

Introduction

The following document was prepared for the Wyoming Food Coalition (WFC) Board of Directors to support their strategic thinking efforts in spring/summer of 2023. The WFC is a member-driven organization that is currently organized into seven working groups (WG) with a governing board of directors. WFC has grown with the support of volunteers, including Americorps Vista volunteers since its founding in 2019. The WFC hosts a yearly conference and regular speakers series. The WGs work on their specific focus areas with relative autonomy. Many of the WGs have significant overlap in their active members meaning that several folks are active in multiple working groups and also serving on the board. The WFC is well connected to various stakeholder groups with connections to the food system.

In the spring of 2023 the WFC hired its first part time staff with hopes of increasing the organization's capacity, while still relying on member/volunteer efforts. This strategic planning effort is timely in that it will help WFC leadership focus on key priorities and explore how to best use peoples' time to reach key goals. Specifically, it will be important to clarify roles and responsibilities between volunteers and the staff to ensure realistic expectations for all as they work to advance the WFC mission. This document is a reflection of ideas that have come via input of the working groups as well as suggestions based on nonprofit best practices and principles from organizational development

Organizational Strengths:

1. **Strong commitment from a core group** of talented, hard working, knowledgeable folks. The Board (including the WG chairpeople) and staff are all thoughtful and experienced. They are incredibly driven and bring a strong desire to improve Wyoming food systems and food access (e.g. not just on the board to feel good about themselves).
2. **Diverse connections to the food system** and key players within it. From educational programs to research to a wide variety of producers, WFC members are people who know people who know people. This level of networking and resources is a valuable asset to helping different players in the food system, even outside of WFC.
3. **Relevant and timely mission.** While other groups are doing their own parts, WFC is uniquely positioned to support communication between these groups and, when possible, to unify and coordinate those efforts.
4. **Varied backgrounds and priorities** of the members. These help the group to consider possibilities from multiple angles which gives them a more comprehensive understanding of things than they might have if they only worked within their own groups.

Organizational Challenges:

1. **Limited capacity and volunteer burnout.** A small group of people is doing the vast majority of the work. The time and energy that folks have to put towards the WFC is on top of all the other things they do for their day jobs. This challenges the progress that the coalition can make (people only have so much time to contribute) AND may not be sustainable in the long term. Some leaders may feel “stuck” in their positions because they don’t necessarily see new folks coming up behind to replace them.
2. **Limited opportunities for new members.** Although the WFC wants to engage new members (and get them into leadership positions), it’s not immediately clear how new folks can get involved. There is no “menu” of ways to support the WFC. The current WG structure works great for those who are already involved and “in the know” but might be hard to join in with as a new member. Not all working groups have a clear path to participation whereby new folks can find their place and contribute.
3. **Perception of conflict between groups and their priorities.** While the diversity of the group is absolutely a strength, it also presents challenges in establishing a clear identity. Amid our hyper-polarized political landscape, prospective members may not always see the WFC as “their people.” It can be difficult to communicate WFC priorities in a way that feels comfortable and compelling to wide audiences.
4. **Role confusion.** The WFC has been scrappy and thoughtful in creating a sound structure. Adding staff to this has changed the landscape and the organization hasn’t yet “caught up” with itself to fully support everyone in their revised roles. Although this doesn’t appear to be a glaring problem yet, mis-matched expectations are to be expected as the group works to clarify roles and responsibilities.
5. **Perceived vulnerability and lack of institutional support:** The coalition operates with very limited financial resources. While they used to get more support from the UW Agriculture/Extension offices, extension services are spread thin, key positions have turned over, and this institutional support (from UW) is inconsistent. The budget has allowed for some critical investments but the organization’s aspirations exceed the current budget.

Successful Working Groups:

To respect the autonomy and unique needs of each group of WFC stakeholders, the WGs are free to select their own leadership and largely function as they choose. Some of the working groups meet monthly while others may meet just once or twice a year. Some WGs have just a few members (2-3) and others have around 10. Consistent scheduling, agenda setting, and note taking support active and productive working groups. Meetings that are TOO frequent are seen as a burden, but groups who meet very infrequently report challenges with gaining momentum. People lose steam between meetings, forget what they had previously discussed, or don’t follow through on commitments. Consistent and organized leadership provides clarity for members and increases the likelihood that new members will stick around when they join in.

Likely Future Hurdles/Stuff to Expect and Plan For:

The WFC has one foot in two different [stages of nonprofit development](#) (2 and 3). As such, lessons can be learned from both of these stages and the predictable challenges of transitioning between them. While frustrating, these are very typical growing pains that all organizations go through in one way or another. If thoughtfully navigated, these challenges can certainly be weathered and overcome.

Specifically, the WFC can expect to see the following:

- Ongoing reliance on volunteers to complete key work.
- Maintaining initial enthusiasm.
- Aspirations that exceed the organization's capacity to actually implement plans
- Uncertainty about roles and authority in decision-making, specifically board member confusion about their role and responsibilities (beginning to shift from operations to governance).
- Lack of formal systems and documented policies.
- Limited financial resources and/or over reliance on a very few funding streams.
- Disjointed public communications and/or confusion about the organization's identity.
- Confusion or friction as "outsiders" join in leadership positions.

Components of the strategic plan can help to address many issues and WFC leadership should attend to these.

Key Recommendations:

1. Grow your membership. Continue to identify individuals with connections to the food system and invite them to come to a meeting. Give people a clear reason to belong and multiple ways that they can contribute AND benefit from their involvement. Define and implement a "new member welcome" or orientation process to help new members understand the coalition's core business, ways they can benefit from membership, how they can connect with and support WFC priorities.
2. Tell a story that unifies your stakeholders. Develop an identity that's as varied, robust, and welcoming as Wyoming itself. While accepting that you don't have to be everything to everyone (and without minimizing your core values), strive to communicate a nonpartisan identity. Food security, fairness for small-scale producers, and systemic changes that help Wyoming eat Wyoming food can all garner wide-spread support.
3. Diversify partnerships and funding sources. Solicit institutional and community contributions to help fund your efforts.
4. Revisit your structure and adjust as needed. Consider how you can free up people to focus on governance OR operations but not necessarily have to do both. Continue to develop your governance role as you grow.
5. Commit to reasonable expectations. Do a few things well and celebrate your successes with those. Maintain momentum through transitions and growing pains.

Strategic Priorities

Connect

Food systems are inherently connected but sometimes, only haphazardly, or in ways that don't fully satisfy people's needs. Work to connect pieces of the food system to one another. From connecting producers with other producers to connecting eaters' and producers' lived experiences with policy-makers and enforcers, build strong connections between all the players.

Learn

The knowledge and expertise to create a thriving local food system already exists within Wyoming. Leverage key connections to support shared learning. Once folks are connected, help them tell and hear one another's stories. When something is working well in one community, help fledgling efforts in another community to replicate ideas in their own ways. From beginning producers to Wyomingites experiencing food insecurity, we can all benefit from learning new information to better meet our needs. Further, speaking with one voice, the coalition can advocate for the needs of producers and consumers alike and encourage decision-makers to make smart choices for Wyoming's food system .

Grow

Apply shared learning to support growth. From increasing food yields to expanding distribution systems to growing healthier stronger bodies, nurture sustainable growth state-wide. Producers, having connected with and learned from one another, can grow more food and expand their operations. Nonprofits and food assistance programs, having connected with and learned from others, can grow their reach and better serve hungry eaters. Wyoming citizens, having improved access to healthful foods, and having learned skills to prepare it, can literally grow their bodies in a healthy way. With basic needs met, people can better contribute to and engage with their families and communities.

Vibrant Farms Strategic Goals

Priority	Goal(s)	Key Partner(s)	Timeline
A. Connect	1. Increase active participation in producer/market/distribution related WFC events. Involve 10-15 active members at least 4 times/year.	Eat Wyoming UW Extension, Growing Wyoming Internship, Haub School UW College of Ag (Vet Science , range , Plant Science ,	Annually
	2. Represent WFC at 3 producer related events per year (non WFC hosted) through guest speaking, tabling, etc.	CWC Rocky Mountain Farmers	Annually
	3. Involve 3+ institutional stakeholders with producer/distribution related efforts	CWC, State Department of Ag, UW Extension, etc.	End of 2024 → annually
B. Learn	1. Host 3+ producer/distribution focused speakers/idea swaps annually (conference + 2 others virtually). Publish key ideas/insights from these events online (online repository of information)	Strategic Communications Stockgrowers, Women in Ag, SRM, Barnyards and Backyards AG news	End of 2024 → annually
	2. Collect information about producer barriers and challenges once per year. Use information gained to inform policy/advocacy efforts AND to drive speaker/idea swap and website content (food freedom act related informing producers and consumers).	Strategic Communications WG Policy WG	End of 2023 → annually
C. Grow	1. Increase annual revenue from in-person and online farmers' markets by 10% annually.	Eat Wyoming, Extension + Extension Research Centers, Speciality Crop grants	End of 2023 → annually
	2. Increase individual producer yields through regenerative agricultural practices and improved soil health. Connect 2 producers/year with this effort.	Sustainable Ecosystems WG CWC beginning farm program	End of 2024 → annually

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	<p>3. Remove barriers to production/distribution by serving as a liaison between producers and regulatory enforcement bodies (food freedom act).</p> <p>Formalize process and share outcomes with producers. Create a dedicated contact form on the website and aim to increase # of resolutions/year by 10% annually + share ideas with producers (member benefit).</p> <p>Consider ways to create access to shared liability insurance for producers</p>	<p>Policy WG (Adam as liaison)</p>	<p>Ongoing?</p>
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Sustainable Ecosystems Strategic Goals

Priority	Goal(s)	Key Partner(s)	Who/When
A. Connect	1. Increase active participation in WG meetings. Invite 3 new people per meeting. Focus on key connections for rolling topics/meeting focus.	Growing Wyoming Internship, 4H, Farmers' Markets	Bi-monthly Mike
	2. Represent WFC at 3 events per year (non WFC hosted) through guest speaking, tabling, committee membership, etc.	CWC, Community colleges, 4H RMFU, Climate Action Networks	2024 → annually Mike/ BJ
	3. Involve 3+ institutional stakeholders with sustainability related efforts	CWC, Department of Ag, Extension, UW Range Club	2024 → annually Mike/ BJ
B. Learn	1. Host 2+ sustainability related speakers/idea swaps annually (conference + 1 others virtually). Publish key insights/learnings online (online repository of information)		2024 → annually whole
	2. Pilot community-level composting efforts and share lessons learned with 2+ other communities. Pursue funding in partnership with others to support implementation.	City of Laramie ACRES Student Farm Wyoming Food for Thought	2024-25 Whole
	3. Create and share educational/advocacy 3-5 documents to promote sustainable practices (documented financial and ecological benefits). Share with relevant stakeholders. Add sustainable food prep. suggestions to share with consumers (foods that are local, affordable, and sustainable)	Policy WG Vibrant Farms WG Strategic Communications WG Healthy People WG- Sensible Nutrition	1 per year for next 3 years Whole
C. Grow	1. Expand adoption of sustainable practices (soil health) to 2 producers/year. Consider connections with students/interns to support implementation (grant funded?).	Vibrant Farms WG, CWC, Department of Ag, Extension, UW Range Club	Whole
	2. In partnership with local stakeholders, implement 2 community-based food-waste composting efforts within 5 years.	Identify target communities to start with	By 2028 Whole

Strong Native Communities Strategic Goals

Priority	Goal(s)	Key Partners	Who/When
A. Connect	1. Increase active participation in WG meetings. Invite 2 new people per meeting.		Rhonda
	2. Represent WFC at 2 events per year (non WFC hosted) through guest speaking, tabling, committee membership, etc.		Rhonda/BJ
	3. Involve 3+ institutional stakeholders with native food related efforts	CWC, WIC/SNAP, NRCS, UW Extension, etc.	Rhonda/BJ
B. Learn	1. Teach culturally relevant skills to improve food access (growing, hunting, gathering, food preparation). Share key insights/learnings online (online repository of information, videos, etc.)		Whole WG
	2. Share culturally relevant guidance to support SNAP outreach (once implemented in Wyoming). 😊	Healthy People WG	Whole WG
	3. Explore opportunities and limitations for expanding WIC/TANF on the reservation. Investigate ways that EBT at self-check out might support food purchases with SNAP benefits for those who can't travel to the store themselves.		Whole WG
C. Grow	1. Improve food access to reservation communities with the greatest need (Crow Heart and Sage Creek) within the next 3 years. Support food procurement and delivery in partnership with other service providers and community members.	Wind River Cares, Combine with medical check-ups/check ins, Wind River Farmers Market SNAP Express and SNAP EBT for delivery options?	Whole WG
	2. Establish a community food center within the next 5 years to serve as a learning and production hub. Once established, consider ways to improve access to this center	Vibrant Farmers WG Food Bank Of WY	Whole WG

Healthy People Strategic Goals

Priority	Goal(s)	Key Partners	Who/When
A. Connect	1. Maintain actively involved and diverse WG members (10+ at monthly/bi-monthly meetings). Maintain regular information sharing between stakeholders.	DFS, DOE, DOH, Food Bank of Wyoming Cent\$ible Nutrition Program Casper Community Greenhouse, American Heart Association, Head Start Collaborative	WG
	2. Link/synthesize available data to inform a more comprehensive view of the state’s food insecure (see B-1)	Department of Family Services Department of Education Department of Health	WG
	3. Expand farm to fork connections including Fruit and Vegetable Rx Programs, GusNIP	Vibrant Farms WG Fairness and Justice WG (Healthy People Working Group assist as needed)	WG assistance
B. Learn	1. Collaborate with (coming DFS) statewide study to inform data aggregation and decision-making.	Department of Family Services Food Bank of Wyoming WY Hunger Initiative	WG
	2. Draft white-paper - continue pressure in state legislature (and local school boards?) for systemic support of food security. Focus on universal free meals, breakfast before the bell.	Policy WG Fairness and Justice WG	WG/Fairness and Justice WG
C. Grow	1. Improve food access with SNAPed Outreach . Secure (basic) and matching funds and partners to help implement this.	Policy need state \$ to fund + workforce to implement	
	2. Nurture fledgling efforts by sharing best practices from successful hunger-relief work throughout the state. Foster collaboration and “copycat” efforts across the state.	WY Food For Thought , Edible Prairie Project , The Food Group , Casper Community Greenhouse Project...	WG

Fairness and Justice Strategic Goals

Priority	Goal(s)	Key Partners	Who/When
A. Connect	1. Increase actively involved and diverse WG members by inviting 2 new people/meeting. Meet quarterly.		All, Rhonda to remind
	2. Meet with the N. Arapaho and Shoshone heads of WIC. Explore opportunities with them (farmers' market).	Market Staff (Rhonda)	Rhonda (with Livy and Rhonda)
	3. Add institutional partner (like other groups) + representing WFC at other events. 4. Connect with producers around justice for small scale producers too (compared to large industry) Fairness for small scale, family scale farmers/ranchers.	Policy, Vibrant Farms WG Language from RMFU, Center for Rural Affairs (NE)	
B. Learn	1. Educate decision-makers regarding free school meals. Re-polish + publish brief documents, Continue to pressure the state legislature (and local school boards) for systemic support of food security. Add increasing number of states. Nourishing children is pro-life.	Policy WG Healthy People WG	
	2. Pilot GusNIP grant (or something similar fruit/veg Rx) with Wind River Cares beginning 2024-25. Could be funded in another way.	Strong Native Communities WG	2025? Needs \$
C. Grow	1. Working with Market Managers, increase acceptance of WIC i at Farmers' Markets (2 new markets per year). Include expansion of WIC on the Reservation when appropriate (when eligible foods are available).	Vibrant Farms WG Strong Native Communities WG WIC outreach grant through FRAC	Beginning 2024?
	2. Following GusNIP pilot, organize information sessions to expand in other communities (Casper, Gillette) by 2027.		

Policy Strategic Goals

Priority	Goal(s)	Key Partners	Who/When
A. Connect	1. Skim WG meeting notes each month and identify possible policy connections.	Board Secretary Vista Volunteers	VISTATrial in late 2023, rolling in 2024
	2. Meet with 1 state legislator a month (distribute duty across the WG) to build rapport.		Liaison, BJ, whole WG?
	3. Develop a simple “referral” process by which other WGs can alert you to policy needs. Document steps to follow once this happens.		VISTA, BJ, Chair
B. Learn	1. Annually survey stakeholders to identify key frustrations and policy needs.	Communications WG	Whole WG, VISTA
	2. Publish existing WFC whitepapers/policy statements on website (organized by working group). Maintain these documents as positions evolve (1/WG by 2023...) Focus on Food Freedom First and grow from there → Farm Bill	Communications WG RMFU Adam to draft initial documents	Whole WG2+/WG by end of 2024 → ongoing from there
	3. Pilot your referral and next steps process 2-3 times and revise accordingly.		VISTA, BJ, Chair
C. Grow	1. Increase policy WG membership by 2 each year. How to help onboard new folks?		Whole WG
	2. Increase number of posted WFC positions by 1 each year.		Whole WG Farm bill in 2023/24?
	3. Reflect on process improvement for advocacy during legislative session. Subcommittees? 4. Remove barriers via liaison roles between producers and enforcement bodies.		Whole WG

Communications (*Member Services?*) Strategic Goals

Priority	Goal(s)	Key Partners	Who/When
A. Connect	1. Read WG meeting notes each month and identify key points to highlight. Work with Vista volunteers to draft and schedule content to share with brtgoader audiences.	Vista Volunteer	Ongoing
	2. Identify relevant content from other sources (especially local partners). Work with Vista volunteers to draft and schedule content to share with broader audiences. Explain the value of local foods and how to access it.	Eat Wyoming, WY Food Bank, Sen\$ible Nutrition, UW Extension	Whole WG
	3. Tell the story of the WFC with key materials (website, social media, Member Benefits Document, brochure, and donor talking points, regular newsletter, videos of speakers, etc). Publish monthly newsletter. WPR Community Moment.	UW Ag. Communications Public Radio Station + WY State Daily, Livestock Roundup, newspapers	Tools in place by end of 2024 VISTA, ED
B. Learn	1. Organize a high quality annual conference for stakeholder learning. Identify topics and speakers from each WG lead.		ED, VISTA, whole WG
	2. Coordinate annual member/stakeholder survey(s) to inform and guide priority work.		VISTA, ED
	3. Publish key content on WFC website in easy-to-find/navigate way.		VISTA
C. Grow	1. Increase traffic to website by X% annually. Consider contracting with a marketing/web design consultant to improve website search engine optimization (SEO).		WG, VISTA, 2025
	2. Increase WFC membership and annual conference attendance by 15% each year.		Board, WG Annually
	3. Increase local food sales by 15% annually Track data with multiple measures. <i>Statewide Market Sales?</i>	Vibrant Farms WG LeAnn	

WFC Governance Board Strategic Goals

Priority	Goal(s)	Key Partners	Who/ When
A. Connect	1. Convene regular (6x/year) board meetings including one in-person board meeting per year. Build agendas that are efficient and aligned with strategic priorities.	Board Chair	
	2. Identify potential future leaders (for working groups and the Board) and strengthen those connections. Invite them to join, explore how they might fit in and be able to support (or supplement) your identified priorities.	ED, working with WG Chairs	
B. Learn	1. Continue to clearly define roles and responsibilities of staff (operations) and board members (governance). Remember the dual-nature of WG leads as volunteers (working at the direction of staff) and supervisors (board oversight of ED).	Exec Board WG Leaders ED	
	2. Evaluate the current organizational structure and whether/how it's meeting your needs.	Board + ED	
	3. Consider the organization's needs (see this report) and identify gaps in your board.	Board	
	4. Schedule regular (yearly) board trainings/board development to support smooth board functioning.	Board Chair + ED	
C. Grow	1. Recruit and thoughtfully onboard individuals to serve on the board who will help meet identified challenges.	Board (see A-2)	
	2. Annually increase the WFC budget by \$20,000. Develop a clear plan for revenue generation (mix of grants, business donations, individual donations, etc.)	ED	2024 + annually
	3. Increase budget for staff time, travel, and professional development.	Board	
	4. Adopt board policies for spending and fiscal management.		

Yearly Meeting + Communication Plan

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Farms	Buyer/Seller Swap	Production Tips	Thaw + Grow			Buyer/Seller Prep	Buyer/Seller Prep		Obstacles, Needs	Wrapping Up/Rest?	Finances	WG Break-outs, WG leader round-up?
Sustain	Soil Health	Soil Health		Compost		Compost	Compost	School Gardens?		Soil Health		
Native		Food Prep				Garden/Market News				Food Preserv.		
Healthy					SNAP enrollment				School Food News			
Justice				WIC at Market			Veg Rx					
Comm/Member	Conf. Recap								Conf. teasers		Conf. Details	
Policy		Leg update	Leg Update			School Meals			Policy Needs			
Board		Elections	Retreat									
Mtgs	5	3	3	5	2	4	3	3	3	5	4	Conf.

KEY	WG Meeting	Mini Meeting + Speaker	Newsletter/ Blog Feature	Conference	Surveys/ Elections
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Key Roles and Responsibilities

Americorps Vista/Communications Intern/Part Time Staff

- Handle majority of communications (with direction of Strategic Communications WG). This includes but is not limited to newsletters and blog posts, event announcements and promotion, social media, etc.
- Collect newsletter stories/content on a rolling basis from each working group. Draft content for newsletters/blogs and submit to ED and post/share when ready.
- Set meeting dates (with WG leaders), send calendar invites, and email reminders to working group members.
- Remind WG leaders about meeting invites (connect goals) and encourage personal outreach.
- Work with WG leaders to coordinate mini-meetings and speakers. Coordinate logistics with zoom links, slides, recordings, sharing recordings, etc.
- If needed, record notes at WG meetings and email notes to the group at the end of each meeting. Include notes from previous meeting in reminders/invitation for next meeting. NOTE, this is also a great responsibility for a WG “chairperson in training.”

Executive Director

- Supervise and support Vistas and other volunteers, including WG chairpeople.
- Attend (in support) but not lead the working group meeting. This meeting attendance can be adjusted over time once the ED is more up to speed with all the groups and their members.
- When necessary, the ED may serve as a WG chair, on an interim capacity with a focus to recruit new leadership. When this happens, the ED/interim WG chair will designate a proxy for board votes. During this interim service, ED will balance duties of the temporary chair role and other ED duties. A new WG leader should be identified and onboarded as soon as possible and definitely within 6-12 months.
- Support growth and leadership development within the Working Groups (coach on agenda setting, leader recruitment, etc.)
- Where relevant, share information from other working groups to support coordination between them.
- Serve as an Actively recruit new members and help them get connected/involved.
- Monitor WFC spending and budgets (with Board)
- Provide welcome message at the conference (with Board Chair?) and build/reinforce connections at the event itself.
- Write personal thank you notes to donors.
- Raise money through grant-writing, donor asks, partnership development, membership, and fundraising. Focus on building capacity to compensate future WG leaders or infuse WGs with paid staff support.

Communications/Member Services/Conference Committee

- Supervise Vista volunteers with newsletter/online content generation.
- Work with WG leaders to identify novel and appealing topics and speakers for the conference.
- Coordinate conference agenda and logistics with the Vista Volunteers.
- Create an annual report (summary of WG accomplishments/successes)

Board Treasurer

- Keep records of financial contributions and regularly send “No Goods or Services” letters to acknowledge donors.
- Maintain annual filings with the IRS and State of Wyoming.
- Oversee revenue and expenses + track alignment with annual budget.
- Over time, consider shifting bookkeeping duties to staff and/or a part time bookkeeper.

Board Secretary:

- With the Treasurer and Communications/Member Services lead, maintain membership/donor lists, WG affiliation and contact information for each. Over time, shift these duties to the Vista or paid administrative staff.
- Work with WG leaders and Vista volunteers to collect WG meeting agendas and notes. Suggest [templates](#) for both that make it easy to keep the meetings on track and record decisions.
- Take and distribute meeting minutes for Board Meetings.

Possible Future Structure

“Shrink” the governing board to only include the executive committee/at large members. Other WG chairpeople could serve on a WG advisory board (meets every other month?) for information sharing. Governing board can continue to oversee communications and policy to ensure alignment. All other working groups get support and coordination from the ED and AmeriCorps Vista/Administrative Staff.

