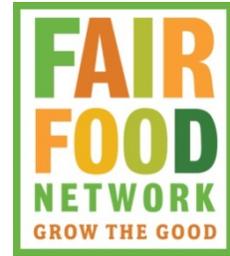


# Strengthening Detroit Voices

## Telephone Town Hall Summary



## Introduction

Fair Food Network (FFN) is a national non-profit that works at the intersection of food systems, sustainability, and social equity to guarantee access to healthy, fresh, and sustainably grown food for all, particularly in underserved communities. FFN's Strengthening Detroit Voices (SDV) project is partnering with over 50 community, legislative, and food systems organizations and leaders to create greater support and advocacy for policies that shrink food deserts and expand regional food systems in southeast Michigan. In order to reach out to low-income families hampered by an inability to access healthy food in Detroit, FFN experimented with a technology that could engage the maximum number of vulnerable households in an interactive event. On December 5th, 2012, Fair Food Network (FFN) held a Telephone Town Hall meeting, the purpose of which was to create an opportunity for thousands of Detroiters to ask questions about accessible, affordable, and healthy food options and to hear from a panel of experts who spoke from a variety of positions in the food systems field.

## TTH Technology & Logistics

The Telephone Town Hall is an exciting communications tool that combines traditional communications methods with contemporary technology to create a highly interactive virtual town hall meeting. TTH technology allows thousands of participants to interact with town hall organizers from the comfort of their home. The process starts with an invitation call to potential participants the day before the actual event so that they know about the topic and the timing of the conversation. The day of the event, invitees receive a second call that connects them to the live conversation – they need not dial in but simply stay on the line when they receive this second call.

Participants can either stay in "listen-only" mode or join the conversation and speak directly to the other participants in the event. Periodic polls invite listener feedback using the telephone keypad; answers are then compiled and reported during the call.

Fair Food Network (FFN) engaged the Washington, DC-based Stones' Phones to implement our TTH. The event headquarters was located at United Way for Southeast Michigan – venue requirements included room to accommodate call screeners with 6 landlines and 6 laptop computers and an area where the moderator, expert panelists, and question screeners gathered.

Stones' Phones provided FFN with templates for the automated calls, and FFN staff edited the template to align with the goals of the project. FFN staff also created the moderator's script, a "playbook" to follow during the course of the event. We can make all of these materials available if you are interested.

TTH staffing needs are as follows:

- The **moderator/host** keeps the interaction between callers lively and the flow between presentations, questions and answers, and polls seamless.
- **Experts/Panelists** give very brief (2 minute) presentations, respond to questions, and encourage audience participation.
- **Call screeners** select callers/participants to ask their questions on the air. The selected callers' questions are forwarded via the computer to the moderator room
- **Question screeners** review the selected callers' questions and decide which panelist should address them.

## TTH Outcomes & Learnings

In work to provide outreach and education about growing a sustainable food system for all, it is vital for FFN to provide information about its programs to those most affected by barriers to healthy food access. TTH technology allowed us to reach out to more than 50,000 residents in our target demographic and provided feedback from those who elected to participate.

Our learnings can be summarized as follows:

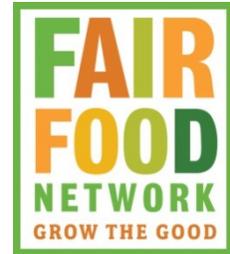
- Using a radio personality as the **moderator** proved to be an enormous advantage: Vickie Thomas is a known radio personality who covers Detroit social issues for WWJ Newsradio 950, so her recorded invitation calls immediately got people's attention. Her professional experience and personal investment in the topic were evident as she kept the conversation flowing seamlessly, answered one caller's question herself, and invited Detroiters to contact her at the radio station if they see signs of food system injustices in their communities. Additionally, she interviewed FFN staff for her radio program, creating further opportunities to promote our programs.
- The moderator and caller **scripts** developed by Stone's Phones were of a generic nature, and initially, the lack of FFN staff knowledge about TTH technology made it difficult to envision an event-specific script; however, the Stone's Phones facilitator was available to walk the staff through the process, and the moderator's professional experience made the script a successful playbook for the event.
- The qualifications of our expert **panelists** prepared us for a variety of questions that might come from the general public:
  - o Dr. Oran Hesterman (president, FFN) addressed the majority of food systems questions;
  - o DeWayne Wells (president, Gleaners Community Food Bank) took questions related to emergency food relief.
  - o Eric Davis (Director, Food Initiative of United Way for Southeast Michigan) answered local food policy questions and inquiries about food assistance benefits available from state agencies.
- The **call screeners**, a combination of FFN staff and volunteers, did an exceptional job as the first point of contact for callers, condensing their questions for forwarding to the **question screeners** for assignment to panelists. Call screeners need to be acquainted with the topic of the townhall in order to select the most thought-provoking questions and must also be able to elicit a concise question from callers in order to answer as many calls as possible in a limited time.
- The **callers** who participated were passionate about the food issues that were covered. An important advantage of the TTH technology is that it allows those who may have felt disenfranchised in the past to voice their concerns. In fact, our very first caller asked why this conversation hasn't happened before and said it was high time that it did.
- The United Way office was the perfect **venue** for the TTH meeting: speaking from a venue where social work is paramount helped with credibility. The rooms were adequate for our purposes, and the staff was helpful in every way.

## Conclusion

After employing the innovative TTH communications technology, FFN sees myriad possible applications for future use, including informing neighborhood residents when the Double Up Food Bucks program is available in grocery stores.

# Strengthening Detroit Voices

Telephone Town Hall Results | December 5, 2012



## Caller Statistics

Invitation calls made	47,751
Invitation calls answered live	11,100
Invitation accepted	7,485 (67%)
Participants on entire length of call	450+
Participants screened for comment/question	127
Participants who spoke on air	12

## Questions

Caller questions predominantly focused on access (or the lack thereof) of healthy foods in their neighborhoods, how to ensure that healthy foods are in the local grocery stores, and why aren't there more local grocery stores?

Poll questions

- Where do you get most of your groceries?

Grocery store	504	84%
Convenience store	31	5%
Farmers' market	44	7%
Food bank	19	3%
- Have you heard of FFN's Double up Food Bucks program?

Yes	122	29%
No	296	71%
- What is the biggest issue you face in feeding your family healthy food?

Too expensive	129	58%
No transportation	50	22%
No time	20	9%
Don't know enough about healthy food/preparation	25	11%
- Do you have a Bridge Card?

Yes	89	38%
No	121	52%
Would like more info	26	11%

## Conclusion

The quantitative data that this innovative communications methodology provided paled in comparison to the qualitative data provided about healthy food access concerns directly from the mouths of underserved Detroiters.

For more information on Strengthening Detroit Voices, including the audio recording of the Telephone Town Hall, please visit <http://www.fairfoodnetwork.org/what-we-do/projects/strengthening-detroit-voices>.