From the Executive Director
Appreciation of interest holders engaged in equity centered strategic planning process

Why Strategic Planning and Why Now?
Outlines FINE’s journey and the need for the work

Full Strategic Plan
Just cause statement, focus areas and metrics of strategic plan

Methodology
Step-by-step process to collect data, create new systems & impact change

Strategic Partners
Diverse interest holders who impacted development of strategic plan

Appendix
The network, key terms, SWOT analysis, and root cause analysis
Dear FINE Friends,

On behalf of the entire FINE staff and advisory team, I am delighted to share FINE’s new strategic plan that will guide our work over the next three years.

The planning process took place over the past year, a pivotal time for FINE. We began as we concluded our fifth biennial summit, and reflected on our work over the past dozen years. We took a minute to appreciate all that we have accomplished together, supporting the farm to institution network in our region through events, programs, research, and connections. And, we asked, what is needed now in a food system, region, and world that has changed in many ways and faces ever-mounting challenges? We also asked what is FINE’s unique role in addressing those needs.

You will note that the plan builds on many of our founding principles and core values. We continue to recognize the important influence of institutions - early childhood and K-12 schools, colleges, hospitals, and prisons - in our food system and our communities. We see a growing need for institutional value chains that create a just, equitable, and regenerative food system. Moreover, we double down on the need for a collaborative, adaptive network committed to collective power and increased regional self-reliance.

Our focus areas and strategies also build on prior success - forging meaningful relationships and ensuring that new and experienced network partners have the resources and tools needed to meet our collective ambitions.

We emphasize an obligation to diversify our network and center the voices and needs of those most affected by food system inequities in all aspects of our work, including planning, implementation, and evaluation. This starts by ensuring that the FINE organization has a framework, structure, and culture that embodies the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The plan includes a strategy to hold us accountable - and we invite you all to join us in that essential piece.

The plan would not have been possible without the dedicated work of FINE’s talented staff team, a committed and diverse group of advisors, and the skilled leadership of Solutions Consulting Co.

The process took twice the time we anticipated, despite a very deliberate pace and organized approach. In the end, the effort was well worth it. We have a plan we are proud of and inspired by, and we are already working to put it into action - you can be sure this will not be a shelf sitter! A huge thank you to all who contributed to the plan, and to all of you—the FINE network—for joining us on our journey forward. Please let us know your questions, suggestions, and ways that you want to be involved.

Peter Allison,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
he / him
WE ENVISION

a just, equitable, and regenerative food system in New England and beyond, led by a collaborative, adaptive network committed to collective power and increased regional self-reliance.
Create an organizational framework, structure, and culture that embodies the values of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Facilitate opportunities for relationship building and collaboration while centering the voices and needs of those most affected by food systems inequities.

Expand the network’s skills and capacity to cultivate an equitable and sustainable food system.

OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS, WE WILL FOCUS ON THREE AREAS:

Organizational Framework

Relationships & Collaboration

Capacity & Skills
WHY STRATEGIC PLANNING AND WHY NOW?
Farm to Institution New England (FINE) was founded in 2011 when farm to school leaders from the six states identified a need for a broader farm to institution network in the region. At the same time, the six New England agricultural commissioners identified farm to institution as a key strategy for keeping land in food production.

Since inception, FINE has focused on developing cross-sector connections between K-12 schools, colleges and universities, hospitals and other institutions such as early child care facilities, health centers, assisted living facilities, prisons, government facilities and corporate campuses.

Over the last 13 years, the farm to institution network has expanded and deepened and FINE’s work has evolved and adapted to meet the changing needs of the network. Learn more about the origins of FINE as a book chapter and case study.
LAUNCHING A STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

In 2023, we launched a strategic planning process with Solutions Consulting Co. to develop a roadmap for the next 3 years that would reflect the significant changes our food system and region have undergone in the last decade, and particularly the last 3 years.

We Started With Several Guiding Questions:

- How can FINE support communities and others along the supply chain to meaningfully engage with and influence institutions?
- How can FINE support institutions to:
  - Meaningfully connect with and support their local community food systems?
  - Address and repair the inequities on which our current food system is built?
  - Mitigate their food system impacts which are adding to the climate crisis?

Our Desired Outcomes Included:

A clear and shared understanding of
- FINE’s value proposition and vision going forward
- The language FINE uses to describe itself, its work, and its theory of change
- FINE’s culture, staff roles, and organizational structure
Narrowing Focus While Widening Our Lens

While we set out to clarify our focus and our direction, this process has also widened our understanding of the food system and all of the interconnected pieces that influence and are impacted by farm to institution work. As you read through the strategic plan, you’ll notice an emphasis on building strong and equitable value chains. We see this is a critical part of building a just and resilient food system. We also recognize that this work cannot be done without acknowledging and addressing serious land and capital access barriers that disproportionately impact communities of color and prevent people from even entering the value chain. Alongside our commitment to value chain development, we are also committed to understanding and addressing these and other intersectional issues, and working alongside the many individuals and organizations in the region who are committed to this work.
FULL STRATEGIC PLAN
JUST CAUSE STATEMENT

FINE serves a dynamic network of communities, organizations, and institutions working together to create a just, equitable, and regenerative food system in New England and beyond.

Institutions hold substantial power and wield significant influence in our food system through their food service, education, investment, employment and land use. We believe that developing institutional food value chains that are responsive to community needs and rooted in racial justice, food sovereignty and climate resilience is a critical way to leverage the power of institutions to change the food system.

The changes we seek can only be achieved when led by a collaborative, adaptive network committed to collective power and increased regional self-reliance.
JUST CAUSE
STATEMENT

Organizational Framework

Relationships & Collaboration

Capacity & Skills

Strategies
Create an organizational framework, structure, and culture that embodies the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Facilitate opportunities for relationship building and collaboration while centering the voices and needs of those most affected by food systems inequities.

Expand the network’s skills and capacity to cultivate an equitable and regenerative food system.

2024-2027 FOCUS AREAS
Assessing Impact  We’re assessing impact around things like....

- Diversity, lived experience, and skills of FINE staff, Network Advisory Council (NAC) members, and project advisors
- Staff, NAC, and project advisors report a sense of inclusion, support, and belonging at FINE
- Diversity of engagement and participation in FINE evaluation and accountability processes

Strategies

Organizational Infrastructure: Create and revise FINE’s leadership structure so that FINE is staffed and advised by people with the skill sets and experiences to effectively serve the network and fulfill our just cause. Develop and maintain policies and systems to operate effectively in meeting our just cause.

Culture: Build a healthy, equitable, inclusive culture at FINE that prioritizes teamwork, innovation, curiosity, support, belonging, continuous learning, trust, and celebration.

Accountability & Evaluation: Establish a feedback loop that ensures clear accountability as FINE works to create positive impact; reduce harm; and build equity, justice, and sustainability in the food system

More about how we’re holding ourselves accountable at farmtoinst.org/strategic-impact
Facilitate opportunities for relationship building and collaboration while centering the voices and needs of those most affected by food systems inequities

Assessing Impact
We’re assessing impact around things like....

- Connections that lead to action or collaboration as a result of FINE events and matchmaking
- Attendees report a sense of inclusion, support, and belonging at FINE events
- Diversity and lived experience of planning committees, presenters / facilitators, and event attendees

Strategies

Facilitate Gathering Spaces: Host and facilitate events, communities of practice, and other spaces for relationship building.

Networking: Facilitate and support relationship building, ideating, and collaborating, by attending network events, supporting value chain coordination, and matchmaking

More about how we’re holding ourselves accountable at farmtoinst.org/strategic-impact
Expand the network’s skills and capacity to cultivate an equitable and sustainable food system

Assessing Impact

- Network members learn new skills or discover a new tool from FINE
- Policy platform and plan are defined
- FINE stories, resources, and policy campaigns center priority impacted communities

Strategies

Research & Resource Development: Conduct research that identifies and/or fills in gaps in information that increases the network’s understanding of F2I. Develop resources that reduce barriers and build the network's capacity.

Amplify: Share, elevate, and circulate F2I stories, opportunities, and resources from FINE and the network.

Advocate for a Policy & Programmatic Agenda: Take a position and advocate for public and institutional policies and program changes that support an equitable and regenerative food system.

More about how we’re holding ourselves accountable at farmtoinst.org/strategic-impact
METHODOLOGY
We can count on racism and other systems of oppression to show up in our work because it’s historically, institutionally, and culturally set up to happen.

It’s force is like a strong current. Trying to move against the current is an active, consistent choice, and even so, one person swimming against the current of a very powerful river is an impossible task. It takes a lot of people, linked together, creating group infrastructure that is strong enough to move against the current.

FINE has prioritized swimming against the current in our strategic planning process and implementation plans.

Source: Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance (AORTA)
You can find more about our SWOT analysis and Root Cause Analysis in the Appendix.

**PROCESS OVERVIEW**

**Facilitators**
- Data Collection & Analysis
- SWOT Findings & Recommendations*

**Co-creators**
- Root Cause Analysis*
- Visioning & Goal-Setting

**Feedback Partners**
- Feedback Incorporation

**Network Advisory Council**
- Final Strategic Plan & Outreach

**Timeline**
- July 2023
- October 2023
- December 2023
- February 2024
- May 2024
This process relied on invaluable input from partners, network members, and collaborators.

### KEY INTEREST HOLDERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Partners</th>
<th>Co-Creators</th>
<th>Facilitators</th>
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<tr>
<td>Network Advisory Council Members</td>
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<td>FINE Staff</td>
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<td>Organizational Partners</td>
<td>Community Members</td>
<td>Solution Consulting Co.</td>
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<td>Funders</td>
<td>FINE Staff</td>
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<td>Subject Matter Experts</td>
<td>Organizational Partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Members</td>
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FINE Staff
LATHA SWAMY  
City of New Haven, Food Policy Division

SIMCA HORWITZ  
Mass Farm to School

NESSA RICHMAN  
Rhode Island Food Policy Council

KYLE FOLEY  
Gulf of Maine Research Institute

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Rhode Island Commerce Corporation

LESLEY SOBLE  
Impact Justice

MARGARET CHRISTIE  
Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA)

KIRBY ROBERTS  
UMass Dartmouth Dining Services

ANDY KENDALL  
Henry P. Kendall Foundation

BART WESTDIJK  
New England Grassroots Environment Fund

CYNTHIA GREENE  
Shelburne Farms

JESSICA PATROLIA  
Rhode Island Dept of Education

JOHN WAITE  
Western Mass Food Processing Center

JESSE RYE  
Farm Fresh Rhode Island

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New England Grassroots Environment Fund

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ELLIE BOMSTEIN  
Seed Change Strategies

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Farm Fresh Rhode Island

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Maine State Prison

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Boston Mayor’s Office of Food Justice

JULIUS KOLAWOLE  
African Alliance of Rhode Island

MAIDA IVES  
Amherst College

VINCE RAZIONALE  
Hartwick Elementary School, formerly Center for an Agricultural Economy

WAYNE WILLIAMS  
The Food Trust

SHAUNIA FLOWERS  
2 Cents Homegrown

DANYA TEITELBAUM  
Queens Greens Farm

CHRISTINE CARUSO  
Wesleyan University
NETWORK ADVISORY COUNCIL

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City of New Haven, CT

ELLIE BOMSTEIN  
Seed Change Strategies

TOM BREWTON  
Food Connects

JENNIFER CALLOWAY  
Harvesting Goods

STEPHANIE PIKE  
Farm Fresh Rhode Island

VINCE RAZIONALE  
Hartwick Elementary School, formerly Walden Local Meats

KIRBY ROBERTS  
UMass Dartmouth Dining Services

HELEN RORTVEDT  
The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT)

MICHAEL WEBSTER  
Tory Hill; Dining Services, The Hotchkiss School

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Formerly The John Merck Fund

CARA SANTINO  
Little Lion Collective

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Rhode Island Commerce Corporation

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City of New Haven, CT

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ML Design Studio

JOSH MARSHALL  
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MELISSA MONTEJUNAS  
Harvesting Good, formerly Native Maine Produce

CHRISTINE C. CARUSO  
Wesleyan University

CHARISSA ZAPATA-WALKER  
Aspire Consulting; Southern New England Farmers of Color Coalition; Boston Waterfront Initiative, The Trustees
WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US!

About This Strategic Plan

Get Involved

Subscribe to Our Newsletter

Get in Touch
FINE serves a network of communities, organizations, and institutions working together to create a just, equitable, and regenerative food system in New England and beyond. FINE does not have a formal membership, but considers the farm to institution network to include:

- Those who are impacted by the decisions and actions made through this movement/work
- Those working to leverage the power of institutions and institutional value chains to change the food system
- Those who hold power and resources in the institutional value chain and food system

### Those working along the supply chain:

**Beginning**
- Producers/farmers/fishers
- Food businesses and manufacturers
- Producer support entities (e.g., extension services)

**Middle**
- Processors
- Distributors
- Aggregators
- Food hubs

**Institutional End**
- Institutional dining service staff
- Institutional sustainability staff
- Institutional Administrators
- Food service workers
- Nutritionists
- Researchers
- Educators
- Service members
- Campus farmers, farm managers

### Those working outside the supply chain to support a just, equitable, and regenerative food system in New England:

- Nonprofit and advocacy organizations
- Funders, lenders, investors, and fundraisers working in the food system space
- Food system and community organizers and activists
- Government officials and policy makers
- Subject matter experts
- Marketing and communications professionals

### Those who rely on institutions for food and other related resources:

- College, K-12, and early care students and their families
- Health care patients and their families
- Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people
- Families of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people
Who does this work impact?

While we believe that everyone in the network will benefit from creating a more just, equitable, and regenerative food system, we recognize that the inequities in our food system impact some communities more than others. Our work seeks to positively impact those communities, which throughout the strategic plan we refer to as “priority impacted communities.” They are:

- Farms, producers, and food businesses, with an emphasis on those from communities who have been structurally excluded from funding, resources, and decision making. This includes BIPOC-led food orgs, farms and food businesses; immigrant and refugee farmers and food businesses; and tribal and indigenous-led food initiatives.

- Communities and eaters who are impacted by institutional food systems and/or rely on institutions for a majority of their food and nutrients, with an emphasis on communities facing food apartheid.

Who is informing and participating in the work?

FINE’s work is informed by the network and its needs. It is essential that those who are most impacted by the work are informing it and have decision making power. Thus we strive for consistent representation from priority impacted communities on FINE’s Network Advisory Council, in our steering committees, and on our staff.

Other ways individuals and organizations participate in FINE’s work include community of practice members, project and research partners, speakers, presenters, trainers, and facilitators. When we launch a new effort, we engage those who bring professional expertise, lived experience, and their own networks/communities. Respecting these individuals’ input means that FINE compensates fairly for time, acknowledges that we are not entitled to their presence, and engages affinity groups and caucuses when most appropriate.

Who is influenced by the work?

Institutions, funders, nonprofits, and governmental agencies hold a lot of power in New England’s food system. These organizations hold decision making power and leadership in supply chain development, land access, procurement, investments, funding, research, policy, and other areas. Over the past decade, access to funding and resources has allowed FINE to operate and to build relationships with resource-holders; many others have not had these opportunities. We plan to use this power to build understanding, shift policy, and to improve our food system, challenging ourselves and others to work towards a more equitable food system for those who have been excluded.
Climate Resilience: Climate resilience is the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to hazardous events, trends, or disturbances related to climate. Improving climate resilience involves assessing how climate change will create new, or alter current, climate-related risks, and taking steps to better cope with these risks. source

Equitable: Equality has to do with giving everyone the exact same resources but Equity involves distributing resources based on the needs of the recipients. source

Farm to Institution: The infrastructure, processes, supply chain relationships, and policies that enable food to travel from producers to institutional consumers within the region. source

Food Sovereignty: Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. source

Food System: A food system is the interconnected web of people and processes that works to facilitate the growth and distribution of food for a specific community group. The term incorporates and embodies all concepts related to food, from the community’s overall physical and economic health to its sociopolitical and legal underpinnings. source

Just: Justice is long-term equity. It looks to create equity in systems as well as individuals. “Justice can take equity one step further by fixing the systems in a way that leads to long-term, sustainable, equitable access for generations to come.” source

New England: New England is a northeastern region of the United States comprising the states of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island. source

Racial Justice: Racial justice is the systematic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone. All people are able to achieve their full potential in life, regardless of race, ethnicity or the community in which they live. source

Regenerative: Sustainability seeks to maintain our environment and world without causing damage or degrading the ecosystems. Regenerative practices seek to restore the environment and ecosystems to improve them. The regenerative movement involves building or rebuilding systems to restore and regenerate nature instead of minimizing damage. source

Regional Self-reliance: how well a given region can satisfy the food needs of its population. source

Value Chain: A strategic alliance between farmers or ranchers and other supply-chain partners that deal in significant volumes of high quality, differentiated food products that distributes rewards equitably across the chain. Partner alliances recognize that maximum value for products depends on interdependence, collaboration, and mutual support. Alliances form around shared values such as social or environmental concerns that are reflected in the product and customer relations. They are responsive to demand for products differentiated by values-related claims such as “local,” “regional,” or “organic.” source

Value Chain Coordination: leveraging the soft infrastructure, in the form of skills, competencies and relationships, in a food value chain. With a strong soft infrastructure, individuals and organizations are far more readily able to acquire and utilize hard infrastructure in their communities, improving the economic position of supply chain members. source Value chain coordination activities involve working with stakeholders who are directly a part of local value chain such as input suppliers, producers, processors, distributors, wholesale buyers and end consumers. Additionally, value chain coordination engages local support actors who provide services or activities to value chain stakeholders. These include lenders, researchers, advocacy non-profits, researchers and more. source

We rely on the following definitions from experts across the food system.
The SWOT framework was used to identify DEI internal and external factors, disparities, and trends. The process armed FINE with a solid strategy for prioritizing the work that needs to be done in order to maximize impact and shift the team toward decisions that result in action.

The completion of a comprehensive data and document review resulted in the development of a SWOT analysis.

**Why SWOT?**

The SWOT framework was used to identify DEI internal and external factors, disparities, and trends. The process armed FINE with a solid strategy for prioritizing the work that needs to be done in order to maximize impact and shift the team toward decisions that result in action.

**SWOT ANALYSIS**

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**Timeframe**

- **03 Months**

**Documentation**

- **43 Documents Reviewed** (Including Network Surveys)

**Focus Groups & Interviews**

- **06 Staff Members**
- **23 NAC Members**
- **29 Individuals**

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Click Here to Read the SWOT Analysis
### Internal Origin (attributes of the organization)

#### Helpful
- FINE leverages and amplifies field experience and research findings to support network members in their efforts to strengthen our food system
- FINE convenings create opportunities for critical connections that might not otherwise happen
- FINE’s core values are important and durable
- FINE has strong relationships and a reputation as a valued leader in the farm to institution network

#### Weaknesses
- FINE staff and Network Advisory Council have limited diversity and should be more reflective of the communities they serve
- Overly ambitious work plan that stretches staff capacity and limits ability to serve effectively
- FINE has limited funding sources to support all of its high priority projects and organizational operations

### External Origin (attributes of the environment)

#### Opportunities
- Create authentic ways to engage communities of color and others most impacted by the inequities in the food system by building trust and partnerships. Critical in order to do work that reaches more people, in more meaningful ways
- Share power, decision making, and resources with partners in the region (e.g., Rooted in Community)
- Learn from institutions and network partners who have demonstrated effective and authentic community engagement
- Create more formal partnerships with national and regional actors to increase collective impact

#### Threats
- Potential tension between our core values and the values of institutions and other powerful interest holders
- Challenges facing NE farms, fisheries and local food system businesses that are integral to FINE’s work, caused by environmental factors, land access and values, and competition from bigger national entities
- The concentration of other support organizations at the national, regional and local levels that make it harder for FINE to define our unique value proposition
ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

Root Cause Analysis (RCA) is a structured method used to identify the underlying reasons or causes of a problem or a failure.

Rather than simply addressing superficial symptoms, RCA seeks to reveal, understand, and tackle the core issues that facilitate the manifestation of the problem.

It involves a process of deduction, from the observed effects back to the initial cause. RCA is crucial in problem-solving and continuous improvement strategies because it prevents recurrence of the issue by addressing it at its source.
# Root Cause Analysis Debrief

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<tr>
<th>FOCUS AREA 1</th>
<th>FOCUS AREA 2</th>
<th>FOCUS AREA 3</th>
<th>FOCUS AREA 4</th>
<th>FOCUS AREA 5</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Representation &amp; Leadership</strong></td>
<td><strong>Capitalism &amp; the Love of Money</strong></td>
<td><strong>Power Hoarding</strong></td>
<td><strong>Institutional Design</strong></td>
<td><strong>Institutional Design</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited access and opportunity for marginalized or impacted communities to solve their own problems</td>
<td>Profit over people and environment</td>
<td>Scarcity mentality and challenging status quo</td>
<td>Hierarchies that reinforces negative outcomes</td>
<td>Siloed solutioning without impacted communities</td>
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