



Food Power is a four-year programme led by Sustain and Church Action on Poverty, funded by a grant from the Big Lottery Fund (BLF). It aims to strengthen local communities' ability to reduce food poverty through solutions developed locally with the support of their peers from across the UK. The approach centres on local alliances, giving voice to those experiencing food poverty, influencing practice on the ground and leveraging in additional resources. This will enable responses to food poverty and its root causes, and sharing of learning regarding what works. The Food Power programme aims to transform the way that people in food poverty can access support and create long-term sustainable lives free from hunger.

Evaluation report Year 1 2017-2018

Executive summary October 2018

This report presents findings from an evaluation of the first year of Food Power, including insights from a survey of alliances and from interviews with representatives of case study alliances.

Researchers from Cardiff University were appointed as external evaluators for the project and have taken a collaborative approach to working with the project partners and beneficiaries, whilst maintaining independence as academic researchers able to provide credible evidence of impact.

In addition to providing baseline data from which subsequent progress can be tracked, the findings provide lessons to inform ongoing delivery, and to facilitate exchanges of learning between local alliances.

After the first year of operation it is inevitable that programme is still becoming established, and that considerable activity has focused on setting up systems, and results should be considered within this context.

Our year in numbers

49 alliances registered with Food Power

26 alliances received £250,000

7 regional learning networks

93% reported that Food Power had an impact on progressing their objectives

80% reported using resources from the Food Power website

57% reported that Food Power had been of quite a lot of value or more

The evaluation explored local alliances experiences so far, looking at key themes such as action planning and monitoring. From all the information gathered, the following patterns and issues emerged.

Local food poverty alliances

- Alliances around the UK are at different stages of development, adopting different models and ways of working.
- Despite their independence and varied contexts, alliances face many common challenges. The most prevalent are managing group dynamics, limited access to resources and pressures on members' capacity.
- Overall there is a good level of engagement with support offered by Food Power, and positive feedback on it.
- Building and maintaining alliances presents inherent challenges, some of which could be eased through additional support from Food Power.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Lack of a single measure for food insecurity and national monitoring data is a significant gap alliances struggle to address, with different areas trying varied approaches. Proxy indicators, monitoring outputs, household surveys and programme evaluation generate valuable evidence.
- Alliances require expertise on monitoring and evaluation, including input from specialist advisors such as academics with a focus on practicable research.
- Monitoring and evaluation are best embedded in action plans at the outset, with responsibility for data collection clearly allocated.
- It remains difficult to demonstrate changes in levels of food insecurity, or to attribute this to particular initiatives.
- Each area requires an approach appropriate to its alliance, and partners' capacity to gather and share data.

Impacts of food poverty alliances and Food Power

- Alliances are engaging with all of Food Power's key workstreams. Alliances report that the support is appreciated, valued and being delivered in appropriate ways.
- It is too early to claim direct impacts on local experiences of food insecurity, but alliances are confident that they are making a difference, and of the value of working collaboratively in the ways facilitated by the programme.
- It remains important to demonstrate and communicate the value of networks and collaboration as a way to address food insecurity, and to secure participation and support. This is fundamental to Food Power's impact and a key need emerging from local alliances.
- Food Power's emphasis on involving experts by experience is well received and influencing alliances' work.
- Those who have received the most intensive support – financial support, peer mentoring – find the programme most valuable, but benefits are not limited to these alliances.

Limitations and future considerations

- The timing of year one evaluation activity has limited the extent to which impacts of local alliances and Food Power support could be identified.
- Alliances more engaged with the programme may have been more likely to provide feedback, meaning we know less about those more distant from the programme.
- Future delivery and evaluation will need to reflect the diversity of rural and urban experiences, and activity across devolved nations.
- The perspectives presented here are inherently limited and likely favour those with positive experiences of engaging with food poverty alliances and Food Power.
- Subsequent evaluation should endeavour to involve more peripheral actors and their perspectives on local alliances.
- There is no consensus on how to interpret and refer to issues around food poverty and insecurity, and merit in exploring how different groups have successfully communicated these to different audiences.

Reflections and questions

The findings reported here raise various issues for Food Power to consider, and highlight potential areas for focused attention in remaining years of the programme, including evaluation.

- Can the level of interest from local food poverty alliances be matched through support from Food Power? How might forms of support available need to vary?
- Are local actors clear on what Food Power is aiming to achieve and their role in this?
- What is the value added by local alliances and working through partnership? How can Food Power help local alliances articulate and evidence this?
- Does allowing flexibility in local alliances alter Food Power's impact? Does the form a local alliance takes vary affect its outcomes?
- Is there consensus on the value of involving experts by experience and how to achieve this? If not, what are the implications for Food Power?
- How viable are local alliances in the long term, and what financial models or structures might enable sustainability?
- How can Food Power support alliances to meet shared challenges around evidencing change?
- How can Food Power support local alliances with skills for relationship building and partnership working?



School of Geography and Planning
Ysgol Daearyddiaeth a Chynllunio



Sustainable Places Research Institute
Sefydliad Ymchwil Mannau Cynaliadwy



sustain
the alliance for better food and farming



FOOD Power

✉ maddie@sustainweb.org

🐦 @FoodPowerUK

⚙️ www.foodpower.org.uk

Food Power

C/o Sustain

The Green House

244-254 Cambridge Heath Road

London

E2 9DA