

School Food & Community Organizing

YOUTH FOOD ADVOCATES QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



Cover Photo: YFA Summer Leadership Training, August 2021

What I learned About Community Organizing

By Eliza Porsella

My personal experience learning about community organizing this summer has been hard work and pure effort. For my project, I focused on improving the options served in cafeterias in terms of dietary restrictions and allergies. This required a lot of research. Researching your topics heavily to construct a plan is key. I began my research by downloading the school cafeteria menu app and looking at what were considered options. I listened to podcasts and read articles. I found a pdf of a cookbook including preparation instructions used in Vermont.

As a group, we've worked to research school food options present in other states as well as food preparation. I've also learned the importance of building support; it's necessary to reach out to the connections you have. You have to be fully willing to email everyone around you to effectively spread the word. I reached out to the parent coordinator at my school to be put in touch with Department of Education officials or other routes. Additionally, we reached out to and are planning to meet with OFNS. I've found that community organizing demands self-motivation, and requires students to put in the effort without necessarily knowing when they will succeed in reaching their final goal. One thing that has kept me motivated is the changes I'm capable of making to both student life and my own through improving cafeteria food options. Essentially, community organizing is about making an effort if you'd like to see real change.

Steps to Community Organizing

Explore it



Understand it



Plan it



Mobilize it



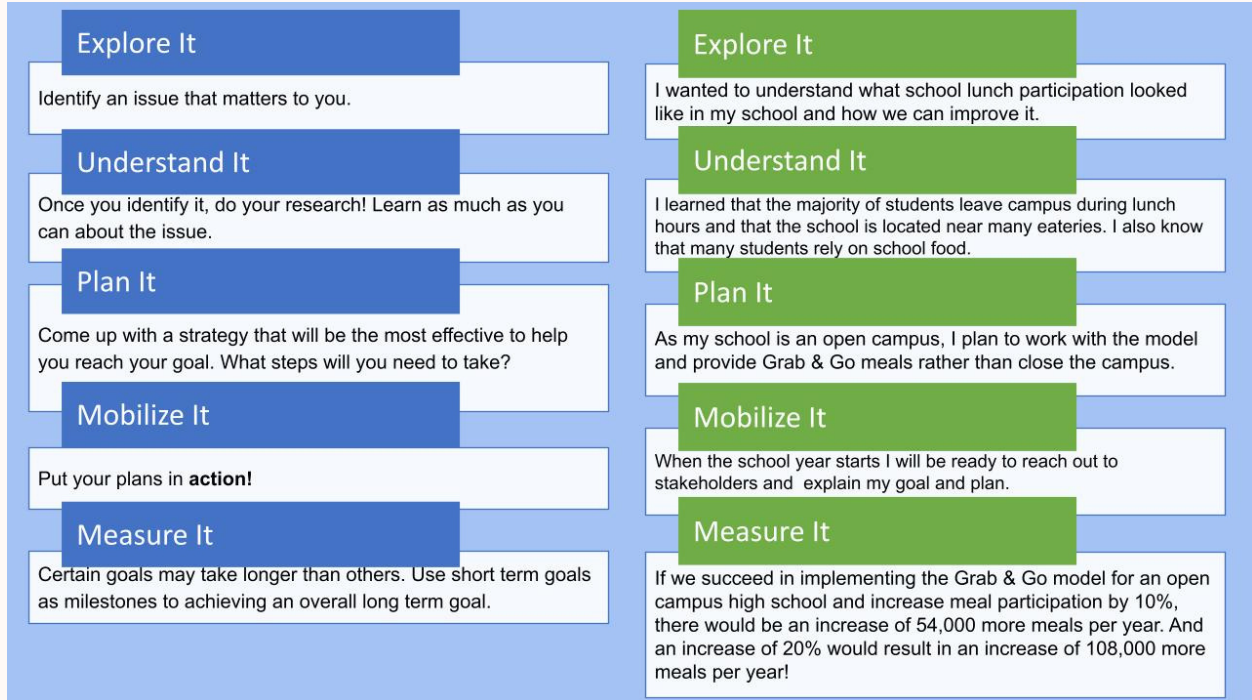
Measure it



Community Organizing Step by Step

By Ashley Yang

After reading about Eliza's experience in community organizing, or perhaps from your own curiosity in creating change in a specific space, you may be interested in how to actually start. Below is the 5-step process that I have followed to help guide your own goals.



Youth Summit Recaps

On June 3rd, YFA gave a virtual presentation at the **3rd Annual Youth Summit NYC**. Students were able to join and watch various presentations by youth groups from across the city. This presentation was to shed light on the school food system and how it can be vastly improved by the intervention of young people. The presentation went into detail about the inequality and inequity of the school food system. There was a Q&A session afterward to answer further questions.

The **2nd Annual Intrepid Youth Summit** was intended to showcase youth who worked on projects that address issues and problems that they see in their daily lives. On June 12th we participated in the Intrepid Youth Summit where we gave an interactive presentation entitled, "Does Your School Food Make the Grade?" based on the YFA School Food Report Card we created and launched in the Spring 2021 where students graded their school cafeteria on four vital aspects: cafeteria environment, menu options, communication, and emergency response. We presented to students and educators across NYC who had the chance to join different rooms on varying topics, ours being school food. Overall the summit provided great experience in being concise, but still clear in your meaning and relating each topic to the audience.

Action Alert: Mini Menu Survey

As students get ready to go back to school, we would like to hear your thoughts on the meals that will be served. Our **Mini Menu Survey** collects feedback from students about the lunch foods you like and those you believe need improvement.

bit.ly/YFAMenusurvey21



Youth Advocate Spotlight: I.S. 232

In Spring 2021, Anna Lilia Araiza, Director of Youth Leadership at Community Food Advocates, was invited to co-facilitate a virtual professional learning session for K-8 educators for a new service-learning program, **Students Taking Action Today (STAT)**. Teachers work with students to develop actions to address food insecurity. **Ms. Espinoza and her 7A and 7B students at I.S. 232** focused on menu flexibility and incorporation of culturally diverse items in the school food menu.

A key learning for I.S. 232 was understanding school food preparation. For example, there are **no fried foods in NYC's school food menu**; all school food items are baked. They also identified their School Food Manager and Principal as stakeholders they should meet with to gain support. Below are excerpts from their final STAT Showcase in June.

What school food access issue did I.S. 232 identify:

In this school there are many people with Puerto Rican, Dominican, Honduran and Peruvian cultures... most of them have a delicious fruit which is the plantain. Different dishes can be made. Some examples are mangu and mofongo.

Why are culturally diverse school meals important to I.S. 232:

We miss this fruit in our school lunches, so we believe that diverse schools should provide multilingual students with cultural food because it is important to connect with our native food.

What are the benefits of including culturally diverse foods in school meals:

Schools need cultural food to strengthen the school attendance and participation [in school meals]. It will eliminate stereotypes and bias of other cultures. It will elevate our voices... and it will show a better image of immigrants and their cultures.

What can culturally familiar foods on the school food menu accomplish:

We will be pleased to eat the plantain fruit in our school lunch, and perhaps, a student will be passionate to be in the school. We are proud of where we are and who we are. We want to share what our culture is with others and that we also have a beautiful culture that represents us.

YFA will continue to advocate for menu flexibility, including halal, kosher, vegetarian, and alternatives for students with food allergies.

Pandemic EBT (P-EBT)

Did you know...

- During the pandemic, while kids were out of school, the government created a program to help kids who missed school meals.
- P-EBT (what the cool kids call Pandemic-EBT) is food benefits for students and their families.
- The exciting thing is that EVERY NYC public school student is automatically eligible!
- There is no documentation or application required. Everything is automatically issued.
- You can use P-EBT anywhere that accepts EBT/SNAP.
- You will receive either a shiny new P-EBT card in the mail or your P-EBT funds will go into your trusty SNAP card, or a card you used last year for P-EBT.
- The expiration date resets to 274 days from the last use after each purchase!

Check out our YouTube Channel for more info on P-EBT!
<https://bit.ly/YFAyoutube>



Photo: Ms. Espinoza and 7A and 7B students @ I.S. 232

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