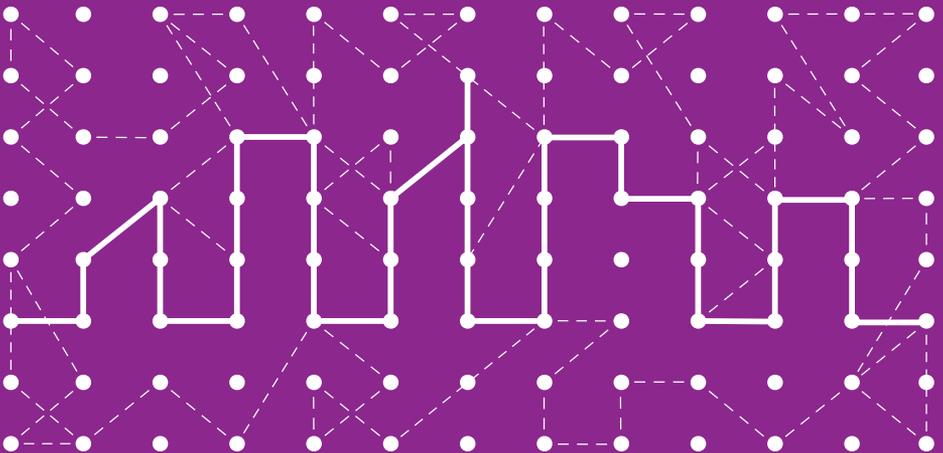


# Healthy Food Retail Action Network

Supporting Access  
to Healthy Food  
throughout NYC / 2018

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# New York City

is home to tens of thousands of food retail establishments: corner stores, bodegas, and supermarkets selling a range of grocery items to their communities. However, years of research show that access to healthy food varies dramatically neighborhood to neighborhood<sup>1</sup>. New York City government and local organizations were early leaders in developing programs, policies, and initiatives to address this inequity and the city is currently home to some of the most innovative, successful and impactful food access programs nationwide<sup>2</sup>.

Not unlike practitioners in other fields, individuals and organizations working on these issues were often working in silos: certain areas of the city became saturated with healthy food retail programs while others had none; data were not collected systematically; survey tools and marketing materials were recreated over and over; and programs doing similar work within a neighborhood were not always collaborating or communicating effectively. Smaller organizations lacked resources to implement healthy food retail projects, while larger organizations searched for local partners. The professional community as a whole also lacked any formal way to share the limitations, challenges, and opportunities of the work with elected officials, policy makers, and other large players.

# The Healthy Food Retail Action Network

is a New York City based alliance that brings together healthy food retail practitioners, non-profit organizations, advocates, academic institutions, business representatives, and policy makers working to increase equitable access to healthy and affordable food in brick and mortar retail venues across New York City.

# Our Community

HFRAN is currently the only citywide coalition that brings together New Yorkers working to increase access to healthy foods in low income areas. Members include nonprofit organizations working on healthy food retail initiatives (approximately 50%) as well as advocates, policymakers, business representatives, academic institutions and students, and members of the public, all of whom are looking to collaboratively create change. These varied groups represent the key players in the New York City food retail landscape, covering all five boroughs. Healthy food initiatives were active in at least 400 individual retail stores in 2017 and over 1,000 in the past decade.



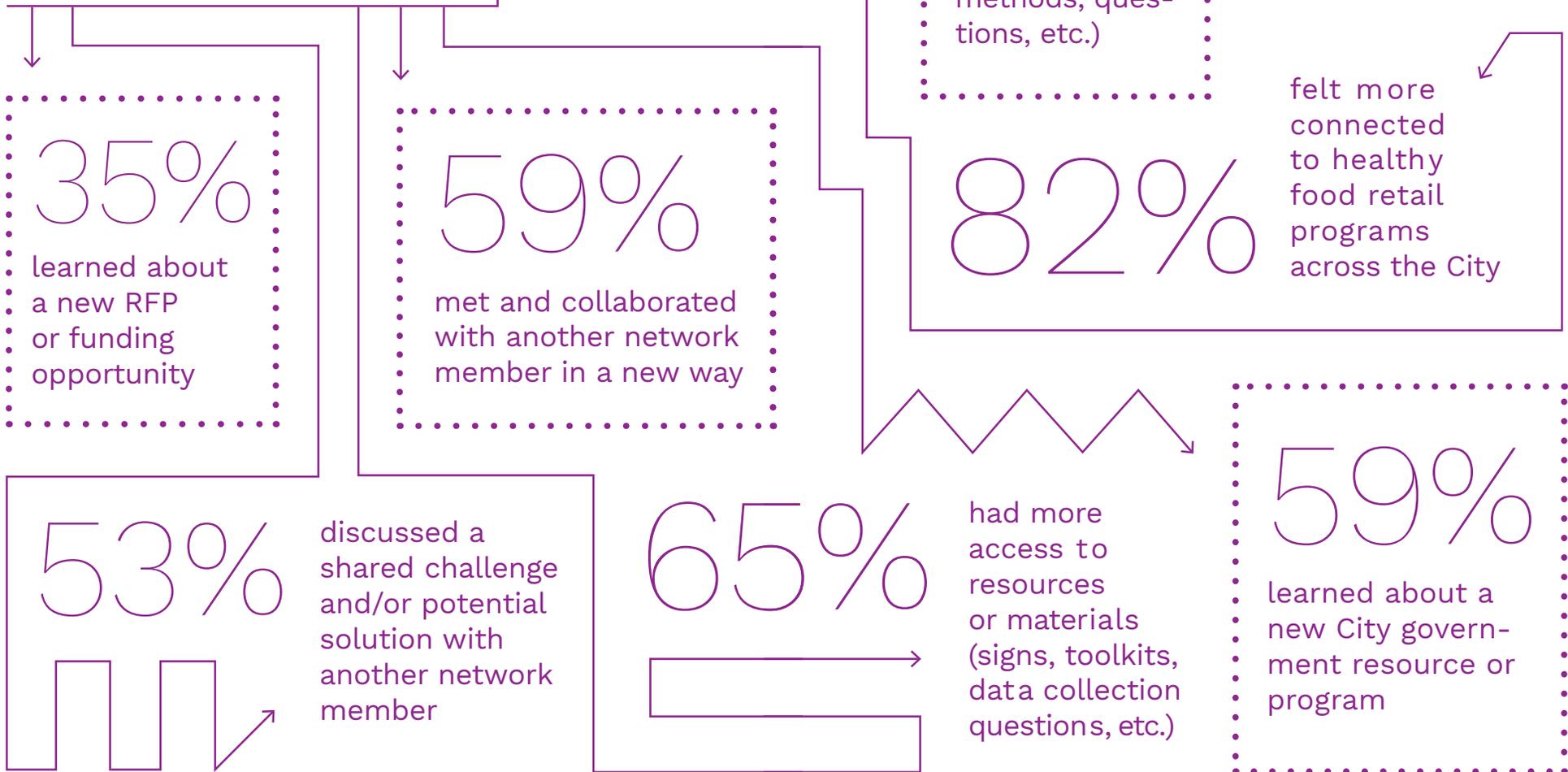
Program efforts focused on initiatives that range from **stocking/promoting healthy foods** ... 88%

to community programming such as **nutrition education, cooking classes, or shopping tours,** ... 75%

and capital improvements such as **physical renovations, opening new stores, or changing store design.** ... 25%

# Our Impact

HFRAN provides immense value to its network throughout the five boroughs. According to the 2017 online survey, as a result of being part of the HFRAN network:



## **HFRAN is a welcome shortcut to getting and staying connected to the healthy food retail community.**

The healthy food retail community is growing and changing as organizations launch new initiatives, rethink existing programs, and experience changes in staffing amidst a shifting funding and policy landscape. Throughout it all, HFRAN is a shared space for people with different experiences, perspectives, and levels of food-retail familiarity to share information and stay up to date on what is going on in the community. As Sabrina Baronberg, Senior Director of Food and Nutrition Programs at Public Health Solutions and former Director of Food Access and Community Health Programs at the DOHMH explained, the value is “being part of

“The connection to city wide work is critical to not overlap or create redundant programs... the City is so big it is helpful to ground City Harvest and be clear on what we should be doing.”

Jennifer Mclean, Chief Operating Officer at City Harvest

a community, being a piece of a larger puzzle, that working together we can really move the needle.”

## **HFRAN facilitates critical relationship building, allowing for innovative collaborations.**

Building strong relationships between network members is key to the success of HFRAN’s stated mission to support productive working relationships and collaboration. Deep knowledge of each other’s mission, programs, and communities as well as trust are critical to understanding how

“A lot of people are doing this work and you don’t have to do it alone. You can work smarter and use each other’s resources and best practices.”

Diana Canuto,  
Retail Merchandising/  
Marketing Manager at  
City Harvest

different initiatives could work together. This is hard work, and it takes time. HFRAN events provide time for colleagues to build relationships and develop of a strong, practice based learning community. For example, when Carmelo Cintron, the Director of Budgets and Healthy Food Financial Initiative at South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation (SoBRO) attended his first HFRAN event, he asked for advice on how to talk to store owners. Several

“I look to the group to see what we would like to be doing but aren’t doing yet.”

Keith Carr, Manager of Community Engagement at City Harvest

“I see it as fact finding. I met someone at a meeting whose program was giving out youth stipends and City Harvest had always said it was not possible. So I could point to that program to show how it could be done.”

David DeVaughn,  
Director of Policy  
& Community  
Engagement at City  
Harvest

people immediately spoke up, to validate that they too had this challenge and discuss what strategies each had tried. After the meeting a representative from Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation and DOHMH Shop Healthy approached Carmelo, leading to a long conversation

“As the American Heart Association reviews Healthy Food Access as a top policy priority, we are grateful for the opportunity to vet ideas and determine points of synergy with others in the network.”

Robin Vitale, Vice  
President of Health  
Strategies for New  
York City at American  
Heart Association

culminating in a request for a meeting between the three organizations to discuss strategies. Under the leadership of HFRAN’s evaluation subcommittee, a shared set of evaluation questions was developed and a report is being created using data from all participating organizations where the same or similar questions were asked

to showcase citywide findings from 2012–2015. This report will provide a baseline for the healthy food retail community, telling a richer story of where the work stands today and where it must go. HFRAN simplifies resource and best practice sharing, increasing efficiencies among groups.

Pooling resources allows network members with similar needs to save time and funds in an environment

“As a funder and not being on the ground, it is really good to understand the landscape on the ground from this group. This is very effective way to get up to date.”

Michelle Bae, Program  
Associate at The  
Laurie M. Tisch  
Illumination Fund

where groups are already strapped for funding and personnel. HFRAN provides an opportunity for groups to combine and share valuable resources such as marketing and promotion signs, educational materials and guides, training resources or toolkits, translated materials, as well as evaluation questions and tools. As Kim Wong, Program Director of Community Health Programs at BronxWorks acknowledged, “No one wants to reinvent the wheel.”

## HFRAN provides space to identify and explore trends and innovations.

HFRAN provides a dedicated time to reflect on the changing healthy food retail landscape, share concerns, and raise new issues with peers. Highlighting and promoting new research enables network members to stay up to date on current events and industry trends. Local academic and research institutions are part of the network, providing a rich source of scholarly knowledge. Frequent HFRAN events helped identify a distressing citywide trend—supermarket closings. Since 2015, New York

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1 Cohen N, Freudenberg N. Creating Healthy Food Access in a Changing Food Retail Sector: Invitation to a Dialogue. New York: CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute, 2016.

City experienced a net loss of approximately a dozen supermarkets<sup>1</sup>, most commonly in areas of increased development and significant food insecurity. Over the course of several HFRAN events, network members shared the news of store closings in their neighborhoods and people noticed the trend. When asked if this

“I don’t know of any other group like HFRAN that brings organizations doing food retail work together to share best practices and work towards strategic collaboration. We are so fortunate to have HFRAN in New York City.”

Molly Hartman, Senior Advisor for Food Policy for New York City

issue could have been identified elsewhere, City Harvest’s Director of Policy & Community Engagement, David DeVaughn, replied, “I don’t know where there is another place where a bunch of food retail people would be talking about this to have identified the problem.”

## HFRAN educates and empowers the network to understand and have a voice in policy change.

The Policy and Advocacy subcommittee identifies and disseminates policy news to network members to inform them of impending changes that may impact their work and provide opportunities to engage in advocacy efforts on the local, state and federal level. For example, when New York State proposed changes to the rules for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) vendors, the network was concerned the rules would favor larger businesses. The subcommittee conducted research, informed the network about the issue and encouraged individual organizations to submit testimony during the State’s public

“I find it valuable to hear about new and innovating and interesting projects that people are working on [and] to be able to take that back to my groups.”

Bonnie Nesbitt,  
Community  
Development Officer  
at Local Initiatives  
Support Corporation  
(LISC) NYC

President of Health Strategies for New York City, Robin Vitale, recently joined the network: “to inform AHA’s efforts around nutrition and healthy food... It’s been very useful to deepen our relationships with those in the front lines of providing healthy foods to New Yorkers, as well as outline the potential partners for policy campaigns.”

comment period. HFRAN also nurtures mutually beneficial relationships between policymakers and those who are impacted by policies. This has proved to be valuable as practitioners can better understand how policies are intended and implemented while policymakers obtain a deeper understanding of community level challenges and priorities. The American Heart Association’s Vice

## Acknowledgements

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