transformation; involved in other organizing, advocacy, or policy work – it’s not just about food	Language and mission is general or just development or food related (i.e. “all lives matter”); community transformation is an intention but not yet in practice
<b>Place-based</b>	Embedded in a community or regional network with strong community identity; prioritize culture and artistic and cultural expression; a history of work in this community; leadership has historical connection to social justice in that community	Not connected to community; national or regional without accountability to particular community with distinct identity
<b>Use market-based/ business strategies</b>	Developing new markets and enterprises, creating real economic opportunities, sustainable	Exclusively education, policy, or awareness building; no direct service programming; solely community gardens, no sales or marketing aspect
<b>Community leadership development/ community organizing</b>	Board of Directors and top leadership is representative of the community organization serves, often People of Color-led; work is by & for community members; critical convener role in development projects, serving to maintain community sovereignty, local/county planning involvement	Community served has no real power, decision-making, living-wage jobs in organization
<b>Community ownership</b>	Building community-member assets, equity. often uses alternative economic structures and decision-making processes so community members can have ownership (i.e. co-ops); representative board membership	Outside capital, business owned by outside institutions or people; primarily job creation or training

# AN ILLUSTRATION: THE POWER OF FOOD-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## Equitable Food Oriented Development

Ashland Market & Cafe, a project of Mandela Partners (Oakland, CA)

“It was a very focused effort to work with community to determine food access gaps and economic development opportunities... through that process we were not only able to launch a community-directed project, but we also deepened our own connection with the neighborhood we serve.”

- Mariela Cedeño, Interim Executive Director, Mandela Partners

Long-time community organization Mandela Partners worked alongside local residents and stakeholders to develop the Ashland Market and Cafe, a 2,100-square-foot food hall, incubator, and community space on the ground floor of an affordable housing complex. The project was catalyzed in partnership with a resident-led advisory committee that eventually selected four local food entrepreneurs as the facility's inaugural tenants. Ashland Market & Cafe vendors live in the surrounding neighborhoods and sell foods that reflect their heritage and family histories. To support and encourage community-based entrepreneurship, kiosks rental rates are kept well below market and tenants are offered business development workshops, micro-loans, and legal assistance. Ashland Market & Cafe was funded using an innovative, but cumbersome, mix of financial instruments including revolving loans, \$360,000 in federal Healthy Food Financing Initiative funds, and \$1.3M in public and private investments.



LaShawn Raybon celebrates the opening of I Am Café, in the Ashland Market, with her family.  
Photo credit: Nader Khouri.

## Conventional Food Oriented Development

Plentiful Kitchens, a project of West Boylston Food Council (Boston, MA, and New Haven, CT)

West Boylston Food Council (WBFC) is a regional nonprofit organization founded by a council of farmers, local government and business leaders, and consumers to promote local agriculture. WBFC developed two multi-tenant food production facilities, Plentiful Kitchens, operating in both Boston, MA, and New Haven, CT. Plentiful Kitchens supports small food entrepreneurs through reduced rents and business mentoring, but it specifically targets national brands to drive revenues. The facilities create a combined 600 sustainable, living wage jobs in their respective communities. The WBFC board is actively involved with tenant and employee relations, yet maintains full governing power over the facilities. The \$23 million initiative was fully funded using loans and investments, including \$9 million from MDE, a national community development finance institution. City officials in Boston and New Haven also provided tax incentives.

***Both Ashland Market & Cafe and Plentiful Kitchens are food development projects with positive outcomes for economic development, however, equitable food oriented development centers actual ownership of the initiatives and resources within the local community.***

# EFOD UNIQUE IMPACTS

Impacts and outcomes attributed to EFOD are distinct from those of traditional community development or food oriented development (FOD). EFOD allows for holistic systemic community changes rather than addressing surface symptoms, with long-term community understanding and engagement in change.

While food initiatives not explicitly focused on equity can have positive outcomes on food access and economic development, they can also have negative impacts on long-term community strength and health. Examples include urban gardening that can lead to increased property values and displacement, or supermarket attraction programs that grant precious resources to national chain grocers headquartered outside the community. While conventional food systems work – often supported by philanthropic resources, municipal leaders, investment capital, or tax incentives – may unintentionally attract higher-income residents or the outsider-owned businesses that will cater to them, **EFOD results in powerful outcomes addressing social determinants of health and economic development, such as new social capital networks, equitable asset development, and increased civic engagement.**

A small sample of comparative impacts that are being considered:

Related to health

- Conventional food oriented development impacts: healthy food access/availability, nutrition education outcomes
- **EFOD impacts: environmental changes, availability of culturally appropriate foods, and adoption of community-designed healthy and nutrition priorities**

Related to economic development

- Conventional food oriented development impacts: new food businesses, smallholder farm sales, job growth
- **EFOD impacts: new food businesses owned by low-income people and people of color, capital that circulates locally, dignified jobs with equitable wages**

Related to environment

- Conventional food oriented development impacts: greenspaces created, preserved farm acreage, organic food sales
- **EFOD impacts: community-owned greenspaces, community members are activated in their own environmental interests**

Related to culture

- Conventional community development impacts: creation of public art, engagement of artists
- **EFOD impacts: neighborhood identity preserved, engagement of culture-bearers**

Related to civic engagement

- Conventional food oriented development impacts: select community members on project boards
- **EFOD impacts: community members in leadership roles and public positions, community members involved in decision-making roles in public projects, policy changes accomplished**

**“Our neighborhood is majority low-income, a third Black and a third Southeast Asian, and has historically been stripped of resources and been disinvested for decades. Many people have very little assets, especially property. They are renters and their landlord's don't live in the neighborhood. Food will allow us to create ownership for our businesses and families.”**

**-- Va-Megn Thoj, Executive Director, Asian Economic Development Association**



Elaboration of EFOD impacts and methodologies for evaluation are ongoing, led by experienced community-based practitioners and supported by allies from philanthropy and academia. A more robust set of impacts and related metrics will be available on [www.efod.org](http://www.efod.org), with ongoing updates from our research and development work.



**Neighbors at one of IMAN's Corner Store Cyphers - a wellness and healing event featuring music and spoken word at a store participating in their Healthy Corner Store program on the southwest side of Chicago.**

# MOVING TOWARD A ROBUST EFOD FIELD

## Scaling the Field

EFOD principles, which are currently specific for an organization's founding and programmatic execution, can be adapted into a framework to guide and support equitable development and investment by a broad set of actors, much like LEED standards can help define positive environmental practices in building. As revitalization and growth efforts take shape, EFOD organizations can be key partners in informing public policy and supporting residents so that they benefit and build assets as development happens. Specific ways in which developers and policymakers can partner with EFOD organizations can be seen in the table below:

Role of EFOD Organizations as Partners	Role of Developers/Policymakers as Partners	Community Benefit
Own physical assets (land, buildings, etc.) for community direction and use	Alleviate pressures in high-cost real estate markets by making space in mixed-use or commercial developments available for EFOD organizations	Preserving space for local control and long-term community ownership
Reflect community needs and existing assets, engage community members in decision-making, because of long-established history and trust in community	Integrate EFOD voice into public-sector planning, policies and investments	Decreased community alienation from local seats of power
	Community Benefits Agreements reflective of EFOD	Increased public accountability and transparency

### Overall role for philanthropy:

- Supporting a larger EFOD knowledge base in the community economic development industry
- Supporting EFOD organizations to maintain accountability to/advocate for their local communities.

# Recommendations for Field Building

EFOD organizations often operate within a context of limited resources and recognition from power agents in their communities. Interviews revealed a strong sense of misalignment with financial and public resources. While there are several prominent EFOD projects that have been financed by national CDFIs and supported by philanthropic funders, in order for EFOD to scale we must move from reliance on a few heroic champions to better institutionalized systems which consistently deliver appropriate financing to the projects that most deserve them. The year of research and interviews inform the following recommendations on how to better direct resources and areas for further development of the EFOD framework:

## **Recommendations for Field Supporters.**

The growth in lender-funder partnerships, such as statewide healthy food financing initiatives, is incredibly promising for food access advocates. However, these initiatives maintain conventional underwriting standards that often prevent EFOD organizations and the communities they work with from accessing needed funds. Food system funders and mission-aligned investors are important allies for EFOD organizations, and can support EFOD initiatives in several important ways:

- **Increase collaboration between foundations and mission-aligned investors to fund EFOD**

Explore collaborative funding models with multiple funding vehicles, including the development of philanthropic “soft money” instruments that help EFOD projects leverage financing and increase investor comfort with EFOD. These could include pre-development grants, and are strengthened by guarantee pools, credit enhancement dollars, loan loss reserve funding, or equity pools. These collaborations should be structured in such a way that investors confront and change institutional discriminatory practices and seek out opportunities to involve community-based practitioners in decision-making for shared power. Funders and investors must work alongside EFOD

practitioners to invest in the growth and development of EFOD organizations, strengthening relationships and building EFOD organizations’ financial capacity.

- **Resources for organizing and community building**

While EFOD organizations need investment capital for a variety of economic ventures, these investments should be paired with sustained funding of community-building work. In order to create a vision of thriving communities that are reflective of neighborhood needs and opportunities, EFOD organizations need funding that allows for the creativity to integrate their base-building work with their economic development work.

- **Capital that is community-responsive and quick to deploy, for time-sensitive and longer-term development projects**

EFOD organizations operate in a market economy where land can be acquired quickly and opportunities are awarded to the fastest and most capitalized bidder. To be successful, EFOD organizations need access to capital sources that can be deployed quickly enough for organizations to compete with private parties. Too often, mission-aligned lenders are bogged down by restrictive assessments, cumbersome on-boarding processes, and strict underwriting criteria that lead to EFOD organizations missing key opportunities. New systems need to be created to “pre-approve” organizations and grant them access to funds when a project needs them.

- **Develop and extend EFOD guidelines and protocols for mission-aligned investors**

Along with mission-aligned investors, explore application of EFOD principles and criteria as part of underwriting. Develop rigorous case studies from successful examples and extrapolate lessons. Explore a pilot fund to demonstrate these applications. Support existing opportunities to share EFOD principles with CDFI food lenders. Ensure that the incorporation of EFOD principles is institutionalized in lending practices.

- **Advance EFOD guidelines and protocols for public and private development**

Continue to develop EFOD framework<sup>6</sup> and assessment rubric as a set of practices that developers could follow, advancing new norms and expectations around the “return on investment” for economic development projects. Include leading planning and development agencies in this discussion. Consider pilot applications.

**Recommendations for Field Builders.**

Support organizations and fellowship opportunities provide needed spaces for EFOD organizations, and can support the development of the field in the following ways:

- **Increase financial capacity-building opportunities**

Some EFOD organizations demonstrate an incredible amount of financial savviness, utilizing a complex mix of resources. However, other EFOD organizations are still purely grant-funded and in a constant cycle of persistent underfunding and lose out on vital resources. Additional and explicit financial technical assistance and capacity-building, would help EFOD organizations hire and retain the talent pool or leadership development needed to continue to build capacity.

- **Increase opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and exchange**

EFOD practitioners see a need for leadership development and peer-to-peer exchange that challenges and stimulates their organizations and builds relationships with peers elsewhere in the U.S. While there are organizations represented on the EFOD Steering Committee that are over 25 years old, over 60% in the survey have been founded within the last five years. Practitioner leaders articulated the need for EFOD gatherings to include intentional time for practices to be passed from experienced leaders to younger leaders as well as new ideas to be shared by newer organizations – all fostering mutual learning.



**The Community Services Unlimited team at the groundbreaking of the Paul Robeson Community Wellness Center.**

**Recommendations for EFOD Practitioners.**

- **Advance and educate on the evaluation and metrics of the EFOD sector**

The outcomes of EFOD are more complex than normal community development interventions that define “impact” as job creation, income growth, increased rates of homeownership, or decreases in negative health outcomes. The effectiveness of EFOD’s upstream work is notoriously challenging to measure in data points. Further study of the connections between community power-building, health outcomes, and economic equity, as well as the development of shared metrics across the field would help advance the movement. In order to accurately portray the systemic nature of EFOD work, the development of these metrics should be practitioner-led.

**There is great opportunity with EFOD to build on the practitioner leadership** and experience that has been cultivated with the EFOD Steering Committee, and to develop a field of practice that prioritizes the integration of racial and social equity. This group has the credibility of years of practice, systemic understanding of low-income communities, powerful voices on equity, and strong participation of leading investors as advisors. This body would like to continue to be in a position of authority to develop standards and strategies for EFOD, even as more members and advisors are added to the process.

<sup>6</sup> The EFOD theoretical framework can be found at [www.efod.org](http://www.efod.org).



# CONCLUSION

This report demonstrates how the common values and defining criteria of the EFOD framework can present an innovative approach to marrying food systems and economic development models, with an explicit aim of building community power. The information introduced here creates space for further examination, discussion, and action as the EFOD field continues to develop. While there is currently a formidable body of EFOD activity across the United States, the work can still feel daunting without peers, thought partners, and intentional ways of coming together. The powerful work spearheaded by the EFOD Collaborative presents an important opportunity for financial and philanthropic partners to support and increase the visibility of this vital work, and to ensure its ongoing success.



**Teodoro Ortíz and his fellow gardeners started La Finquita in 1996 to teach children in their Holyoke, MA, neighborhood about agriculture. The farm grew into Nuestras Raíces, an organization preserving and promoting Puerto Rican agricultural traditions.**

**Culinary training with young people at Liberty's Kitchen, a youth-centered organization in New Orleans, LA, that has a 90% employment rate for graduates.**



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