

Synthesis of the **Forum**

for the **consolidation of
a food security
network** in the West
Island of Montreal



This document summarizes the results of
activities carried out during the forum on
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The content of the document is based on the responses of the 85 forum participants. The summary was reviewed by the steering committee of the West Island Food Security Network project, led by the TQSOI in collaboration with the TQNOIM.

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Challenges & needs of the West Island

Perceived by organizations and citizens involved in food security participating in the forum



Structural & communication

Challenges

- **Most of the organizations on the territory serve citizens from several municipalities and boroughs**, which complicates interactions and communication between the various players.
- **It's also more difficult to serve all the people in need, as they are located in several areas far from each other.** This phenomenon also contributes to the isolation of individuals and the difficulty of creating a community spirit that includes everyone, both organizations and citizens.
- **For organizations, it's particularly difficult to ensure they reach the people who need their services, and to follow up with service users once they've left the system.** The current model depends on these people being able to find the services they need and make the first contact.
- **In addition, a lack of knowledge of available services and tools** has been noted among the WI population.
- **There is also a general lack of awareness of existing needs in the WI among citizens of the region and the City of Montreal**, as the WI is often considered "well-off".

Needs

- **Gather statistical data on the state of collective needs in the WI**, from the point of view of both organizations and citizens.
- **Identify gaps in services offered in the region** in order to adjust available resources.
- **Facilitate access to and cross-referencing of services offered to citizens**, to optimize the impact of each service.
- **Pooling certain resources**, as different organizations or initiatives require similar and generally limited resources (transportation, storage, processing space, specialists, documentation, training, etc.).

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Transportation & accessibility

Challenges

- **The lower population density of some WI areas affects the quality of transportation and the availability of food;** the number of businesses is low or non-existent in low-density areas.
- **The territory is also built around the use of the car,** making it unsuitable for walking, thus limiting access to food.
- **There are also social inclusion challenges,** such as cultural or language barriers that can make some people more vulnerable to food insecurity (unfamiliarity with local foods and how to prepare them, unfamiliarity with available resources, etc.).
- **Physical accessibility and mobility are also major challenges in the WI** (services sometimes far away, premises not always accessible to people with reduced mobility, lack of adapted transport, etc).
- **Another issue affecting the accessibility of services is linked to the stigma surrounding the use of emergency food aid services,** which can cause a sense of shame and discourage their use.

Needs

- **There is consequently a need to improve the mobility of services** and citizens in general.
- **Increase the availability and accessibility of food in the WI,** both in terms of production - as many farmlands in the region are under-utilized - and in terms of increasing the number of drop-off points.
- **Facilitate access to existing outlets.**
- **Increase the availability of quality foods and foods** that correspond to the different personal and cultural preferences of WI residents.

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Purchasing power & inflation

Challenges

- **Cost-of-living inflation is affecting the portion of income available for food purchases.** For many, food takes second place to rent and other basic needs. So there's a direct link between rising living costs and food insecurity.
- **The same is true for organizations, which must also pay rent and/or buy food to meet demand.** The purchasing power of organizations is therefore also reduced by inflation.
- **This makes it even harder for food banks to meet the growing need for emergency food aid.**
- **The same is true for organizations offering affordable meals or having a "pay-what-you-can" model;** it's harder for them too to remain affordable to those in need while remaining economically viable.
- **Inflation also affects producers and their ability to offer affordable and competitive products,** due to rising production costs.

Needs

- **Increasing the purchasing power of citizens and organizations is essential to reducing food insecurity overall.** Among other things, by reviewing the type of funding granted and/or available to organizations (per project vs. per mission), by ensuring that government aid is indexed to keep pace with inflation in the cost of living...

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Human resources

- **Lack of manpower in both the community and agricultural sectors** is a major challenge (as it is for food businesses).
- **As financial resources are often limited and workloads rather ambitious** in these fields, it is difficult to retain employees over the long term.
- **The lack of resources to support and supervise the training** of these employees contributes to the issue.
- **Currently, demand for services exceeds the capacity of organizations to meet it.** This increases the pressure to constantly find solutions with few resources, and contributes to burnout.
- **The shortage of personnel is also an issue in the agricultural sector,** especially in terms of succession planning, which is an important issue for the future of food production.
- **The administrative workload that comes with grant applications and donor follow-up** contributes to the issue for organizations, as they have to devote precious resources to these tasks rather than to improving the services they offer or the working conditions of their employees...

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Education & sensibilization

- **Education is an important factor in food security. It has been observed that there is a need to expand the knowledge of the population of all ages in relation to nutrition and financial planning, such as:**
 - how to choose nutritious foods on a budget,
 - how to prepare and preserve food,
 - how to reduce food waste,
 - understanding the nutritional value of food (not all calories are created equal),
 - what tools exist to help you eat well without breaking your budget...

Healthy & affordable housing

- **The issue of healthy and affordable housing is linked to food security as it affects the percentage of income available for food,** as well as the overall health of citizens.
- **There is a strong link between food insecurity and health. While living with food insecurity is likely to have an impact on your physical and mental health, the opposite is also true.** Certain physical and/or mental health conditions can affect your ability to eat well or to access certain services (i.e. reduced mobility, dietary restrictions, inability to prepare food...).
- **There is a great need in the WI to increase the availability of this type of housing.**
- **The lack of affordable rental space also directly affects organizations requiring office, storage and/or food processing space.** This lack of space directly affects their ability to offer their services effectively.

Solutions

of the West Island

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Structural

- **Structure collective data collection and consultation.** Ensure that the data collected is taken into account in the development of initiatives, and create an archive to facilitate the monitoring of the situation. Make data easily accessible.
- **Implement tools to facilitate communications** between organizations. Develop tools to inventory existing resources and initiatives so that everyone can keep track of each other, and to facilitate inter-resource referencing.
- **Pool resources** (best practice guide, knowledge sharing, bank of volunteers, joint fundraising) to enhance collaboration between players and optimize collective impact.
- **Structure WI's efforts and food system.** Establish a clear framework, strategic plan and action plan to support existing organizations and initiatives.
- **Advocacy and awareness-raising** towards elected officials and politicians is essential to advance food security and gain more support from various levels of government.
- **Create opportunities** to facilitate and increase communication with funders and other entities that have an influence on the funding of initiatives, so that the types of funding are more appropriate to the needs of organizations, project leaders and agricultural producers.
- **Create more affordable social housing** and emphasize the connection between the need for social housing and food security.

Solutions

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Food system

- **Integrate diverse food production** systems when designing urban spaces. Design our spaces to take into account the importance of food-producing areas.
- **Strengthen local supply chains**, along with local food production and consumption (proximity cards, farm-to-table, local farm circuits, communal markets, collective and community gardens, etc.).
- **Promote the creation of hubs** that facilitate the sharing of resources, spaces, knowledge and/or tools for each sector of the supply chain (production, transformation, distribution, storage, etc.).
- **Promote initiatives** that facilitate the collection and transformation of surpluses to reduce food waste.

Transportation & accessibility

- **Improve access to food** in food deserts by supporting and creating initiatives such as mobile markets, mobile grocery stores, Meals on Wheels, community and collective gardens, etc.
- **Facilitate mobility across** the territory through initiatives such as collective transport for food security services. At the same time, make existing services more accessible through social pricing and/or transportation passes that organizations could distribute to their clientele.
- **Design living environments** where basic services (food, care, education, etc.) are accessible within 15 minutes.

Solutions of the West Island

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Education & sensibilization

- **The creation and support** of educational programs on the various aspects of food security (nutritional value of food, budgeting and grocery shopping, surplus management, basic cooking, etc.) are essential to improving the current situation.
- **Create more educational** opportunities for different target audiences, and develop collaborations with schools.
- **An effort must be made** to reach out to individuals and communities who could benefit from existing services and resources (i.e. marketing strategy and promotion adapted to the target audience).
- **In addition, general awareness** must be raised about the needs that exist in the WI, and efforts made to break down the stigma surrounding those in need.
- **Creation of activities** and/or spaces to encourage exchanges and familiarization between different social classes and/or cultural groups.