Resident Food Equity Advisors 2026 Recommendations

Introduction - 5th RFEA Cohort



The 2025-2026 Resident Food Equity Advisors (RFEA) cohort brought together 14 Baltimore City community members to share their experiences and ideas about healthy food access.

This cohort's main focus was to provide feedback on the Food Policy and Planning Division's (FPP) American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funded programs and future goals. Each meeting was structured to share information about ARPA programs and engage with, listen to, and collaborate with advisors to grasp what is needed in order to improve healthy food access in Baltimore through policies and plans.

Together, cohort members and stakeholders brainstormed future food programming and policy recommendations to help ensure that food resources address community needs. Suggestions focused on creating opportunities for older adults and youth to learn from one another, increasing community collaboration, and giving residents more say in their community's food choices. The cohort focused on understanding ARPA programs and the role of food policy, legislation, and advocacy in Baltimore's planning process. Advisors shared feedback on these programs and helped develop strategies aligned with the City's new Comprehensive Plan, which includes a Food Access chapter. Throughout the meetings, the FPP team ensured that members could access, understand, and explain available resources while creating space for their perspectives to inform more equitable food access efforts.

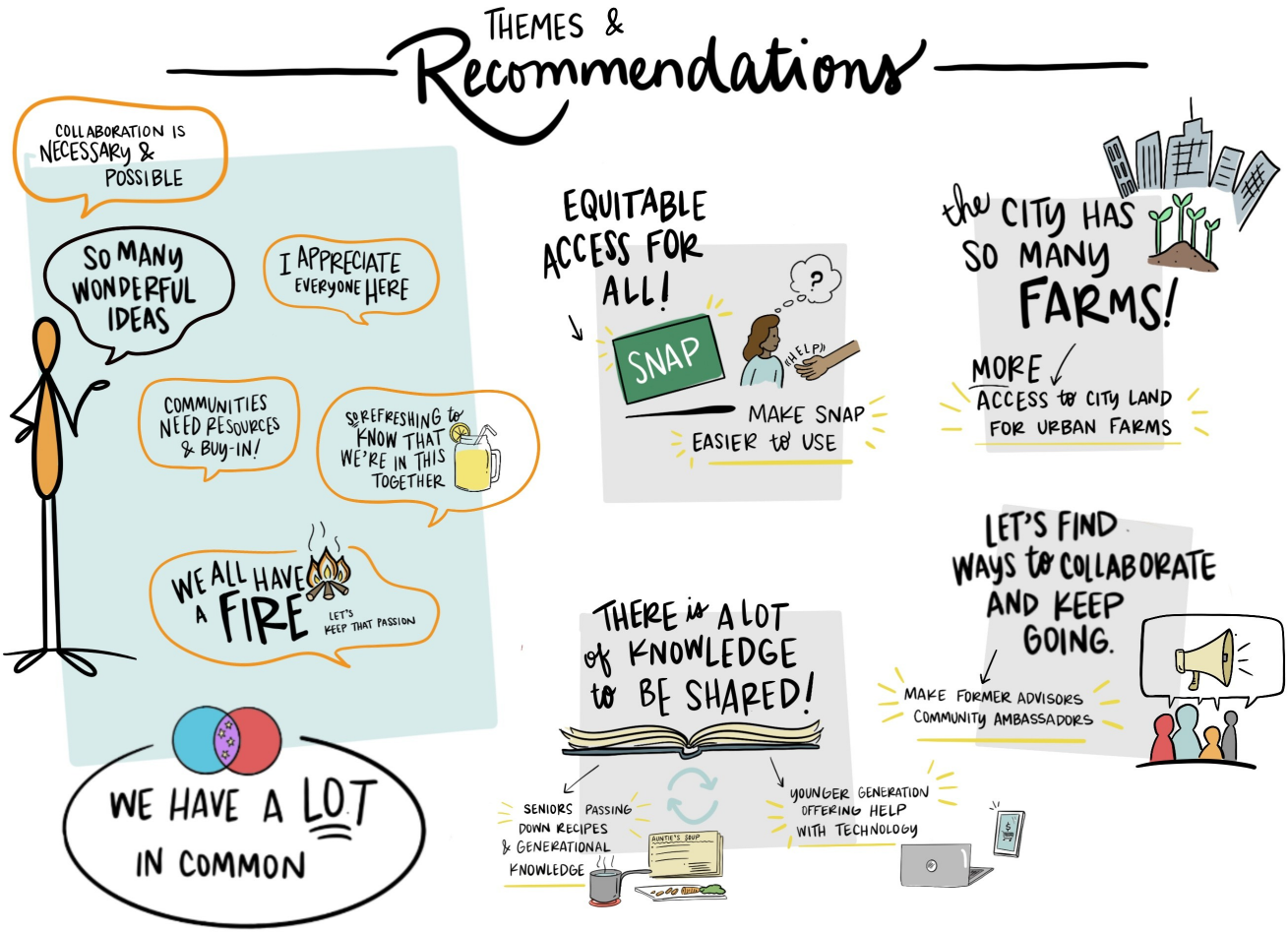
This report summarizes key lessons from the 2025–2026 RFEA cohort, including the challenges members faced in accessing food resources. It highlights insights shared during the six meetings and is organized by key themes, reflections, and recommendations from the advisors.

Overview



The 2025 advisor cohort was selected through an application process and interviews. Overall, 86 people applied for the program, and 14 were selected based on their community involvement and interest in food policy. The cohort consisted of 1 man and 13 women, and ranged in age from 26 to 75 years old. The neighborhood of each advisor is reflected in their bio.

Monthly meetings were held at different sites around Baltimore, including The Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC)'s Pleasant View Garden office, HABC's Eager Street office, and the Department of Planning office. Meetings were held from November 2025 to April 2026. Advisors were compensated $65 per meeting, and each meeting was catered by local restaurants and chefs. Mayor Brandon Scott acknowledged their participation and contribution by signing certificates for each advisor.



Cohort Themes and Recommendations

The themes capture the perspectives advisors shared during the meetings. The recommendations build on their ideas and identify opportunities for the Food Policy and Planning Division to take action in collaboration with City agencies, nonprofit organizations, community leaders, advocates, businesses, and funders.

Theme: Intergenerational Knowledge Sharing

- Advisors emphasized the benefits of knowledge sharing across generations that could be achieved by bringing older adults and youth together in educational settings.
- Older adults could pass down knowledge of healthy eating habits, food growing techniques, and cultural food traditions to youth in their community.
- Youth could provide older adults with the assistance they need to use technology and social media to learn about available food resources.

Recommendation:
Provide educational opportunities that allow generations to learn and connect with one another. Older adults can create recipe cards for produce boxes, conduct cooking demonstrations at recreation centers, and run workshops on managing food pantries. Youth can help older adults use computers and phone apps to find and use food resources.

Theme: Building Community Awareness Through Collaboration

- Advisors emphasized the need for greater community awareness about Baltimore City's food access programs through peer support networks, having information about resources in several languages, and distributing printed and digital materials on resources.

- Advisors felt that a lack of community awareness keeps community members from accessing available food resources; a lack of knowledge about where to access food could be due to factors like a lack of digital literacy for older adults, language barriers, and insufficient information-sharing networks; and community leaders and community members may not be collaborating with government, nonprofits, community helpers, and neighbors in a way that can get help to those who need it most.

Recommendation:
Create a council of RFEA alumni to support outreach and engagement around food access resources in their communities as Ambassadors. Ambassadors would help inform community members of where food resources can be accessed and would also help increase awareness of resources in partnership with City agencies and community organizations.



- Advisors want investment in projects that help local communities have more control over their own food system and establish community food sovereignty.
- There should be systems to help communities and farmers get land and grow and produce food in cities. It should be easier than it currently is to get land and grow local food on that land.
- Communities should be able to grow, make, and share food at every step of the food sourcing process.
- Increasing access to healthy, culturally relevant foods can bring economic and social benefits, including providing job opportunities for community members.

Recommendation:
Improve access to City-owned land for urban agriculture.

Recommendation:
Coordinate food distribution efforts and create opportunities to connect food producers with grocery stores, restaurants, hospitals, schools, and other venues that could turn locally sourced ingredients into ready-to-eat foods.



- Groups such as older adults, young people, people with disabilities, and people who have been recently incarcerated have a harder time accessing food and should get more help than they do now.
- Advisors recommended focusing outreach where these groups already gather (e.g., churches, senior centers, cultural centers) and collaborating with City agencies and community organizations that are connected to them.
- Advisors suggested different methods of outreach - both printed materials (e.g., flyers, tabling materials) and digital media (e.g., social media, e-flyers).

Recommendation:
Create customized food access programs for older adults, youth, people with disabilities, and recently incarcerated residents. Ensure food distribution sites are set up across Baltimore's Healthy Food Priority Areas to provide assistance to underserved groups.

Recommendation:
Distribute flyers and other marketing materials where people congregate so that people who need help most know about the resources that are available.



- Advisors noted that using the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can be challenging.
- SNAP benefits can be compromised or lost by accident. Getting them back can be hard, and issues can take a long time to resolve.

- People should not have to struggle to get their SNAP benefits if something goes wrong with the system.
- There are not always enough trained caseworkers, translators, or online help. This makes it harder for people to get and use their SNAP benefits.
- Caseworkers do not always have the training they need to help everyone.

Recommendation:
Make SNAP paperwork easier to read. Give clear directions and offer documents and forms in many languages. Connect clients with the Department of Social Services about their SNAP cases.

Recommendation:
Partner with relevant agencies to provide caseworkers with more training and guidance. Hire more staff, bring on volunteers, and implement a "train-the-trainer" program for new caseworkers to ensure timely, accurate, and high-quality services.

Recommendation:
Ensure everyone who receives SNAP benefits has a caseworker. This would help prevent mistakes, fraud, and problems like lost benefits.

FPP thanks the 2025-2026 RFEA advisors for sharing their time, experiences, and ideas, as well as the partners that supported the program. FPP will use the cohort's recommendations to help shape future food-access strategies, programs, and policies.

Session Overviews

Meeting 1: Overview of FPP and ARPA Programs

- Introduced advisors to one another by having them share their background and why they wanted to join the RFEA program.
- Provided an overview of each ARPA-funded program and the history of Baltimore City's food policy work.
- Described the purpose of the RFEA program and the ultimate aim of identifying policies and plans to prioritize after ARPA funding concludes.

Meeting 2: City and State Policy Advocacy

Justin Walker, Land Use Planner at Department of Planning
Claudet Miranda Zambrano, Senior Anti-Hunger Program Associate at Maryland Hunger Solutions

- Introduced the legislative process and structure at the state and local levels.
- Informed advisors about giving testimony on bills to make positive change in food policies and plans.
- Discussed how legislation and proper support systems for staff and clients can resolve SNAP challenges (receiving, maintaining, and reinstating SNAP benefits).

Meeting 3 - Feedback on ARPA Programs

- Explained the structure, objectives, and impact of FPP's ARPA-funded programs.
- Advisors provided feedback on ARPA programs and discussed lived experiences.
- Discussed how to make ARPA programs more beneficial to the community.

Meeting 4 - Overview of the Food Access Chapter of the *Our Baltimore Comprehensive Plan*

- Explored the Food Access chapter of Baltimore's Comprehensive Plan.
- Selected one recommendation and performed a SWOT analysis to identify if it should be implemented.
- Discussed the results of the group activity and made recommendations for future priorities.

Meeting 5 - Overview of Strategic Planning Process and Workshop to Understand Advisors' Perceptions on the Planning Process

- Reviewed the structure and goals of FPP's upcoming strategic planning process to inform future policymaking and programming on food access.

- Identified groups that were underrepresented in previous food access planning initiatives that should be prioritized going forward.
- Advisors proposed solutions to barriers that can be addressed in the strategic planning process.

Meeting 6 - Developing Future Strategies and Recommendations
Yeeli Mui, Assistant Professor, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Anne Palmer, Senior Scientist, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future

- Recapped cohort efforts and shared key takeaways from the RFEA program.
- Discussed advisors' hopes and concerns about the future of the Baltimore City's healthy food access work to identify common themes.
- Explored how difficult it will be to develop specific food access policies and programs



Statement of Appreciation and Next Steps

During this RFEA cohort, and in the time since, there have been a few immediate wins stemming from advisors' recommendations. During an RFEA meeting, an advisor expressed an interest in receiving a list of contents for produce boxes sooner so that they could prepare accordingly. The FPP team was able to quickly and efficiently make this happen with the food distributor. Additionally, the FPP team was awarded a Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute grant in the amount of $20,000 in partnership with the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. This grant will support a strategic planning process for FPP's post-ARPA work. Recommendations from this RFEA cohort will be prioritized, and advisors have already committed to help lead community engagement efforts for the strategic planning process. Special thanks to Monica Navarro-Leonard, our visual notetaker, who captured the cohort's discussions and shared experiences during our final meeting and transformed them into the visual representations featured throughout this document.

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2025-2026 Resident Food Equity Advisors



Akasha-Regine Rodgers
Park Heights

Akasha joined the RFEA Program to help address gaps in the food system through accessible, community-led solutions. As a community health worker and holistic chef, she understands the connection between food, mental health, and dignity. To Akasha, food equity is about more than just availability; it is about dignity, choice, and the ability to thrive, not just survive.



Armon Smith
Northwest Gwynn Oak

Armon joined the RFEA program to help his community access food resources and learn sustainable ways to bring quality food to others. His neighbors are mostly seniors who find getting groceries inconvenient, since the single local grocery store isn't enough to meet their needs. To Armon, food equity means giving seniors and the broader community access to healthy food nearby, rather than taking resources away.



Barbara Tunstall
Cameron Village

Barbara joined the RFEA program to support her neighbors and improve food access by working with other Baltimore residents to bring food to all parts of the city. For Barbara, food equity means having major grocery stores in her community with fair prices. She pushes to end Baltimore's redlining, knowing its lasting impact on food access. She hopes leaders will create better systems for everyone.



Betty Bland-Thomas
Historic Sharp Leadenhall

Ms. Betty joined the RFEA program to connect with others and help her community access healthy food beyond corner stores. She organizes nutrition education, food distribution, and exercise events, and looks forward to continuing to advocate for her neighbors. For Ms. Betty, food equity is having affordable, healthy food, plus education on nutrition, meal prepping, exercise, and accessing fresh produce.



Breana Chambers
Butchers Hill

Breana joined the RFEA program because she cares deeply about ensuring her community has access to healthy, affordable food, having seen firsthand how food inequity affects families. The program has given her a chance to learn, advocate, and support change. For Breana, food equity means everyone can get fresh, affordable food, no matter their income or background.



Elnora “Diamond” Spruill
Johnston Square

Diamond, a longtime Baltimore resident, joined the RFEA program to help make fresh food more accessible in her community. She wanted to learn new ways to bring food to her neighbors beyond existing giveaway programs. For Diamond, food equity means her community knows others are fighting so everyone can have healthy food options nearby.



Evon Henry
Glen Northwest

Ms. Evon joined the RFEA program to gain tools and connect with others so she can better advocate for her community. As a former foster parent and kinship caregiver, she knows how vital food programs are for youth and families in need. For Ms. Evon, food equity means respecting the diverse traditions that make her community vibrant, believing food connects people and everyone has something to offer.



Kenyarda Ross
Oldtown/Middle East

Kenyarda joined the RFEA program after seeing the effects of food deserts in her community, especially on children and the elderly. She knows how limited access to healthy food shapes lives. For her, food equity means everyone can access fresh, affordable, and culturally appropriate food. She wants healthy food to be a standard, not a privilege, and believes closing the gap is essential.



Margaret Martin
Brooklyn Homes

Margaret joined the RFEA program to ensure seniors and families in her community have access to healthy food. Inspired by her grandmother and mother's struggles, she wants no one to have to choose between food and other needs. For Margaret, food equity means affordable grocery stores with fresh produce and healthy proteins nearby, plus more resources for seniors and people with disabilities.



Princess-Bua Bihai
Park Heights

Princess-Bua, became an advisor because she believes in helping create the world she wants to live in. She has seen how lack of healthy food impacts communities, and she refuses to accept this as normal. Princess is committed to building healthy communities, knowing food is the foundation of health and dignity. For her, food equity means consistent, dignified access to fresh food and real choice for all.



Rushell Graham

Rushell wanted to be an advisor because she cares about making healthy, affordable food accessible to everyone. She has seen how lack of fresh food affects families' health and stability. Rushell believes food is a basic right and wants to help create inclusive, community-driven solutions. For her, food equity means everyone can eat healthy, affordable, culturally familiar meals—no one should struggle to feed their family.



Stella Drayer
Coldstream Homestead Montebello

Stella joined the RFEA program because she knows how hard it can be to access food, especially for older adults. Experiencing these challenges inspired her to help find solutions to food insecurity. Stella believes getting groceries and transportation shouldn't be so difficult, especially for seniors. For her, food equity means everyone can get the food they need and feel empowered to improve access.



Tiffany Page-Cooper
Panway, Langston Hughes

Tiffany joined the RFEA program to address inequities in healthy, affordable food access. Through her leadership at Youth Educational Services, she has seen how food insecurity links to economic and health instability. Tiffany sees the RFEA program as a way to strengthen community. For Tiffany, food equity means removing barriers like food deserts and empowering communities to shape their food systems.