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Introduction

A Message From the Executive Director

Since the Farmers Market Coalition was founded in 2007, it has served as a resource and a guide to farmers markets across the United States. During those twelve years, the farmers market sector has experienced massive growth and change and FMC has grown and changed along with it. With robust members in all 50 states, FMC has grown to be the only national organization advocating for and supporting the needs of farmers markets. Within the sector, FMC is admired for our heart, and respected for our expertise. This time has not been without its challenges as well, both for the sector and for the organization. It is for these reasons that the FMC board tasked me with developing a plan to guide the organization into the next phase in its development.

Below you can read about the process, what we learned, what we believe we need to do, and how we expect to do it. But what you won't find below is something that I feel the need to convey here, and that is my deep feelings of pride and gratitude for the result of this process. I am tremendously proud of how well we have delivered on our original goals and timeline for the process and what a detailed, usable document we have created. A document that is already guiding us towards our next stage. I am grateful to the staff, board, members, and other stakeholders for the level of input and engagement paid do this process. That so many people care so deeply about this organization is a testament to the tremendous work it has done and the lives it has impacted over its relatively short lifespan. I am further grateful that I have been given the tremendous opportunity to help shepherd FMC into the next chapter in it’s life. It is a great honor and I take that responsibility with the utmost sincerity.

A special thanks goes out to FMC board members who served on our Strategic Planning Task Force: Anupama Joshi, Allen Moy, Hugo Mogollon, Ross Dakin, and Sagdrina Jalal.

And the specialist of thanks goes to Nancy Mendrala who has provided invaluable guidance and support through every step in this process. Her probing questions help ensure that the final plan was one that was carefully considered and intentionally decided and our regular check ins held me accountable for making progress each week. Without Nancy we would not have this plan at this time. Thank you Nancy.

Ben Feldman
Executive Director
Farmers Market Coalition
Background

The intent of this strategic planning process was to identify FMC’s core functions, set key goals in relation to those functions, outline strategies to achieve those goals, and draft implementation tactics, resulting in a plan for the organization’s next five years. Simultaneously, the process itself facilitated organizational cohesion among the board and staff; improved organization-wide clarity on FMC purpose, representation, and role; and increased transparency and inclusion with members and other stakeholders.

In spring 2018, FMC staff and board members met in Washington DC for an in-person retreat, during which we identified 5 priority areas for work in the short to medium term (see Appendix). With significant changes with the organization and to the landscape of the farmers market field as a whole, we decided to build upon the 2018 priorities and strategies and develop a more comprehensive five year strategic plan. Notably, we felt it important to solicit feedback from members and external stakeholders to get a sense of how FMC is viewed externally and to ensure that our assumptions about our members’ needs are verified by the members themselves.

In addition to soliciting feedback from a wide set of stakeholders, we also looked carefully at the organization’s internal processes, systems, and procedures through an organizational assessment in order to strengthen FMC’s core operational functions.

Process

We began the process with one-on-one conversations between FMC’s Executive Director and individual staff and board members, and a review of our most recent membership survey. We created a board level Strategic Planning Task Force that identified the following phases for the strategic review process:

**Phase One: Information Gathering** *(April - May 2019)*
- Internal Assessment (FMC Staff and Board)
- Forward Looking (Staff, Board, Members, External Stakeholders)

**Phase Two: Discussion** *(8 meetings from March - June 2019)*
- Membership Meetings
- Board and Staff
- Monthly meetings with State Farmers Market Leaders

**Phase Three: Creation of Strategic Plan Documents** *(July - October 2019)*

**Phase Four: Implementation** *(October 2019 - May 2024)*
Who are we?

FMC was founded by a cohort of market operators from across the U.S. with ongoing support from USDA and with national partners such as Projects for Public Spaces (PPS) and The Wallace Center at Winrock. Originally loosely organized as the Farmers Market Consortium in 2005, the entity was formally incorporated as Farmers Market Coalition in 2007. Although much has changed since then, FMC’s mission remains: “to strengthen farmers markets for the benefit of farmers, consumers, and communities.”

Stakeholders responses revealed that FMC is a trusted, valued and respected organization that occupies a unique niche. While other entities may touch on parts of the work of FMC, no other organization is focused on the needs of farmers market operators at the national level. “FMC stands out as the only national organization that focuses primarily on farmers’ markets, their managers and their operators. Others that work in this area focus on farmers’ markets as one of several outlets for their primary constituency - farmers, distributors, customers, etc.”

One question we sought to clarify as part of this strategic planning process is: Who does FMC represent? Historically, FMC has often tried to serve all farmers market stakeholders (markets, farmers, consumers, etc.) equally without identifying our primary stakeholder. As one respondent put it, “I think we try to be all things to all people, and as a result we dilute our efficacy.”

The feedback we received consistently supported the idea that FMC’s primary stakeholder is the farmers market operator. “The most important [stakeholder], by far, is market organizations. Very few operators have enough history or capacity to create the resources that FMC provides. From integrity tools to the legal toolkit, to consumer education programs like POP, small operators need a central source for these resources.” These responses from stakeholders reinforce the idea that while farmers markets exist to benefit farmers, consumers, and communities, FMC’s primary role is to support the individuals and entities that operate farmers markets. This notion is present in FMC’s mission (“strengthen farmers markets”) and through most of FMC’s historic activity, but it has not always been clearly communicated or universally understood. A more explicit focus on farmers market operators will allow FMC to better define our range of programs and activities in pursuit of our mission.

In addition to providing clarity around FMC’s unique role and core stakeholders, the feedback process also helped to solidify the scope of FMC’s work as falling into two main categories: supporting market operators ability to do their work more effectively; and providing a unified, national voice for market operators to external stakeholders and decision-makers. According to one stakeholder, FMC provides “Advocacy and allyship!! FMC is such a great connector for us all, and a strong resource to help operators, managers, and farmers across all states navigate legal issues, risk management, nutrition incentive programs, and more!!“ These ideas are expanded upon in section 4 below.
Why farmers markets?

As was pointed out by an FMC board member, farmers markets do not exist simply as an end in and of themselves, they are also a tool. A tool that is an effective way to increase farmer revenue, to support sustainable agriculture practitioners, to increase fresh food access, to grow and sustain small businesses, and to bring communities together. We support farmers markets for the wide range of benefits that they provide and the values upon which they are based. FMC’s work should help to ensure that farmers markets are achieving these benefits and supporting these values, offer ways for markets to demonstrate their success, and share those successes with decisionmakers.

What is a farmers market?

Historically, FMC has shied away from creating a strict definition for farmers markets, preferring to allow communities to create their own definitions based on their own needs. In 2010, the FMC board created a definition task force based on the concern that the term ‘farmers market’ was “coveted from marketing and public image perspectives and is not always used with sufficient integrity or in the best interest of family farms.” The committee cited 5 reasons for needing a definition of a farmers market: consumer confusion, decisionmaker confusion, increasing support for farmers and farmland protection, to support farmers entrance into local food systems, and to improve data integrity about farmers markets.

Ultimately, that committee opted not to create a hard and fast definition, instead adopting the following text as a guide to what constitutes a farmers market:

A farmers market operates multiple times per year and is organized for the purpose of facilitating personal connections that create mutual benefits for local farmers, shoppers and communities. To fulfill that objective farmers markets define the term local, regularly communicate that definition to the public, and implement rules/guidelines of operation that ensure that the farmers market consists principally of farms selling directly to the public products that the farms have produced.

In the decade since, the need for clarity around what is and what is not a farmers market has come into the spotlight many times. Developing a rigid definition may once again prove challenging given the variety that exists within and among communities. Further, a rigid definition may not be necessary. FMC can and should do more to put forward our perspective on what constitutes a farmers market focusing in on the idea that “farmers market consists principally of farms selling directly to the public products that the farms have produced.”

Additionally, based on the work of FMC Senior Advisor Darlene Wonik, FMC has begun to make use of market typologies to characterize similar groupings of markets with similar features. Recognizing the diversity that exists within our members will allow FMC to help them more effectively deliver on their mission and values. (See appendix.)
Core FMC Functions

The strategic planning process clarified the need to be more explicit that the farmers market operator is FMC’s primary stakeholder and that our work divides into two main categories: supporting market operators ability to do their work more effectively and providing a voice for market operators to external stakeholders and decision-makers. The goals and strategies outlined below are viewed through this lens.

Within this context, activities such as training, technical assistance, resource development, and efforts to professionalize the industry (both to member markets and state associations) fall under supporting market operators. Activities such as federal policy advocacy, consumer education, and promotion of farmers markets fall under providing a unifying voice for market operators.

Supporting Farmers Market Operators

Farmers market operators occupy a unique and often overlooked position within the food system. Farmers markets are often romanticized or viewed as “trendy” in popular culture, however there is a significant gulf between that view and public support for the operational needs of markets. While farmers markets are often celebrated for all the services that they provide to farmers, shoppers, and communities, these discussions often fail to recognize the pivotal role that operators play in ensuring the success of that market and the services it provides.

Recognizing that FMC is the only national organization dedicated to supporting and strengthening farmers markets, it is vital that we continue to provide resources, training, and technical assistance to farmers market operators and managers. It is also necessary to acknowledge that while all farmers markets share certain characteristics, farmers markets are reflections of their individual communities and significant variety exists in size, scope, mission, resources, and capacity. Ongoing FMC work has identified market clusters or “typologies” (see appendix) and . In order to truly serve the breadth of the farmers market industry, it is imperative that FMC provide value across the range of market typologies.

Based on stakeholder feedback there are a number of important areas for FMC to focus on within the category of Supporting Farmers Market Operators.
Training and Technical Assistance

"Market manager turnover is a threat to [the] sector as low capacity markets can't keep up with changing consumer marketplace and regulatory/organizational demands."

Stakeholders, in particular market operators, highlighted the challenging and changing nature of the job of farmers market manager. The need for training and direct support for farmers market managers is clear. While some states have robust training programs for market managers, others lack such programs entirely and no consistent standard exists nationally. Further, markets often lack the internal resources or know how to address challenges to the market, particularly ones that have unique impacts on the farmers market sector but are rooted in larger and more complex issues.

Farmers Market Coalition is viewed by our stakeholders as experts on farmers markets and they want our guidance on how to navigate the challenges that they are facing. Opportunities exist for FMC to expand our role in efforts to train and provide technical assistance to markets on a range of topics and to assist them in developing their individual and organizational capacity.

Training and Technical Assistance Goals and Strategies

**Goal:** Increase the quality and reach of farmers market training programs nationwide

**Strategy:** Working from existing training programs already offered by state associations and academic partners, develop a national “Markets 101” training program that fills in the gaps and focuses on capacity building and risk management for market operators

**Strategy:** Develop topic-focused training programs that cross states, such as incentive work, benefit programs, evaluation, and grant reporting

**Goal:** Continue to provide a venue for one on one support to member markets through a more formal process

**Strategy:** Establish office hours, regular Clinics around topics

**Strategy:** Promote the Technical Assistance form on website, link it to appropriate sets of resources.

**Goal:** Continue to support the professional development of market managers

**Strategy:** Webinar series on market managers specific professional development

**Strategy:** continue to lead the drafting of farmers markets typology through Metrics profile data, shared data from market partners, and contracted analysis

**Strategy:** Create more communication content for FMC to amplify the role of operators
Resource Development

Among stakeholders, the development of resources was consistently cited as one of FMC’s most valuable contributions to the field. As one respondent stated, FMC “provides a lot of resources I’ve never seen anywhere else since it is very specifically for farmers markets.” Stakeholders consistently referenced the Farmers Market Metrics, the Farmers Market Legal Toolkit, the National Farmers Market Toolkit, Power of Produce, and the Resource Library as important and unique resources. FMC is well positioned to share and expand resources and stakeholders suggested on specific topic areas for future development.

Resource Development Goals and Strategies

| Goal: Continue to develop resources (toolkits, programs, fee-for-service offerings) to support the needs of member markets |
| Strategy: Create toolkits to support member markets engagement in emerging issues of climate change and racial/economic justice and on other emerging topics |
| Strategy: Develop an accredited market program to highlight markets that deliver outstanding results on the range of services markets can offer to communities |
| Goal: Organize FMC resources for ease of access and develop system to rate usage and quality |
| Strategy: Complete and launch website redesign |
| Strategy: Explore and evaluate approaches for collecting and analysing usage data and other feedback |
Research and Data Collection

FMC has been on the forefront of promoting and facilitating the culture of data collection at farmers markets over the last five years. While tremendous progress has been made, there are still major gaps in the availability of data about the industry and a need to continue to build a culture of data collection. Recently, FMC’s primary focus has been the Farmers Market Metrics Program. Stakeholder feedback suggests that there is an opportunity for FMC to think more broadly about our contribution to the field in terms of research, data collection, evaluation and reporting on farmers markets, particularly in the context of federal grant programs. It is also important that FMC lead the effort to increase the data and research in the public discourse about the impacts of farmers markets, particularly research focused on the role of market operators and managers have on those impacts.

Research and Data Collection Goals and Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Increase the culture of data collection among farmers market operators</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Continue to promote and expand use of Metrics and other tools available to farmers markets. Add resources for collection, and training for network leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Provide technical assistance to farmers markets, state associations, and Farmers Market Promotion Program grantees on data collection and evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong> Increase the number of articles submitted to scholarly journals about the positive impacts that farmers markets can have on communities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Select appropriate opportunities to write and publish on the national perspective, including partnering with state leaders and flagship markets to co-author.</td>
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Technology

Farmers market operators interact with technology that falls into four main categories: market management software, SNAP and Credit/Debit processing technology, data collection technology, and technology used for promotion or educational purposes. At present, the unique needs of the industry are only partly met as market operators typically lack the resources to develop custom applications and products created by technology companies often lack a basic understanding of the farmers market sector. Experience with data collection and SNAP processing, as well as national scope, positions FMC well to engage with existing technology providers and improve the technology available to market operators.

Technology Goals and Strategies

**Goal:** Contribute to the advancement of appropriate technology that supports the needs of farmers market operators within the managerial and funding capacity of market organizations

**Strategy:** Inventory and assess technology systems used by local markets and state associations

**Strategy:** Convene groups of market operators, technology experts, and other key participants to improve understanding and overcome barriers for the farmers market industry
State and Network Associations

Since FMC’s founding, the landscape of state associations has changed considerably as more state associations have developed, but often struggle with accessing sufficient resources and developing capacity. As one stakeholder stated: “There is a big opportunity to engage with state/regional market associations to increase the number and capacity of these organizations.” Significant questions also exist in terms of how FMC can engage with state associations to avoid competition and provide support for capacity building.

State Association Goals and Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Improve the level of support to, and engagement with state associations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Continue to offer monthly calls with state leaders, thereby networking those leaders and improving the real-time analysis FMC is able to provide the field through the sharing and discussion of issues among state leaders. Continue to refine the contact between state and network leaders and FMC to deepen the partnerships with leaders.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Provide training and professional development opportunities for state leaders through expanding training and technical assistance for markets. By establishing and overseeing projects that address the core competencies of a well-managed market organization, FMC and state leaders can jointly create appropriate interventions into building the capacity of those organizations without duplication of effort.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Define the obligations and expectations of both FMC and state associations, including necessary data sharing of network level types and functions.</td>
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Providing a Voice for Farmer Markets Operators

A critical aspect of the role that stakeholders perceive for FMC is providing a voice to stakeholders outside the industry, whether it be in terms of work to advance the policy landscape for farmers market operators, providing education and promotion to potential consumers, or communicating within the industry about important issues or changes. While this is a role that FMC has inhabited there exists significant opportunity for the organization to embrace the role as a leader in the industry and do more to be a voice for the industry.

Improving the policy landscape for FMIs

Stakeholders repeatedly mention policy advocacy as a core function for FMC. As one stakeholder succinctly put it: “Policy work is super valuable.” This includes direct advocacy, grassroots coordination, as well as relationship building with agencies, and communication with members. “FMC has always done a stellar job of sharing updates with stakeholders, even if the update is, ‘there isn’t an update, but we’re continuing to push for one.’” In the lead up to the 2018 Farm Bill, FMC made its heaviest investment in policy advocacy by hiring a part time Policy Director. FMC has also had some recent policy successes regarding WIC but to have ongoing, sustained success, FMC will need to build stronger relationships with other policy organizations, federal agencies, and elected officials. We will also need to build champions from within the movement who are trained, comfortable, and prepared to engage with elected leaders. In particular, FMC should plan to build the capacity and relationships to ensure policy success in the next farm bill.

Improving the policy landscape for FMs goals and strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Build a stronger relationship with USDA, especially AMS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy: Regular communication with AMS staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy: Hire DC-based policy staff</td>
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<tr>
<th>Goal: Ensure that federal programs that support farmers markets are well funded and supported by members of congress</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy: Direct FMC Advocacy with federal elected officials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy: Build the advocacy capacity of FMC member markets and state associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy: Identify farmers’ markets in districts of key congressional representatives and develop the policy skills of key farmers’ market leaders in those areas</td>
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farmersmarketcoalition.org
Increasing the Profile of farmers markets to decisionmakers, funders, consumers

Stakeholders view FMC as playing an important role tracking national trends and stories and providing perspective on them:

"Working with so many different markets across the country, FMC is able to create statistics that quickly help tell the story of markets and the farmers." Communication to member markets was pointed to as a strength of FMC: "(A strength is) Providing a cohesive, national platform for markets - you are excellent at this because you get the messages right, visualize them effectively, and share them consistently."

Members would appreciate more information from FMC about the state of the industry:

"What is lacking is feedback on market conditions in real-time throughout the country. We essentially have to wait several years for USDA survey data to get released to know how the sector is doing. There seems to be a role FMC could have at getting a more up-to-date sense of how the sector is performing that hasn't yet gotten developed."

FMC can also play an important role in communicating to shoppers and the general public about important issues facing the industry. Farmers market managers play a critical and often overlooked role in the alternative food system, including the success of consumer facing food access and health programs, as well as farmer support programs. In addition, as the terminology around local food has become more widely used, it has also been diluted and co-opted. More than one stakeholder identified “food retail that steals the language of [farmers markets]” as a pressing, current threat. As another put it, “I don't think resellers or grocery stores should be allowed to be called ‘Farmers Markets.’ It’s confusing for consumers.” Questions of price were also raised: “How do we break the stereotype about markets being expensive, privileged spaces?”
## Increasing the Profile of farmers markets Goals and Strategies

**Goal:** Increase opportunities for members to share information and engage with FMC so that information can inform FMC activities and communications.

**Strategy:** create a network of peer mentors

**Goal:** Address the use of “farmers market” as a marketing term used by outlets unrelated to actual farmers markets

**Strategy:** Support the development of state definitions for farmers markets

**Strategy:** Develop and conduct consumer education about the difference between direct ag sales and other formats

**Strategy:** Make state partners aware of opportunities to file claims against false advertising

**Goal:** Encourage the collection of data to offer relevant quality and price comparisons with other outlets, work with researchers and media to use appropriate comparisons.

**Strategy:** Work with researchers to conduct more price comparison and publicize the results

**Goal:** Raise the profile or farmers market operators/managers as critical components of the food system

**Strategy:** Incorporate messaging about the central role market operators/managers plan in achieving farmers market successes

**Goal:** Highlight unique aspects of farmers markets

**Strategy:** Focus messaging around direct farmer to consumer rather than local
Organizational Assessment

In order to advance the core mission and achieve key goals, it is essential that FMC’s operational foundation reflects and supports organizational priorities. The strategic planning process included a critical examination of the structure and function of both the board and daily operations, identifying strengths and weaknesses and exploring ways to improve.

Organization Oversight

Overall, there is a lack of clarity around the functioning of the board, how it connects to FMC’s vision and goals and the commitments needed to advance the organization. This illustrates the timeliness of revisiting the workings of the board, starting with organizational goals and making sure the board and its efforts are structured to best support the organization. There is also a recognition among board and staff that the organization is in flux and that this provides an opportunity to regroup, refocus and prioritize.

Among board members, understanding of responsibilities and obligations tend to be expressed in terms that are typical for any board rather than specifically tied to FMC.

“I believe that I have a good understanding of what the responsibilities of any nonprofit Board member should be, but I don’t think there is a shared understanding among all Board members.”

There isn’t a clear differentiation between responsibilities for guidance and oversight versus time commitments. Many express their obligations in terms of attending meetings.

The internal structure (committees) and process (elections) of the board are generally seen as good but there is still a lack of clarity on detail and the sense that the process has gotten muddled recently.

“I thought they were until the last election. I felt very out of the loop and attributed it my own "busyness" until other board members expressed that we went somewhat away from procedure.”

There is also a need to ensure the board composition and committee structure meet FMC’s current priorities.

“We see the need to raise more money, raise our profile, strengthen the organizational infrastructure, and have a bigger impact on policy. Trying to accomplish all four simultaneously means that we are not targeting Board members who have a proven track record in any of those areas.”

Currently, board members do not have a clear sense of their efforts in terms of policy decisions.

“Board meetings can feel rushed and sometimes it is not clear why an item was added to the agenda and what the desired outcome is: a Board decision, Board input, informational only for the Board, etc.”
Some note earlier momentum – and the benefit of in-person board meetings – to improve the board’s policy making function.

“I think the board made tremendous headway in this regard at the in person meeting in 2018. I think the absence of that in person meeting made it difficult to continue that work in 2019.”

There is broad agreement among board and staff on the need to improve efforts – and clarify the board’s role – related to the budget and funding for the organization.

“Fundraising efforts are minimal. Staff has largely been responsible for fundraising. A different approach is critical. Board and staff should develop a common strategy with clear expectations.”

There is recognition that this is part of a larger conversation about the priorities, programs and implementation.

“I think we are moving towards a more strategic approach, but I believe the team would benefit from some designated time to think through what our fundraising strategies are, what kind of work we specifically want to apply for, and what language we can use to do so.”

External Communications

Most see FMC’s communications as effective and note recent progress. There are also suggestions for improvement, including doing more to encourage members to further discuss and share information.

“…our communications are effective and improving (especially for membership), but could see significant improvement with full staffing, an adequate budget…, and enough administration time to track and analyze communication data to further refine our plan.”

Among the staff, there is a recognition of the challenge of communicating a large volume of information related to programs and priorities and the need for an efficient strategy to accomplish this effectively.

“…our ability to develop, manage, improve, and promote the programs (due to limited capacity) present the greatest challenge toward their growth and stunts their overall effectiveness.”

Asked whether members have an accurate perception of FMC’s efforts, many think there is a lack of clarity and room for improvement.

“…I myself don’t have an accurate idea of the priorities and efforts of the organization.”

Even among those board members who say priorities are clear to members, each references a different set programs. Staff also see members’ perceptions as varied – some have a good sense, some don’t -- due in part due to competing narratives.
“I think we often try to showcase all of our various priorities at once which may muddle the perception of FMC by outside stakeholders and constituents.”

A theme that emerges across several questions is the need for improved information flow and more effective communication. For example, a calendar with regular meetings set well in advance and important events clearly indicated allowing for more advance consideration rather than short term, sometimes hurried, reactions.

**Staff & Internal Operations**

There is also the opportunity to increase awareness of efforts between the board and the staff which would make each group more effective in its efforts. The board would benefit from a better sense of staff responsibilities and operational logistics.

“It would be helpful for there to be a guide, perhaps distributed during the Board orientation, that describes staff members’ roles and that provide guidance on how Board members should interact with staff.”

Similarly, the staff would benefit from a clearer sense of the boards thinking on direction, policies, and priorities. They feel disconnected from the board and decision making context.

“... I rarely am aware of what explicit directions and imperatives come from [board meetings].”

Without clear direction, there is a sense that staff actions are disconnected from intent and priorities. Efforts have been more reactive than proactive and this is seen as inefficient.

“I think this speaks to the disconnect among staff on different projects, and the need for collaboration across major initiatives and a regular regroup on how programs can dovetail and build upon each other.”

Staff are also looking for more structure, clarity, and intent in their roles.

“I also think we need a firm organizational structure that identifies which team member handles which initiatives and responsibilities.”
Organizational Development

Based on the review of operational procedures and input from board and staff, the following are the organizational development priorities:

Membership

FMC will be a more powerful and effective organization if it has a larger number of members, both in the ability to support markets and leverage best practices, and as an effective national voice. However, membership is unlikely to be a major source of revenue for FMC given the relatively small size of the farmers market industry and the limited resources of most markets. In recent years, FMC has prioritized increasing membership numbers primarily through partnerships with state farmers market associations.

Membership Goals and Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Increase the number of FMC members</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Clarify FMC member value proposition (more member-only resources)</td>
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<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Promote the value of contributing to a national voice advocating for farmers markets</td>
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<th>Goal: Increase engagement with FMC members</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Define goals for types and levels of engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Clearly define support strategy for individual member markets</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Partner with state and network leaders on educational offerings (webinars)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Develop member communications strategy for new and current members, informing them of FMC resources, benefits, initiatives and opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<th>Goal: In order to better and more efficiently serve members, create better systems for onboarding, renewing and offering member services</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Transition from manual entry of state association members to automated coupon codes</td>
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<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Develop systems to better track membership</td>
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Membership Questions for the future:

- Should markets in states with FMC state association partners only be able to join through that state association?

- “The process by which member markets (particularly those who are enrolled by virtue of their state’s membership to FMC) are onboard and connected to their membership services is pretty ineffective.”

- Should FMC distinguish individual market manager membership from memberships for market operators?

- Should FMC move to a model where basic membership is free but access to services and resources requires an additional contribution or a level of membership?
**Fundraising**

Given the membership goals outlined in the previous section, it imperative that FMC be effective in our other fundraising activities. As noted above, historically, FMC board fundraising has been limited. Fundraising activities have come primarily from the staff and have been focused mainly on government funding sources. While federal funding can be useful in executing work, such opportunities require a heavy investment of staff time to apply, report, and administer while providing limited support for administrative and overhead expenses. More than one stakeholder pointed out that FMC sometimes competes with member markets and state association partners for funding.

“Obviously state and regional associations ‘compete’ at the local level but it’s not apples to apples.”

FMC should pursue a fundraising strategy that minimizes direct competition and prioritizes partnerships with members and state associations and should engage in efforts to increase and broaden the overall funding pool available to farmers markets.

**Fundraising Goals and Strategies**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Increase income donated or facilitated by the FMC board fundraising</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Set targets for board donations and board responsible giving</td>
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<th>Goal: Diversify funding sources and increase unrestricted funds</th>
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<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> Develop a plan for specific fundraising goals and a roadmap for achieving those goals</td>
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| Strategy: Develop earned income/fee for service programs that allow FMC to deliver on our mission while earning revenue |

| Strategy: Design opportunities for sponsorship and underwriting of current FMC programs and activities. Implement a sponsor / corporate / foundation pipeline for engagement and relationship tracking |

| Strategy: Develop partnerships that generate revenue for FMC through lead generation or referral |

| Strategy: Develop merchandising plan to increase revenue from FMC merchandise |
Financial Systems

The assessment of FMC’s financial systems revealed a number of opportunities to improve our financial systems in order to better track and report on the finances of the organization. These improvements will also help ensure completion of and compliance with grants. While these items are included within this plan, improvements are already well underway.

Financial Systems Goals and Strategies

**Goal:** Improve financial tracking and reporting systems in order to provide more accurate, detailed and actionable information about the financial health of the organization

**Strategies:** transition to accrual accounting, create financial manual, revise chart of accounts

**Strategy:** implement more thorough board engagement procedures with regards to financial reports (goal setting, assessment, strategies, and required involvement)
Stakeholders have a high opinion of FMC staff and praise their hard work. “The staff is great and has a big heart. The board members, and farmers market manager community in general, still has an amazing spirit. The energy and passion is really inspiring.” While staff continue to produce excellent quality outcomes, as noted above, they need additional support and structure to be most effective in their roles. It is imperative for the ongoing success of the organization that we invest in and improve our internal systems to support our staff.

**Staff Support and Development Goals and Strategies**

**Goal:** improve staff communication, morale, accountability, and documentation

**Strategy:** Develop a program to more clearly define FMC’s needs and capacity to utilize interns and volunteers

**Strategy:** Prioritize staff professional development by implementing formal staff education and development policies

**Strategy:** Develop evaluation process and performance measure tracking

**Strategy:** Develop staffing structure with clear division of reporting structure and responsibilities

**Strategy:** Implement systems to ensure regular and consistent communication among and across staff teams

**Strategy:** Prioritize opportunities for staff to engage in internal team-building and external networking within the field

**Strategy:** Institute annual in-person or virtual staff retreats for team building, strategic planning, and professional development.

**Strategy:** Review staff compensation and benefits offerings
Board Responsibilities

As noted previously, many board members, as well as some staff, identified a significant gap with regard to both the board’s knowledge of FMC and in the skill set necessary to most effectively support the implementation of FMC’s mission: “Since the board is primarily comprised of farmers market managers, functionally it acts more like a technical advisory committee. The board is sorely lacking representatives [and] that can provide more strategic influence and access to support...the process by which board members are chosen needs a considerable reevaluation.” Multiple board members also pointed to the nomination and election process as needing improvement in order to ensure that the board represents the skills, experience, and assets necessary for the organization.

Board Responsibilities Goals and Strategies

**Goal:** Increase board knowledge of roles and responsibilities, understanding of FMC, and engagement with and commitment to organization needs

**Strategy:** Revise FMC board handbook, train board members more fully, revise recruitment and election process

**Strategy:** Integrate more rigorous onboarding procedures for new board members

**Strategy:** Review and formalize board committees, structure, chairs, obligations and meeting frequency

**Strategy:** Develop board policy for engagement with staff

**Goal:** Ensure that the board composition, size, structure and experience matches the needs of the organization

**Strategy:** Evaluate board’s composition and FMC’s needs and priorities and compare to similar organizations

**Strategy:** Revise board member nomination and election process

Other Questions about the structure of FMC to consider for the future:

- *Should FMC remain independent or consider merging with other like-minded organization, or a fiscal sponsorship arrangement?*

- *Should FMC expand its focus from farmers markets to include other forms of direct farmer to consumer sales such as CSAs and farm stands?*

- *Should FMC rebrand to include the work National in our name?*
Emergent Issues

The external issue that seems to be on most of stakeholders’ minds is how to keep markets relevant as consumers shift how and where they purchase their groceries, including the challenge of online order/delivery as competition (“convenience and speed versus quality and access for all”). FMC needs to address “Ways farmers markets can be more convenient to shoppers [and] begin a conversation about how the shopper demographics are likely to change in the next decade or so and begin brainstorming ideas on how to meet the needs of the next generation of shoppers.” Most also see a role for FMC regarding social equity and climate change in terms of supporting markets who many see as being on the ‘front lines’ of these issues. This support could come in the form of toolkits and campaigns.

“Markets continually are threatened by the drive towards consumers seeking out convenience as their top priority.”

| Goal: Provide leadership and guidance to the farmers market field on emerging issues that are of importance for farmers market operators |
| Strategy: Provide a channel to discuss and explore emerging topics, including an annual webinar and member survey questions |
| Strategy: Develop resources and toolkits on emerging issues to provide guidance to market operators |