



National Farm to School Network Theory of Change

January 2018

Purpose and Scope:

As a complement to the 2017-2019 Strategic Planning process, the National Farm to School Network undertook the development of an organizational Theory of Change. In general, a Theory of Change is a representation of how and why a complex change process will succeed under specific circumstances.¹ NFSN's aims for developing an organizational Theory of Change include: (1) creating a visual map and narrative of organizational outcomes and processes that depict how NFSN activities and interventions promote change and contribute to identified outcomes and (2) engaging in meaningful conversation around goals, priorities and approaches.

The drafting process was initiated by staff, with input from NFSN Core and Supporting Partners and Advisory Board members. The resulting map and narrative provide NFSN staff, partners and stakeholders a depiction of agreed upon NFSN outcomes, clarification of necessary pathways, and justification for interventions and actions initiated to achieve NFSN's mission. The NFSN Theory of Change is intended to unite staff and partners around shared outcomes and facilitate organizational choices and decision making that align with the defined long term and ultimate outcomes. The NFSN Theory of Change is a living document that will be regularly referenced, reevaluated and refined.

Glossary of Terms:

- Theory of Change – A representation of how and why a complex change process will succeed under specific circumstances.
- Outcomes – Desired or expected result.
 - Long-term outcome – The desired goal which is the guiding purpose of the organization.
 - Ultimate Outcome – Vision of change beyond the work of our organization alone, but to which our work contributes.
- Preconditions – Conditions that must be in place in order for outcomes to be achieved.
- Interventions – Actions and activities designed to achieve outcomes.
- Assumptions – Conditions or resources that are needed for success, but already exist.
- Indicators – Measurable evidence of meeting a goal, visible signs that demonstrate that the outcome is achieved.

¹ The Center for Theory of Change, Inc. 2016. Available at www.theoryofchange.org.



National Farm to School Network's Theory of Change

The National Farm to School Network's Theory of Change is grounded in our organizational [Core Values](#), which reflect the spirit of inclusivity and collaboration with which NFSN was established, and embody the integration of equity, justice, mutual trust and respect in all elements of our work.

Ultimate Outcome:

A local, equitable food system that promotes the health of the population, the economy and the environment.

Long Term Outcome:

All schools and early care and education settings can equitably access and implement comprehensive farm to school initiatives (including the three core elements of local procurement, gardening, and food and agriculture education).

The National Farm to School Network has identified three focal areas in which specific preconditions must be established to achieve the long term and ultimate outcomes identified by the organization. The three areas of focus include policy, movement building and capacity building.

Policy

Precondition: Supportive policies for local and regional procurement, gardens, and food & ag education that advance equity within the food system – at local, state and federal levels.

- **Federal:** Policies and funding support current need and promote equitable growth of farm to school/ECE across all racial and social demographic sectors
 - USDA Farm to School Grant funds are closer to meeting demand
 - Removal of barriers and leveraging of opportunities to implement farm to school/ECE
 - Additional federal funding streams are leveraged for farm to school/ECE
- **State:** Dedicated staffing and funding for activities and coordination
 - Dedicated farm to school/ECE coordinator positions at state agencies
 - Allocation of state funds for farm to school/ECE activities and coordination (re-grants or additional reimbursements) with a priority for high-need communities
 - Support for food system infrastructure building to facilitate farm to school/ECE
- **Local:** Policies and staffing support initiation and institutionalization
 - School wellness policies include farm to school/ECE components
 - Each school district has a paid farm to school/ECE manager/coordinator position
 - Local policies support growth of local food market opportunities

Interventions:

- Legislative advocacy: Advocacy for specific legislative initiatives (e.g., Farm to School Act of 2017) and identification of leverage points and opportunity in legislative initiatives (e.g., Rural Economic Investment, Food Safety Modernization Act, ESSA, Farm Bill, CNR)
- Support for state and local policy: Targeted support for state and local policy initiatives



Precondition:

- Stakeholders as champions: Supportive and engaged key stakeholders
- Advocacy resources: Tools and resources to facilitate advocacy efforts are widely available
- Multi-level support: State and school district level administrative buy-in

Interventions:

- Targeted policy priorities: Identification and targeted plan for addressing policy barriers to farm to school
- Advocate engagement: Engagement and education of federal, state, and local policy makers and community members, including engagement of stakeholders from historically marginalized communities

Movement Building

Precondition: A robust collaborative network of organizations exists, demonstrating diversity in sectors, racial and social representation, and geography, who are participating in an aligned vision to accomplish a shared long term outcome

- **National:** Robust national network supports multi-level efforts
 - A robust national network based in strong partnerships and led by racially and socially diverse leaders supports efforts at national, state, and local levels
- **State:** State level collaborative efforts
 - Each state has an established farm to school network (or other mechanisms of connectivity and collaboration) comprised of diverse stakeholder groups
 - Individuals or organizations are positioned as coordinators for farm to school and ECE efforts

Interventions:

- Strategic partnerships: Strategic partnership development with key stakeholders from diverse sectors, geography, and racial and social demographics
- Core and Supporting Partner support: Capacity building and leadership development for Core and Supporting Partners

Preconditions:

- Diverse funding for national and state activity: Public and private funding supports national leadership and statewide farm to school/ECE activity and capacity building across all racial and social demographics
- Stakeholder and decision maker promotion: Key stakeholder groups and decision makers have interest, awareness and capacity to promote comprehensive farm to school activities

Interventions:

- Funder engagement: Engagement of traditional and non-traditional funders and investors at national, state and local levels
- Funding resources: Training and resources on fundraising for farm to school/ECE



- Stakeholder engagement: Engagement, education and support of on the ground stakeholders in order to build foundation of support for farm to school/ECE movement
- Awareness building: Broadly reaching awareness building through outreach, marketing and communications activities

Capacity Building

Precondition: Tools and resources available and infrastructure established to ensure all practitioners have opportunity and capacity to implement comprehensive farm to school activities, with a targeted focus on creating equitable opportunities for historically marginalized communities

- **Farmers and producers:** Supportive and supported producers
 - Farmers and producers are aware of, see economic value in and have necessary supportive infrastructure to sell to schools/ECE sites
- **Schools/ECE Sites:** Processing infrastructure
 - Schools/ECE site food service programs have interest and infrastructure capacity to process and serve local products
- **Educators:** Curriculum integration
 - Educators have resources to fully integrate garden, food and agriculture education into curriculum
- **Family/Community:** Appreciation and support of initiatives
 - Families and community members appreciate farm to school activities and advocate for farm to school initiatives

Interventions:

- Peer training: Engagement and support for potential peer trainers
- Best practices: Outreach and dissemination of resources and best practices to all schools/ECE sites across the U.S
- Metrics and measures: Collection and dissemination of data, metrics and evaluation tools from successful models
- Peer learning: Facilitation of networking opportunities for peer learning

Preconditions:

- Key player partnerships: Well established partnerships between key players in implementation (e.g., producers, educators, food service directors)
- Producer participation: Critical mass of local producers support and participate in farm to school/ECE opportunities
- Food and agriculture education: Food and agriculture education is a key educational component of curriculum for all ages
- Resource availability: Tools, resources and knowledge available to practitioners to implement comprehensive farm to school activities

Interventions:

- Target group engagement: Targeted engagement and education of engagement of racially and socially diverse key stakeholder groups: producers, educators, food service directors



- Creation and dissemination of culturally relevant research and practice based educational resources (curriculum, food service, gardening) materials supporting local food production and distribution systems
- Research and evaluation: Continuous support and engagement in research and evaluation for farm to school/ECE

Assumptions:

- Schools/ECE sites serve meals
- Schools/ECE sites have physical access/proximity to food producers
- Select policy leaders in federal and state legislatures are supportive of farm to school/ECE
- On the ground stakeholders are engaged in farm to school/ECE advocacy
- Stakeholders are aware of farm to school benefits and approach

Indicators:

Long-Term Outcomes:

- Percent of schools and ECE sites implementing core elements of farm to school
- Equitable implementation of farm to school initiatives across racial and social demographics

Policy

- Number of states with farm to school/ECE supportive policies
- Number of FTE positions at state agencies dedicated for farm to school/ ECE
- Number of federal policies leveraged for/supporting farm to school/ECE
- Federal (USDA Farm to School Grants and other funding streams) and state funding dedicated to farm to school/ECE

Movement Building

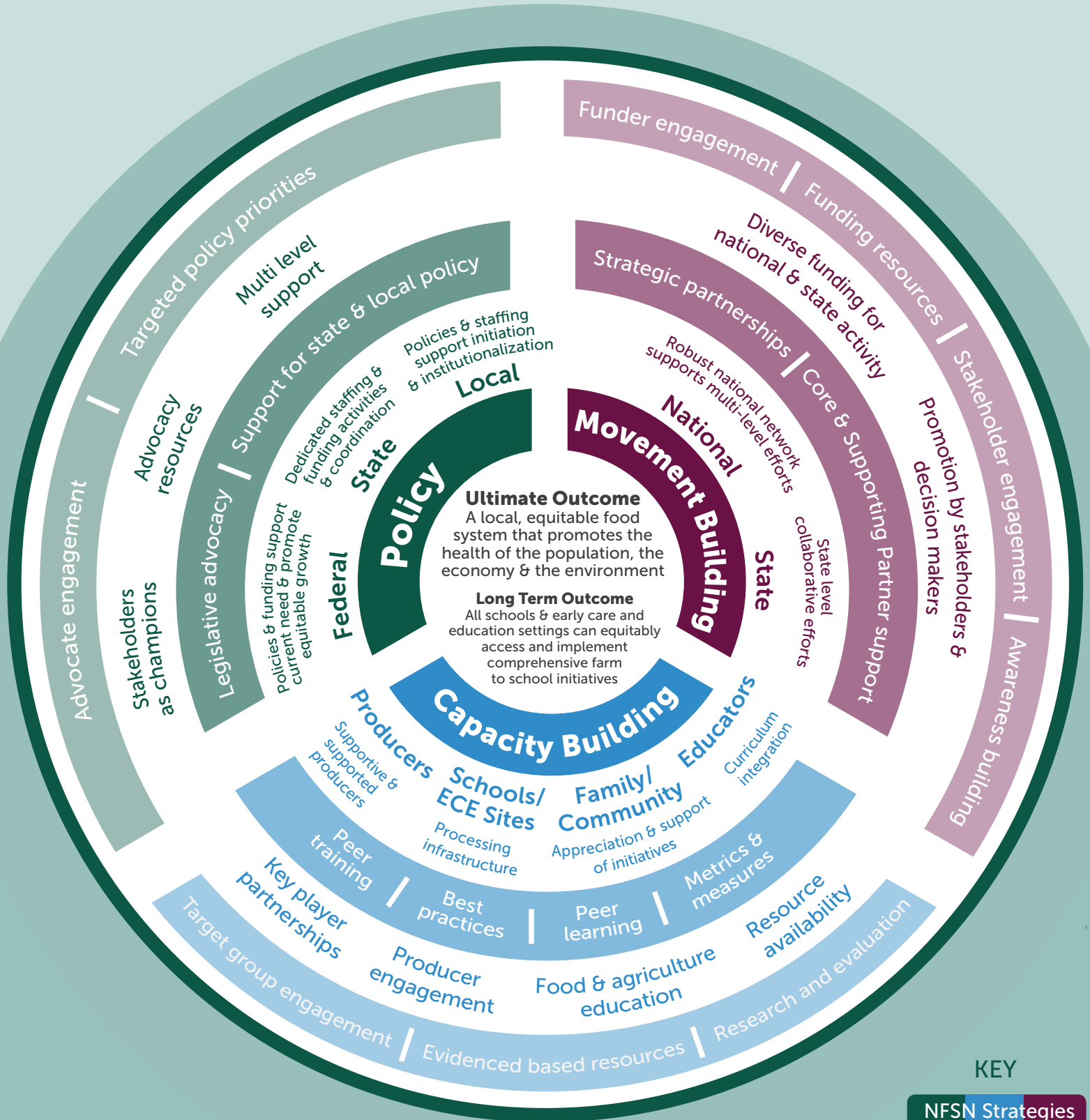
- Number of national level organizations and stakeholders actively engaged in farm to school/ECE movement
- Growth of NFSN membership
- Number of multi-sector and multi-organizational partnerships and collaborations
- Number of states with active farm to school/ECE networks or collaborative efforts, including identified leadership and coordinating positions
- Scope and scale of engagement of state networks (number of organizations and individuals engaged)

Capacity Building

- Number, degree of engagement, and diversity of target stakeholder groups (e.g., producers, FSD, educators, parents/community members)
- Quality, availability and accessibility of research based information, relevant to each farm to school related sector
- Number of schools, districts and communities implementing the core elements of farm to school



Theory of Change



KEY

NFSN Strategies

Needed Conditions