

Summary of Engagement

JustFOOD Action Plan for the Halifax Region

PART A - FEBRUARY 2023

HALIFAX





Summary of Engagement

Engagement Overview

A detailed summary of engagement design and results can be found in Appendix 2.

Building on the *HRM Food Charter*, initial engagements focused on refining the *HRM Food Charter* principles and vision to create and test the JustFOOD Framework (see Appendix 3), laying the foundations for working together toward action. Engagements then shifted to identifying what the community members and partners wanted the *JustFOOD Action Plan* to achieve, then to testing proposed recommendations to make sure they reflected this feedback. Part A recommendations were created with extensive input from community members and food system partners. Consultations for Part A of the *JustFOOD Action Plan* began in March 2021 with the majority of engagements wrapping up in August 2022. During this time, HRM and the HFPA engaged with:

- **29 community-based organizations**
- **6 provincial partners**
- **9 HRM business units**
- **Thousands of HRM residents**

Engagement Priorities

HRM and the HFPA worked directly with the public to ensure that community concerns and aspirations were consistently understood, considered, and directly reflected in the Plan's recommendations. Public engagement was intended to (1) profile the local food system; (2) identify measurable goals, priorities, and recommendations for the *JustFOOD Action Plan*; (3) strengthen relationships and readiness for action among key local partners; and (4) motivate community members to take part in food system changes.

Knowledge and expertise lie within the communities that experience disproportionate rates of food insecurity. Engagement opportunities were designed to create space for these communities to shape Plan development, implementation, and outcomes. These opportunities were delivered in collaboration with trusted community partners and were designed to enable full and equitable participation. Participants were compensated for their time and expertise.

Engagement Design

Engagement for Part A of the *JustFOOD Action Plan* was divided into two phases.

During Phase One of engagement, HRM and the HFPA solicited community and partner participation to create foundations for the Plan, identifying the key principles, goals, and strategies necessary to develop effective actions for positive food system change across communities and experiences. During Phase Two, HRM and the HFPA collected community and partner feedback on the recommendations generated during and following the first phase of engagement. This feedback was used to identify gaps, explore emerging opportunities, and revise proposed actions. HRM and the HFPA worked with community advisors during this review process.

As this work occurred during the pandemic, engagements were designed to prioritize public health and safety while providing space for lively dialogue. Virtual participation was encouraged when possible, and at-home participation opportunities were made available.

Building Awareness

Beginning in 2016, as a stepping stone to the development of a regional food strategy, HRM and the HFPA implemented an extensive engagement process for the development of the *HRM Food Charter*. Throughout this process, HRM and the HFPA built food system awareness, capacity, and excitement for the development of a food strategy based on community-led action and advocacy. Over 200 residents and 30 municipal staff and councillors participated in charter-based engagements. In December 2019, Halifax Regional Council endorsed the *HRM Food Charter* and the development of a food strategy for HRM.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the many gaps in our food system, making clear the extent of food insecurity across the region and the essential roles played by our food producers and food workers. Throughout 2020 and 2021, HRM provided food supports to more than 2,000 households, offering resources such as food hampers, food-activity kits, and food-production supplies. These outreach efforts supported community-level access to food, captured food experiences during the pandemic, and introduced residents to the *JustFOOD Action Plan*.



Photo: Snickerdoodle Photography

Phase One Engagement

Phase One of engagement began in March 2021 with the launch of the Food System Workshops series. This series of virtual workshops was designed to introduce the *JustFOOD Action Plan*, establish the foundations, and set Plan priorities. Following these workshops, the **JustFOOD website** and social media channels were launched to showcase the Plan's development and encourage participation. The *JustFOOD Engagement Toolkit* was created to support community partners to lead Civic Dinners and Hosted Engagements. The toolkit also functioned as a report-back tool to receive feedback on Plan goals.

During the latter half of Phase One, HRM and the HFPa offered residents and food system actors a variety of ways to be involved, recognizing diverse learners, abilities, and backgrounds. Community members were invited to shape the Plan by (1) participating in or hosting a **Civic Dinner**; (2) providing feedback through the JustFOOD Action Survey; and (3) participating in a Targeted Engagement. The JustFOOD Action Survey was distributed in hard copies and offered online. It was used to organize and compile feedback from all engagements. As part of Targeted Engagement efforts, HRM and the HFPa also organized dozens of meetings with community organizations, government officials, and other key food system actors. Phase One of engagement ended in March 2022 with the closure of the JustFOOD Action Survey.



Civic Dinner kits contained ingredients to make a pot of soup and a batch of granola bars for 6 to 8 people. Kits included a discussion guide to prompt conversations about food justice and how we can effect positive change within the HRM food system.

Phase Two Engagement

During Phase Two (March 2022 to August 2022), community members, Plan partners, and key food system actors were invited to give their feedback on Part A of the Plan. This feedback was used to refine and expand proposed recommendations. In an effort to ensure a fully comprehensive review of Part A, three distinct, community-led Advisory Groups – **an Indigenous Advisory, African Nova Scotian Advisory, and Disability Community Advisory** – were established to address gaps and to create new, community-specific actions where necessary. All advisory members were compensated. HRM and the HFPa also collected feedback from provincial and municipal subject matter experts.

Engagement Themes

Community members, partners, and key food system actors expressed a desire for a socially equitable food system where all community members are able to access nutritious and local food with dignity, and where food workers are valued and receive systemic government and consumer support.

Many participants identified the need for a food system that actively resists colonialism and white supremacy, and for a food system approach in which Black, Indigenous, and racialized leadership is prioritized.

Engagement participants also identified income as a root cause of food insecurity and recommended that a greater number of food-related social services be provided to low-income community members. They highlighted the need for a greater number of reduced-barrier food production and preparation spaces and tools, such as free food-skills workshops and improved access to growing spaces such as community gardens. Participants also recommended that the public sector address food system inequities through integrated land-use planning, transportation planning, and community design.

Generally, participants expressed a strong desire to see food at the hearts of our communities and identified food as a valuable tool that can bring people together. Many participants, particularly producers and other food system workers, expressed strong support for local food consumption and production, identifying small-scale, local food producers and retailers as key actors in the regional economy. They championed for communities to define their own food systems, where the means and ends of food production are accessible to all. Similarly, many voiced a need for infrastructure that builds local production, processing, and distribution power.

In summary, community members and partners highlighted the need for a comprehensive food strategy that acts to create a more equitable food system, addresses the root causes of food insecurity, localizes the food system, disrupts colonialism and systemic racism, and builds community capacity and food system resilience.

Appendix 2: Engagement Design And Results

HRM Food Charter Engagements

HRM and the HFPA conducted extensive engagement on the *HRM Food Charter*, a declaration used as a stepping stone towards the development of the *JustFOOD Action Plan for the Halifax Region*. Engagement began in 2016 with a public, online survey. In October of 2017, HRM and the HFPA hosted two public engagement events at the Halifax Central Library as well as a question and answer “Lunch and Learn” with Municipal Councillors. The Halifax Central Library engagements included a panel discussion, group discussions, and a keynote address from world renowned food policy expert Wayne Roberts. In addition to these sessions, several targeted community conversations were held later in the year, including: (1) “Food in NS: Our Strengths and Challenges”, presented by the Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Community Health Board; (2) a community level conversation hosted by Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia and the Loaded Ladle; and

(3) “Chili and Charter Chatter,” a community conversation and meal hosted by the Dartmouth North Community Food Centre. Engagement concluded with an HRM staff session on November 24th, 2017. In total, over 200 residents and 30 municipal staff and Councillors participated in the formal Charter-based engagements, with many more participating in community hosted conversations.

HRM and the HFPA worked closely with the Toronto Food Policy Council throughout this series of engagements to build the rationale, connect local efforts to international best practices, and generate excitement and buy-in for a *HRM Food Charter*. Regional Council endorsed the *HRM Food Charter* in December 2019 as part of the municipal commitment to work with the HFPA to develop a food strategy for the region, which became the *JustFOOD Action Plan*.

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Building Awareness

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the many gaps in our food system, making clear the extent of food insecurity across the region and the essential roles played by our food producers and food workers. In June of 2020, HRM responded by supporting the growing of food at home by distributing veggie seeds, garden packs, container gardens, and planting guides to more than 700 HRM households. These supports were distributed in partnership with Feed Nova Scotia and HRM's YouthLive, Halifax Public Libraries, Community Mobilization Teams, and Parks and Recreation. To support access to good food, 1100 food hampers were distributed through the Mobile Food Market. In 2021, local granola bars and colouring sets were added to approximately 300 Mobile Food Market hampers.

These outreach efforts also built awareness of the *JustFOOD Action Plan*, introducing residents to the Plan and inviting them to take a survey or share a story about their food experiences during COVID-19. The survey received 260 responses. Results indicated that during the height of the pandemic, those reporting difficulty accessing food, or worrying about not having enough food, was 10% higher than in pre-pandemic times. A total of 57.6% of respondents reported facing additional challenges accessing food during COVID-19.

Food System Workshops

Engagement for Part A of the *JustFOOD Action Plan for the Halifax Region* began in the spring of 2021, with two Food System Workshops. These workshops were designed to convene food system actors and community members; raise public awareness of the *JustFOOD Action Plan*; generate feedback for Plan development, and build a foundation for further community engagement and action.

Workshop #1 was held virtually and was designed to test the JustFOOD Framework of principles and food system goals derived from the *HRM Food Charter*. Two sessions were offered in March of 2021. The workshops had a total of 59 attendees from across the food system. Based on feedback from Workshop #1, the Charter principles and food system goals were clarified and updated. The workshop also resulted in the identification of “strategies for success” to guide the development of the *JustFOOD Action Plan*. A **What We Heard Report** was made public, shared with workshop participants, and posted on the JustFOOD website.

Themes Identified in Workshop #1

ACTION AREAS	SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FRAMEWORK
Collaboration	Indigenous sovereignty
Governance & Policy	Better acknowledging climate change
Education & Awareness	More collaboration (collective impact)
Community Ownership & Control	Plain language goal definitions
Infrastructure	Defining food as a right
Funding	Treating food as an asset

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Workshop #2 was held virtually and two sessions were offered in June of 2021. The workshops had a total of 78 registrants and 30 attendees. Workshop #2 sessions built on directions developed in Workshop #1, with the objective to identify action areas to advance through the development of the *JustFOOD Action Plan*, and potential strategies for realizing these actions. Breakout groups were organized based on participants' responses in the registration survey to the question *What do you want the JustFOOD Action Plan to achieve?*

A **What We Heard Report** capturing themes from Workshop #2 was shared with workshop participants and supporters on July 20th. Five Action Areas emerged from Workshop #2:

WORKSHOP #2 ACTION AREAS
Coordinate Collective Action
Expand Community Food Infrastructure
Establish School Food Programs
Increase Food System Resilience
Reflect Community Strengths and Values, including Indigenous perspectives such as Netukulimk and Etuaptmumk.

JustFOOD Website Launch and Social Media

Following the workshops, HRM and the HFPA collaborated with a designer to develop the Plan website, justfoodhalifax.ca, which launched October 15, 2021. The website is the online home of the Plan and hosts the JustFOOD Action Survey and Engagement Toolkit. The website will also serve as a virtual hub for community food resources and local food research. In addition, HRM's **Shape Your City Food Action** project page was used to profile Plan development, host the engagement surveys, and direct visitors to the JustFOOD website.

HRM and the HFPA worked with community partners and HRM planning staff to expand social media outreach. Social media was primarily used to promote engagement opportunities, such as the JustFOOD Action Survey, but also served to celebrate others working to improve our food system. JustFOOD sends email updates to a continually growing list of subscribers, currently at 695 people, providing news on Plan progress and engagement opportunities. JustFOOD also has a growing amount of followers on several social media platforms:

- Facebook - 953 followers
- Instagram - 505 followers
- Twitter - 818 followers

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JustFOOD Engagement Toolkit

The **JustFOOD Engagement Toolkit** was created to support community members and groups in hosting their own conversations about the food system and identify actions to shape the *JustFOOD Action Plan*. Common Roots, Vieth House, and The North Grove used the toolkit to guide their sessions and the toolkit is shared on the JustFOOD website as resource for ongoing food action conversations.

Civic Dinner Kits

In the fall of 2021, HRM and the HPA distributed 500 Civic Dinner Kits with the help of community partners, including the Halifax Public Libraries, Family Resource Centres, HRM Community Mobilization Teams, Hope Blooms, AKOMA, and the Association of Black Social Workers. Each Civic Dinner contained ingredients to make a pot of soup and a batch of granola bars for 6 to 8 people. Kits included a discussion guide to prompt conversations about food justice and how we can effect positive change within the HRM food system. Dinner hosts had several options for sharing back what they heard in their discussion. This data was entered into the online survey tool and incorporated into the draft recommendations.

As COVID-19 public health restrictions changed, community partners adapted how they used the kits. Some groups used the kits to host a meal and conversation with their community, or prepared them as takeaway meals. Other kits were distributed alongside existing produce pack programs and markets. Others were enhanced with additional ingredients and used for virtual cooking parties, led by local chefs.



Photo: Maddi Tang

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Online Survey

HRM residents were invited to provide feedback online through the JustFOOD Action Survey, which was developed in consultation with the HFFPA steering committee. The survey offered a space for the public to share insights, priorities, goals; and identify actions intended to strengthen our local food system. The survey opened October 15, 2021 and closed March 20, 2022. A total of 197 responses were submitted. As many of the responses were submitted to record group sessions, the total number of people involved was greater than the number of individual surveys submitted.

The survey was designed using the food system principles and goals of the JustFOOD Framework: (1) **Social Justice:** Define Food as a Human Right; (2) **Environment:** Enhance Ecological Resilience; (3) **Health and Well-being:** Grow Knowledge and Skills; (4) **Celebration:** Sharing Our Diversity; and (5) **Local Economy:** Strengthen Regional Economies.

Survey respondents were asked to describe their vision for the food system and provide feedback and ideas for action on any one or more of the 5 goals. This feedback was reviewed and common themes were identified.

Vision

Forty-nine distinct “vision statements” were recorded. The five most common visions for our food system are laid out here.

- a. Healthy food is available and affordable for everyone.
- b. I have better access to fresh and locally grown food.
- c. There is universal basic income and/or living wages.
- d. There is improved geographic access to food.
- e. There is systemic support for local farmers and producers.

These vision statements speak to a desire for a socially equitable food system, where all community members are able to access nutritious and local food with dignity, and where food system workers are valued and receive systemic government and consumer support.

Many of the vision statements speak to a desire for healthy communities. Survey respondents, on the whole, want to see food at the heart of our communities, and suggested that the Municipality promote food security through integrated land use planning, transportation planning, and community design.

Other visions identified by the respondents include a:

- Food system that actively resists colonialism and white supremacy, and to see a food system approach in which Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) knowledge is respected and BIPOC voices are centred.
- Localized food system.
- Self-sufficient Nova Scotia, in which the province produces enough food locally to protect against climate emergencies or disruptions in the supply chain.
- Food system that promotes sustainable food production and consumption.
- Food system that emphasizes and prioritizes environmental health as the foundation for all health.
- Food system in which a greater number of social services are continually funded by the Municipality and the Province alike.

Social Justice: Define Food As A Human Right

Thirty-six distinct actions were identified through the Social Justice section of the survey. The five most common actions identified in this section are laid out here.

1. Develop a system whereby low-income residents can access discounted / subsidized local food (e.g., social supermarket model), moving away from the food-bank model.
2. Improve the accessibility, affordability, equity of public transportation services and active transport routes for residents in food deserts.
3. Partner with relevant organizations to extend food programming access beyond traditional working hours and on weekends.
4. Support the operations and expansion of the Mobile Food Market and similar low-cost, fresh produce delivery services.
5. Provide in-kind or monetary support to people or groups interested in gardening at home, starting a community garden, or joining an existing garden with plot fees.

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These actions show a desire to support equity-seeking communities and those most vulnerable to food insecurity in accessing nutritious food. Respondents identified income as a root cause of food insecurity, and recommended that a greater number of food-related social services be designed for and provided to food-insecure communities, particularly to low-income community members.

Food sovereignty also emerged as a key theme. Respondents identified the need for a food system in which communities are enfranchised to define their own food systems, and wherein both the means and ends of food production are accessible to all.

- Other key themes identified in the Social Justice section of the survey include the need for:
- Improved, community-based food production and processing infrastructure (e.g., community kitchens and community food hubs)
- Land access and tenure supports in both rural and urban settings
- The need to prevent or redirect food waste wherever possible
- Services, programming, and supports for producers, including new or young farmers; newcomers; farm system workers such as seasonal agricultural workers and temporary foreign workers; housing insecure community members; people with disabilities; single adults living alone; seniors; and students

Local Economy: Strengthen Regional Economies

Twenty-four distinct actions were identified through the Local Economy section of the survey. The five most common actions identified in this section are laid out here.

1. Encourage the development of accessible and affordable farmers' markets in as many communities as possible.
2. Develop policies and education campaigns that support and incentivize local food production and consumption.
3. Support the development of local food hubs.
4. Provide in-kind or financial support to urban agriculture initiatives that produce and market local food.
5. Incentivize small-scale food retail throughout HRM.

These actions identify a desire to support local food consumption and production, thereby returning food dollars to the local economy. Respondents identified small-scale, local food producers and retailers as key actors in the regional economy, and recognized that, by supporting these producers and retailers, we can promote circular economies. Although these actions identify programming and policy supports as important to strengthening our local economy, respondents also identify a need for infrastructure (e.g., food hubs) that enable greater local production, processing, and distribution power. Such infrastructure allows food system activities that might otherwise be outsourced to remain local, thereby keeping food dollars within our local economies.

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Environment: Enhance Ecological Resilience

Twenty distinct actions were identified through the Local Economy section of the survey. The five most common actions identified in this section are laid out here.

- a. Partner with relevant organizations to develop programs, policies, and public education campaigns to encourage regenerative agriculture practices.
- b. Improve the local accessibility of high quality compost.
- c. Promote delicious, plant-rich or plant-based diets through public education campaigns and institutional procurement policies that prioritize plant-based diets.
- d. Develop seed-sharing resources.
- e. Support and collaborate with farmers on a just transition to regenerative practices, including enabling technologies.

These actions show an interest in supporting local agriculture to be a catalyst for improving the health and resilience of our environment. The most common theme was around promoting regenerative agriculture practices. Respondents also showed an interest in access to high-quality compost suitable for agriculture, which is not widely available in HRM. Several respondents suggest that supporting plant-based diets through public procurement and education programs is an avenue for the public sector to support personal health and ecological resilience in the food system. Together these actions show a desire to make both food production and consumption practices more sustainable so that future generations can enjoy locally grown, high quality, nutritious foods.

Health, Well-being, and Resilience: Grow Knowledge and Skills

Thirty distinct actions were identified through the Health, Well-being, and Resilience section of the survey. The five most common actions identified in this section are laid out here.

- a. Increase the number of community gardens and plot allotments in HRM, and provide residents with more spaces to grow food.
- b. Partner with relevant organizations to equip communities with the knowledge to produce and cook healthy food locally and sustainably, through free and low-cost workshops, cooking classes, and more).
- c. Support operations + development of school meal programming services.
- d. Promote food-skills programming and food-literacy programming in schools and for youth.
- e. Develop services and employ a greater number of dieticians to provide free and low-cost nutritional services and to lead public education campaigns around nutrition (and food as it relates to healthcare).

Respondents showed interest in building community capacity for residents to grow their own food and learn to cook healthy meals at home by increasing the number of community garden spaces and food-skills workshops. Healthy school food programming and food-literacy classes were also a common recommendation, showing the importance of schools as opportunities for public health promotion, nutrition, and community development.

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Celebration: Sharing Our Diversity

Ten distinct actions were identified through the Celebration section of the survey. The five most common actions identified in this section are laid out here.

- a. Partner with relevant organizations to host community barbeques and feasts that bring people together and celebrate food.
- b. Explore ways to increase the cultural and ethnic diversity of produce sold at farmers' markets and in stores.
- c. Support organizations in offering culturally diverse food preparation classes with both in-person and virtual attendance options.
- d. Partner with relevant organizations to host public events where community members can share recipes and celebrate local produce and producers.
- e. Support programming opportunities for newcomers to share knowledge and skills with other newcomers and longtime residents alike.

Food brings people together and provides opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue. These actions show an interest in supporting a greater number of community feasts and festivals which celebrate our cultural diversity, and bring vibrancy to the community. Respondents also recommended that farmers' markets seek to increase the cultural diversity of their products. Food-skills workshops should reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of residents, and provide newcomers with opportunities to share their knowledge with the community.

Targeted Engagement

Targeted Engagements sessions were hosted in collaboration with community partners that work with or represent equity-seeking communities and those particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. These Targeted Engagement sessions ran through Phase One of engagement, starting in November 2021 and ending in April 2022. During these focus group sessions, community members were invited to give feedback on actions and priorities for the Plan. These sessions were designed with the recognition that knowledge and expertise lie in communities that experience disproportionate rates of food insecurity, which is often a result of or compounded by systemic dispossession, and that our role is to provide opportunities for these communities to shape our food system. Sessions for migrant workers in the agriculture and seafood processing sectors were hosted by No One Is Illegal - Nova Scotia via WhatsApp, and were offered in both Spanish and Jamaican Patois. Overall, targeted engagement sessions were designed to remove barriers and support the participation of these equity-seeking communities in as many ways as possible, working with groups when, where, and how they wanted to be involved, in addition to providing community members compensation for participation. A total of 15 Targeted Engagement sessions were hosted in collaboration with our community partners.

During the targeted engagement phase, HRM and the HFPA organized dozens of meetings with community organizations, government officials, and food system actors such as farmers and agricultural groups. This table lists organizations and government partners engaged by HRM and the HFPA.

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COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

AKOMA
Bayers Westwood FRC
Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia
Nova Scotia Health Community Health Boards - Central Zone
Chebucto Connections
Common Roots
Dalhousie Urban Garden Society
Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia
Feed Nova Scotia
Halifax Public Libraries
IWK Health Promotion Team
Loaded Ladle
Meal Exchange
Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre and Centre for Child Development
Migrant Workers in the Canadian Maritimes
No One Is Illegal - Nova Scotia
Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture
Nova Scotia Native Women's Association
ONE North End
reachAbility
Reclaiming Our Roots
Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia
The New Agrarians
The North Grove
United Way Halifax
Veith House
Wooden Monkey Restaurant
YMCA
Young Agrarians-Provincial Ag Land Matching

PROVINCIAL PARTNERS

Joint Prevention and Promotion Committee
Child Poverty Roundtable
Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture
Nova Scotia Department of Community Services
Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Divert Nova Scotia

HRM BUSINESS UNITS

HalifACT
Right of Way
Solid Waste
Planning & Development
Office of Diversity and Inclusion
Parks and Rec: Community Development
Parks and Rec: Urban Forestry
Government Relations and External Affairs: Social Policy
Government Relations and External Affairs: Public Safety
Office of the Mayor

Phase Two Engagement

Feedback

Phase Two of engagement began in May 2022, after a set of proposed recommendations was developed based on a review of Phase One engagement as well as previous work and best-practices research. HRM and the HFPA then sought feedback on the proposed actions to refine and expand them. The actions were first shared with the HFPA Steering Committee members for revisions, then circulated to the partners who participated in targeted engagement sessions. HRM and the HFPA then incorporated comments and suggestions, circling back with partners to review adjusted language.

Advisory Groups

During the analysis of engagement data from Phase One and following the development of Part A of the *JustFOOD Action Plan*, HRM and the HFPA identified several critical gaps in Plan recommendations, including but not limited to recommendations pertaining to Indigenous Peoples, the African Nova Scotian community, and the disability community. Although community members and partners from each of these communities had been consulted with during Phase One, HRM and the HFPA identified a need for further consultation, which was achieved through the formation of three distinct Advisory Groups. Advisors were hired to attend collaborative afternoon workshops facilitated by HRM and the HFPA, where participants met to discuss the recommendations and create community-specific actions. Advisory members are invited to continue to participate in the development and implementation of the *JustFOOD Action Plan* through involvement in one or more of the proposed Working Groups.