CITY REGION FOOD SYSTEM TOOLKIT

Assessing and planning resilient and sustainable city region food systems

Guidance: Establishing terms of reference for governance platforms

Brief description	This document contains some key points relating to the structure and operations of governance platforms for the founders to consider and enshrine within written terms of reference.
Expected outcome	Project teams are aware of the kinds of considerations required in establishing Terms of Reference, and are prepared to draft and secure approval of their own, tailored TOR.
Expected output	Progress towards developing a long-term governance platform.
Scale of application	Project level
Expertise required	Project management
Examples of application	
Year of development	2022
Author(s)	Jess Halliday
Relevant CRFS Handbook modules; related tools, examples and activities	Action planning module *Related to Examples: Food systems governance models and resources*

Full description and justification

This document contains some key points relating to the structure and operations of governance platforms, for the founders of long term governance structures to consider and enshrine within written terms of reference. Key points include: institutional home, vision, objectives or priorities, membership, special roles, how meetings are fun, and decision-making procedures.

This guidance is needed to ensure that coordinators give due consideration structural and operational aspects, and can secure agreement of all members.

1.1.1　Institutional home and status

Consider whether the platform will be hosted within local government (within a particular department or team) or by a member organisation, or whether it will be an independent entity.

It is recommended to weight up the pros and cons of each option. For example:

- If hosted, are there any constraints or conditions that need to be adhered to?
- Will members be free to determine their own agenda, or will they have to obtain approval?
- Can the platform issue its own communications or do they need to be approved?
- What are the benefits in terms of channels to government decision-making?

- If independent, will government representatives be willing and able to participate?
- Will the platform be constituted as a formal entity or be informal?
- Are there any implications for advocacy and influence over decision-making?

1.1.2　Vision

The vision or vision statement from the CRFS project can be included.

1.1.3　Objectives

The objectives may be based on the priorities developed and refined during the CRFS assessment and planning process.

1.1.4　Purpose of the group / activities

The purpose of the platform is clearly articulated in active terms. Examples include:

- Overseeing implementation of the Action Plan developed during the CRFS process; advancing the roadmap towards putting actions in place.
- Participating in a yearly review of progress, and reporting on progress to funders and other partners;
- Advocating policy changes and implementation in support of objectives;
- Identifying and prioritizing emerging issues, opportunities and needs in the CRFS;
- Communication and engagement with stakeholders across the CRFS; providing evidence-based research and the most current knowledge on local food systems issues;
- Identifying and leveraging resources (financial and in-kind/practical) to support the objectives of the platform
- Facilitating or conducting additional research on aspects of the CRFS, to provide more detail to the assessment or covering different aspects or emerging issues emerging local food
- Building new relationships and facilitating networking
- Contributing to monitoring and evaluation

1.1.5　Membership

The TOR should specify the ideal or maximum number of members and stakeholder groups. If member organisations (and/or specific representatives) have been determined, they may be listed.

It is also advisable to specify how members can join the platform. Questions to consider are:

- Do organisations need to apply, or are they invited?
- Is there a voting mechanism?
- How is the representative of each organisation determined?
- And how long is the term of membership? It is a fixed term, or open-ended?

It may also be helpful to list the precise roles and responsibilities of member, for example:

- meeting attendance;
- provision of data;
- acting as an ambassador and encouraging further implementation through their own organisations;
- identifying funding opportunities
- Etc.

An additional question is:

- What happens if a member or a representative is no longer able to fulfil their commitment?

Generally speaking, members of governance platforms do not receive any compensation but are expected to fulfil their commitments as part of their day-to-day jobs or on a voluntary basis. However, there may be some special circumstances where compensation is warranted (subject to funding) – such as, for example, if a member takes on research or report-writing for which funding is available; or if member representing vulnerable or marginalised citizens would not be able to attend meetings if their expenses were not covered.

1.1.6 Board or secretariat

It may be helpful to assign specific roles and leadership responsibilities to certain members – such as an executive chair, co- or vice-chairs, a secretary, a treasurer.

For each, the precise duties should be defined, as well as how each position is filled. Are the roles appointed or is there a voting system? How long does each person remain in their role?

1.2 Meeting organisation

It is helpful to specify how frequently meetings take place – such as monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, etc – and how long they last.

Particularly where the governance platform covers a large area, such as a CRFS, it might make sense to rotate to location of the meetings to promote physical accessibility.

Generally the agenda will be prepared and circulated to members in advance. This may be the responsibility of the Board members, or one specific member such as the executive chair or secretary.

1.3   Meeting process

It can be helpful to spell out some key aspects of how meetings are run and decisions taken.

For example, some platforms require a quorum (more than half of members) before any decisions can be taken. If quorum is not achieved, the meeting can only serve for reporting information.

Meetings may be closed (between members only) or open to public observation. In some cases, external individuals or organisations can send delegations to make specific representations (usually at the discretion of the Chair).

When it comes to decision-making, it is necessary to consider who precisely makes decisions. Do the members merely inform decision-making by the chair, coordinator, or other member of the Board? Or are decisions made via consensus between all members?
Are all or some decisions put to the vote? If so, what proportion of voting members need to be in agreement for the vote to be carried?

1.4   Reporting

Minutes of each meeting are usually circulated afterwards and approved at the following meeting. It is necessary to specify who precisely is responsible for the minutes.

An annual report, including results of monitoring and budgetary reporting may be required by local government and/or funders. Again, who is responsible for producing and circulating the report to members?

1.5   Reflection

Finally, it is good practice to review and amend the terms of reference at periodic intervals – while at the same time, constantly monitoring whether existing governance arrangements are producing the desired or expected results.

It is a good idea to specify who will be responsible for the review (e.g. the chair or secretariat, an external advisor, or the members themselves).