



FREE RANGE FOOD CO-OP STRATEGIC PLAN July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

Executive Summary

The strategic plan for FRFC consists of the following high-level goals:
(A detailed list of tasks for each goal is listed beginning on page 3)

1. Select and close on a store site.
2. Run a successful Community Investment Campaign
3. Finalize the business plan.
4. Strengthen the owner volunteer base in order to enhance our presence at community events and participation at owner events.
5. Improve marketing effectiveness through focused forward planning and increased involvement of owner volunteers.

Mission

Free Range Food Co-op is a cooperatively-owned grocery store committed to community well-being through access to local, wholesome, organic foods and goods.

Vision

Because of Us:

1. We have a thriving, cooperatively-owned grocery store which welcomes everyone and cultivates relationships with people in Itasca County and beyond.
2. We have engaged and involved owners who actively work to strengthen the co-op through cooperative ownership and collaboration.
3. We have a growing, resilient, regional food system through direct support to local growers and producers.
4. Our community has a leader that models and promotes sustainable business practices and environmental stewardship.
5. We have a welcoming space where people come together to share ideas, learn, and empower each other through education and cooperation.

2023-24 Board of Directors

Brandon Otway, Chair
Casey Dabrowski, Vice Chair
Shara Dabrowski, Records Officer
Lois Bendix, Financial Officer

Tom Connolly, Director
Garrett Holl, Director
Lydia Williams, Director
Ellen Smilanich, Director
VACANT, Director

Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Hard Working Board	Owners & community members want store, but lack knowledge of co-op ownership & responsibilities
Food Cooperative Initiatives mentorship	No real endorsement from local businesses
Endorsed by City of Grand Rapids	Not always enough owner volunteers for event help
Large Owner Base	Lack of owners willing to serve on the board
Internal Operations designed, written, and implemented	Owner excitement declining due to perception it is taking too long
Support from other food co-op boards & staff	Lack of capital
A handful of dedicated volunteers	Poor board engagement of volunteers due to board being overwhelmed/overworked
Strategic Plan reviewed often	Communication difficulties between teams, especially during pandemic
Teams are formed to work on needed projects	Lack of volunteers committed to longer-term tasks and projects (such as Volunteer Coordinator)
Policy Management used	Policy Management hard to learn

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Niche for healthy, local, and organic food	Local economic recovery is slow
COVID-19 will change store design	Competition from existing stores
Education for the public about local foods and how they can counter food distribution weaknesses	Interest in, and knowledge of, local foods not understood by majority of shoppers
Serve food insecure population	Owner fatigue – what is taking so long?
Mentors available through Food Coop Initiative and other co-ops	Current availability of foods without local producer relationship
Ability to sustain local economy by using local farmers and producers	Poor farm income is not a good incentive for new and growing farms
Assist and support local farmers and producers in growing what consumers want	Poor Wi-fi connections in some areas of our county prevent connecting on-line
Education about the co-op business model and its advantages	
Build connections between community and farmers	
New normal is on-line meetings, which allows further reach into rural areas	

Site Selection Team

GOAL: Select and close on a store site

Lead: Brandon Otway

Team Members: Garrett Holl, Tom Connolly, Isaac Meyer

Budget: \$15,000 (consultant), \$3,000 (legal fees for LOI)

STRATEGIES

Research/Preparation

- Re-read Real Estate Guide and make a list of actionable items by July 15th
- Enter into agreement with consultant group by July 31st
- Select a date for consultant group to come to Grand Rapids
- Prepare for visit of sites under consideration
- Conduct site visits with consultant group
- Share consultant report with full board

Letter of Intent (LOI)

- Determine what is needed in an LOI
- Create a first draft LOI
- Update draft LOI to meet the needs of the site FRFC desires to purchase or lease
- Send LOI to FCI for advice
- Send to a real estate lawyer for finalization

Closing on a site

- Determine a final list of sites by August 1st
- Bring list of sites to the full board of directors by August 3rd board meeting for discussion
- Get recommendation from board on which site to pursue at August 3rd board meeting
- Contact location owner to submit letter of intent and begin lease/purchase negotiations
- Bring purchase/lease offer to board for discussion and approval

Community Investment Campaign Team

GOAL: Run a Successful Community Investment Campaign

Lead: Casey Dabrowski

Team Members: Lois Bendix, Shara Dabrowski, Amber Marek, Becky LaPlant, Lydia Williams, Merry Moody, Tom Connolly, Katie Novak (consultant)

Budget: \$17,742 (consulting & attorney fees remaining as of July 1, 2023)

STRATEGIES

RESEARCH/PREPARATION:

- Identify a list of 20 committed volunteers to personally contact about being part of the campaign teams.
- Create folders with easily accessible compilations of job descriptions, expectations, and training materials in a ready-to-use format to send immediately to the CIC Coordinator and successfully recruited volunteers.
- Finalize a campaign goal.
- Finalize campaign timelines.
- Complete validation and standardization of owner data by November 2023.
- Hire a Campaign Coordinator by December 2023.
- Thoroughly test all systems (invoice, payment, phone, record keeping, electronic signature, etc.) and create accurate training materials for volunteers at least 1 month before the launch of the silent phase of the campaign.
- Sign contract for CoApp data tracking system, become proficient in its use, and train volunteers at least 2 weeks before the launch of the silent phase of the campaign.

OFFERING DOCUMENTS:

- Determine how much of the funding goal must be met with owner loans, preferred shares, and charitable contributions.
- Determine the amount, interest rate and repayment options for owner loans.
- Get all legal documents reviewed & finalized by the attorney prior to October 2023.

CAMPAIGN MATERIALS:

- Finalize a campaign logo and color theme for consistency across CIC marketing materials by September 1st.
- Work with the marketing team to have all necessary marketing materials ready for team & consultant review by October 31st.
- Have campaign materials submitted for review to Katie Novak by November 1st.
- Have campaign materials submitted for review by the Food Cooperative Initiative by November 15th.
- Develop a communication plan based on the target audience.
- Complete planning and event strategy for the launch party by February 1st, based on the March 23rd launch date.
- Establish strategies and planning for other internal pre- or during campaign events- silent campaign investment recruitment, volunteer recruitment, volunteer training, mid-campaign fundraising/energy boost, etc. by March 1st.

Business Plan Team

GOAL: Finalize Business Plan

Lead: Shara Dabrowski

Team Members: Merry Moody, Tom Connolly

Budget: \$1,400

STRATEGIES

- Update the plan with current Market Study and site details as they become available.
- Revise plan with financial pro forma details once reviewed for accuracy by Don Moffitt.
- Send plan draft to board members for review and input prior to sending to JQ Hannah.
- Send completed plan draft to JQ Hannah from FCI for review and input.
- Select and contract with Columinate consultant for plan review/final touches if needed.
- Contact printing companies for presentation packet quotes

Owner Engagement Team

GOAL: Strengthen the owner volunteer base in order to enhance our presence at community events and participation at owner events

Lead: Lydia Williams

Team Members: Merry Moody, Peggy Brennan, Mary Magnuson, Darlene Brown, Lydia Williams, Kim Clark, Ellen Smilanich, Angela Edel

Budget: \$2,900 (All CE costs, owner meetings minus printing)

STRATEGIES

REORGANIZATION PLAN:

- Finalize and implement the new organization plan dividing responsibilities into 4 different positions, OE Administrator, Community Event Coordinator, Owner Event Coordinator and Training and Development Leader by 7/15/2024
- Develop task lists for each of the positions listed above by 10/31/2023.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

- Maintain the community Events Calendar which is reviewed monthly by the board.
- Submit registration paperwork and fee payments for all events.
- Develop tasks lists for community event leaders by 7/10/2023.
- Develop an interactive survey for evaluating each OE led event by 7/31/2023.
- Recruit and schedule volunteers for all events.
- Plan and implement a volunteer satisfaction survey to be conducted once a year by 10/1/2023. Co-op teams will strive for a 90% volunteer satisfaction rate.
- Analyze, develop and implement changes to enhance volunteer satisfaction rates identified in survey
- Develop an interactive visual aid asking for input on the importance of our future store departments by 7/10/2023. This visual aid is planned for use at Community and Owner events to serve three purposes: 1. as a way to gather and record feedback from current and potential owners, 2. as a way to provide education about food co-ops in general and FRFC in particular and 3. as an advertisement tool.

RECRUITMENT:

- Work with the Marketing Team to develop materials stressing the importance of Owner Volunteers in the development of the co-op. Ongoing
- Recruit a team of 20 - 30 owners who are willing to make phone calls to owners by 9/1/2023. These calls will advertise owner events or advertise identified volunteer needs.

TRAINING & RETENTION:

- Plan and conduct training for booth volunteers by 7/7/2023.
- Plan and implement training for volunteers in the use of VOIP system by 7/10/2023
- Plan and implement training for booth volunteers in the use of Square terminal by 7/10/2023.
- Develop training for teams and the board, related to working with volunteers by 10/31/2023.

Marketing Team

GOAL: Improve marketing effectiveness through focused forward planning and increased involvement of owner volunteers.

Co-Lead: Shara Dabrowski & Lydia Williams

Team Members: Jackie Otway, Birgitta Karlen, Jenna Shadley Ash, Angela Edel

Budget: \$2,800

STRATEGIES

SOCIAL MEDIA:

- Leverage paid promotions at least two times per year to increase engagement during owner drives or other important events.
- Before August 31st, find and train an owner volunteer to assist with social media posting and content creation on as needed basis.
- Report Facebook engagement levels at each quarterly strategic plan review.

NEWSLETTERS:

- Send primary newsletters by the 2nd of each month (Tracking to include # of owners and non-owners receiving, and quarterly average open rates)

COMMUNITY ADVERTISING:

- Before June 1st, contact KAXE regarding special ads during the two weeks prior to our Owner Picnic and Annual Meeting. Find out if there would be any additional cost, or if we can just update the language from our usual ad and then update it back after that time period.
- Compile a list of community advertising possibilities through public radio, newspapers, community newsletters, local offices, bulletin boards, GR Facebook bulletin board (or other city FB pages) etc. at least 2 months before the launch of the CIC.

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT CAMPAIGN:

- Work with owner volunteers to draft all communications materials for the CIC prior to October 31st.
- Leverage paid promotions on social media at least twice during the campaign to increase engagement and awareness.
- Create a presentation slideshow and pitch packet in preparation for the CIC.

REBRAND & MATERIALS:

- Finalize a new, simplified logo and update on all necessary platforms.
- Solidify a brand package including; colors, fonts, etc. and begin using them in all marketing materials/platforms by August 1st.
- Design new marketing collateral documents including rack cards, updated small-sized logo stickers, and branded tablecloth.