



Casting a wider net

A guide for community-supported fishery and other food programs who want to reach broader audiences, especially communities of color and low-income communities

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2023

Based on Young et al. (2023) Strategies for increasing participation of diverse consumers in a community seafood program.

Introduction

What is Fishadelphia?

Fishadelphia is a community-supported fishery (CSF) program founded in 2017 that connects seafood harvesters on the New Jersey shore and seafood consumers in the Philadelphia area, with an emphasis on serving socio-economically diverse customers. To learn more about Fishadelphia, check out our website at www.fishadelphia.com.

What is a community-supported fishery (CSF)?

Community-supported fishery (CSF) programs are a model for selling seafood that emphasize sustainability, traceability, and shortening the supply chain¹. Members of CSFs typically subscribe and pay for “shares” of seafood ahead of time, and then receive shares at regular intervals. The CSF movement has been inspired by the [community-supported agriculture](#) (CSA) model.

¹ Bolton 2016

[Walking Fish](#) has an insightful guide by Joshua Stoll ("[Walking Fish — Steps toward a viable future in small-scale fisheries](#)")² about the operations of CSFs, meant to be used as a reference by others interested in founding CSF-type programs.

Why might CSFs (and other alternative food businesses) want to reach broader audiences?

The North American CSF movement has done an amazing job of highlighting the fishermen who work so hard to catch our fish, and sharing that bounty with so many seafood lovers³. CSFs have also led inspiring efforts to address community food security, such as the [Alaska Seafood Distribution Network](#), the [Fish to Families program](#) in San Diego, the [Monterey Community Seafood Program](#), and [food bank programs in California, Massachusetts, Maine, Mississippi](#), and [Florida](#). At the same time, many of us are struggling to expand our retail base beyond primarily white and/or affluent customers.

There are a number of reasons why it makes sense to expand our reach to include communities of color and low-income communities:

- (a) Everyone should get to eat our delicious seafood. Nobody wants fresh local seafood to be something that only rich people can afford to eat.
- (b) The US is currently experiencing [food apartheid](#) (with 1 in 10 adults experiencing food insecurity⁴); the local seafood movement is ideally situated to continue to take the lead in addressing this challenge.
- (c) Communities of color hold huge potential for seafood marketing. For example, consumer research suggests that African-American consumers spend 70%⁵ more and Asian-American consumers 147%⁶ more money on seafood than the US general market.

² Stoll 2010

³ Snyder and St. Martin 2015

⁴ US Census Bureau 2023

⁵ Nielsen 2013

⁶ Nielsen 2015

[Soul Fire Farm](#) has also written a great guide ("[Sowing the Seeds of Food Justice](#)," targeted primarily at farmers) about serving low-income communities while maintaining financial sustainability.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is targeted at local seafood businesses and projects like CSFs that connect seafood harvesters directly with consumers, but the tools may also be relevant for other food programs (like CSAs and farmers' markets) looking to broaden their reach.

To be clear: this guide is not definitive and we aren't even close to having "all the answers" — our goal is to share some strategies that have worked for us in hopes they might also be useful for you. We also want to continue to be in conversation with you about all of this: what works for you, and what doesn't? What other strategies have worked for you that we haven't tried?

Inclusion strategies

Here we outline seven specific tools that we have found helpful for reaching communities of color and low-income communities.



[Sliding scale pricing](#)



[Flexible payment schedule](#)



[Payment method](#)



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[Multiple communication channels and languages](#)



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The rest of the guide

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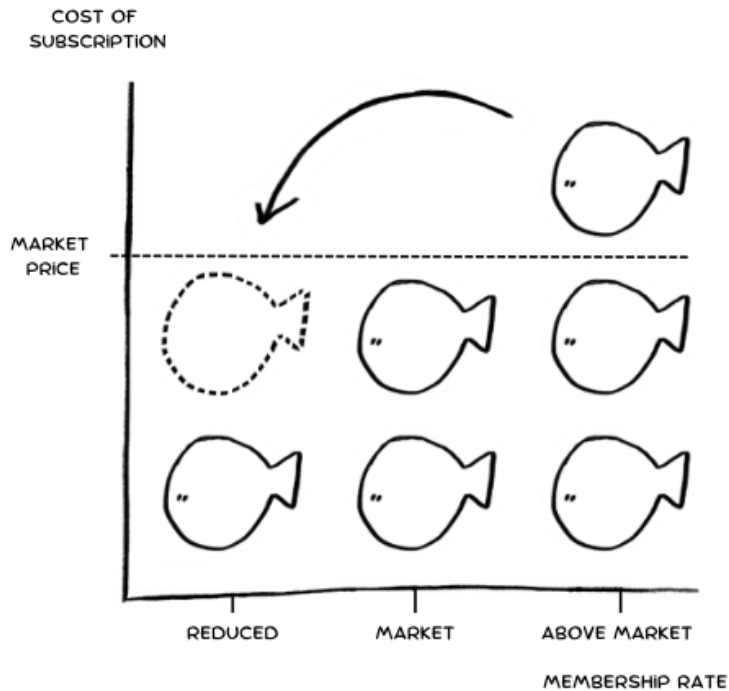


Sliding scale pricing

A [sliding scale](#) means that different people may pay different amounts, but everyone gets the same quality and quantity of product.

HOW SLIDING SCALE WORKS:

Everyone receives the **same quality and quantity** of seafood. Those with more financial resources **choose** to pay higher rates in order to contribute to reduced-rate shares. This system allows distributors to provide food at below-market rates at **no additional cost**.



Example

Fishadelphia has five price tiers:

Tier	Cost per week	Income Guidelines
Neighbor rate	\$0	Eligible for public assistance and paying the cost of Community rate would be a financial burden
Community rate	\$12	Eligible for public assistance (e.g., food stamps, Medicaid)
Market rate	\$24	Any
Supporter rate	\$36	> \$36/hr or \$75k salary
Sustainer rate	\$48	> \$48/hr or \$100k salary

(The exact prices have varied over the life of Fishadelphia, but you get the idea.)

How does it work?

- Members choose their own rate when they sign up. We ask that people follow our sign up guidelines, but we do not check income. **Generally, we do not think that people are taking advantage of this system.**
 - In our experience, of members who are paying Market-rate or above, 15-20% choose to pay Supporter rate and 5-10% choose to pay Sustainer rate. Our sense is that members who sign up for above-market rates do so because they (a) can afford to and (b) want to help others access fresh, local seafood.
 - Inventory for reduced-rate memberships is limited and based on the number of above-market memberships. We keep a waitlist of interested people. We check in with reduced-rate members annually to make sure they still qualify, but don't ever kick people off of reduced-rate memberships.
 - We make it clear to Supporters and Sustainers that they are paying more to make it possible for others to eat fresh food. Sometimes we give them special swag.
- Note: **Above-market memberships** (Supporter and Sustainer) **completely cover the costs of reduced-rate memberships** (Neighbor and Community) — **there is no additional cost to us.**

Here's some language we use to explain our sliding scale system:

Our mission as an organization is multi-fold. We provide fresh seafood that is harvested and processed locally, pay everyone on our team good wages, and make this community accessible to a wide range of Philadelphians.

We offer the same Seafood Club at five Rates — five prices — which allows people from all economic backgrounds to have the ability to participate. Those who have the resources to pay more help fund the Memberships of those who may otherwise be unable to access what we offer: higher-quality & fresher fish than any grocery store.

When you sign up for a Membership, you choose how much you pay. We ask that you choose based on your financial resources; one rule of thumb is that your Rate should be around your hourly pay rate (assuming you work full time).

For example, if you make more than \$36/hr or \$75k/year, consider joining at the Supporter level. If your income makes you eligible for public assistance (SNAP or Medicaid), then you should consider joining at our Community Rate and Neighbor Share Rates. These rates open up as we have the resources available.

Why do this?

- We all want to make fresh seafood as accessible as possible. Market rate prices are, frankly, not within everyone's budget, and we don't want cost to be a barrier to healthy, fresh, high-quality food.
- Through our sliding scale system, those with more financial means make it possible for others to eat seafood. **There is no additional cost to us.**
- Our system uses [mutual aid](#) principles to increase [food security](#).

Mutual aid is an exchange of resources through community cooperation in order to create networks of care and combat societal systems of inequality.	Food security is achieved when nutritious, affordable food is reliably available and accessible to all people.
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Things to keep in mind

- People often wonder whether this kind of system results in “cheating”. As we said above, we don't think that people take advantage of this system. We're clear about what we're trying to do, and we think our members get it.
- Finding the right balance of price points can be tricky and requires thinking about how much of a discount will make seafood more accessible *and* how much more people will be willing to pay to help neighbors. We've had to adjust our prices quite a bit over time.
- We currently have five tiers, but it's possible to start much simpler; we used to only have two.
- Figuring out the details of timing can be tricky. For us, because we don't want to kick people off reduced rates, opening up reduced-rate inventory is a long-term commitment.
- **Successful sliding scale systems are a lot about effective marketing. You know your customer base best:** what is the best way to explain to your base what you're trying to do and why it matters?
 - We've found this [tool for determining rate](#) from the Aorta Training Co-op to be helpful when thinking about how to help people decide which rate to use.



Flexible payment schedule

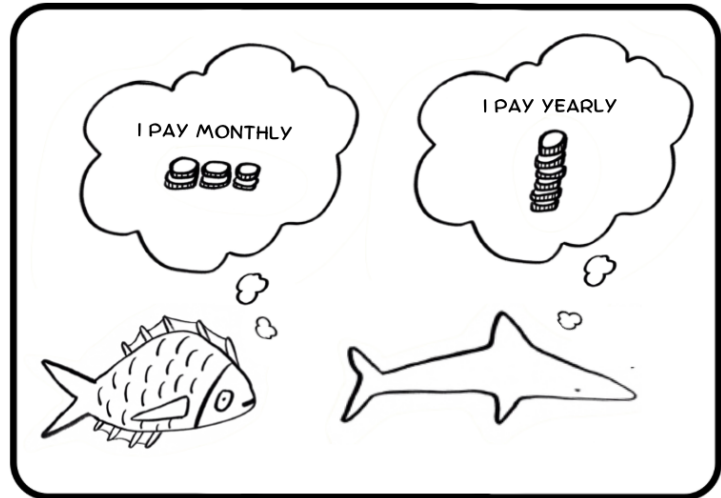
One important way to maximize accessibility is not requiring people to pay a lot of money up front in order to get fish.

Example

Fishadelphia currently offers three payment time frames:

- Annual
- Tri-monthly
- Monthly

We also have a few informal week-by-week arrangements with cash-paying members



Why do this?

- Let's be honest — not everyone can afford to pay a bunch of money at one time, and we don't want to only sell to people who can afford to pay us several hundred dollars up front.
- An additional benefit to this approach is that it allows people who aren't sure about us to try Fishadelphia out in a lower-risk way.

Things to keep in mind

- Annual memberships are great because they give us cash to work with for the upcoming year. Cash flow with monthly memberships is more variable and uncertain. But we're able to predict numbers enough to make it work.
- We definitely see more turnover in our monthly members than our annual members. But we also have monthly members who have been with us for years who would not be able to pay for an annual membership up front.
- The built-in 10% discount we offer for annual memberships (or, depending on how you think about it, the built-in fee for the monthly memberships) helps us cover administrative costs related to turnover.



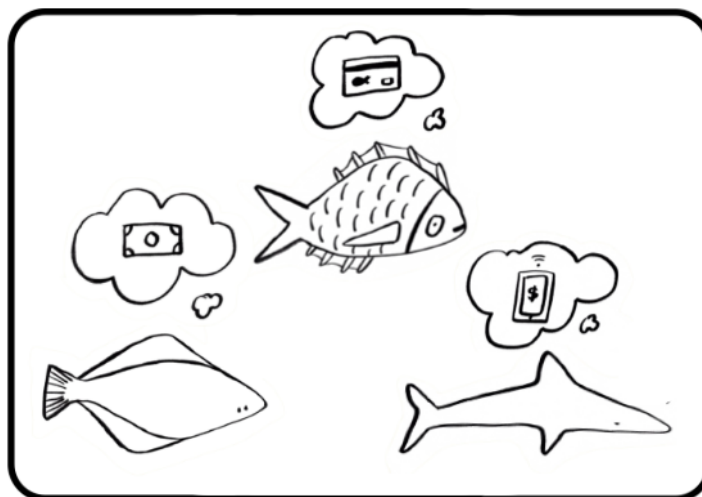
Payment method

Money is money, but different forms of payment are easier or preferable for different groups of people.

Example

Fishadelphia currently accepts payment in three forms:

- Credit card (through our web site or our point-of-sale app)
- Mobile payment apps (e.g., Venmo, PayPal, GooglePay, ApplePay, CashApp)
- Cash



For US-based CSFs, SNAP / EBT /

food stamps is another important payment method (see [below](#) for details).

Why do this?

- Not everyone is able to get or use a credit card, or a bank account. Credit cards require a credit score. A bank account may require immigration and employment eligibility documentation. We don't want this kind of bureaucracy to prevent people from being able to eat our seafood.
- Many communities are simply more comfortable dealing in cash, especially immigrant communities that may include people who are undocumented and/or are paid primarily in cash.
 - For example, all of our Chinese-speaking members pay exclusively in cash, and we think they would not buy from us if we required them to use other forms of payment.
 - In our detailed analysis, we also found that all our members who reported not having any college experience were paying in cash.

Things to keep in mind

- For US-based CSFs, SNAP / EBT is a great resource! SNAP / EBT can be used for fresh or frozen seafood.
 - Harvesters, retailers, and farmers' markets can [apply to accept SNAP / EBT payments](#) directly.
 - Those who don't qualify to accept SNAP / EBT can partner with farmers' markets, grocery stores, co-ops or other retailers. (Some farmers' markets in Philadelphia accept food stamps on behalf of vendors.)
- In our anecdotal experience, different demographics of people use different mobile payment apps: Venmo is popular among professional millennials while CashApp is widely used by working-class people of color.



Fish preparation

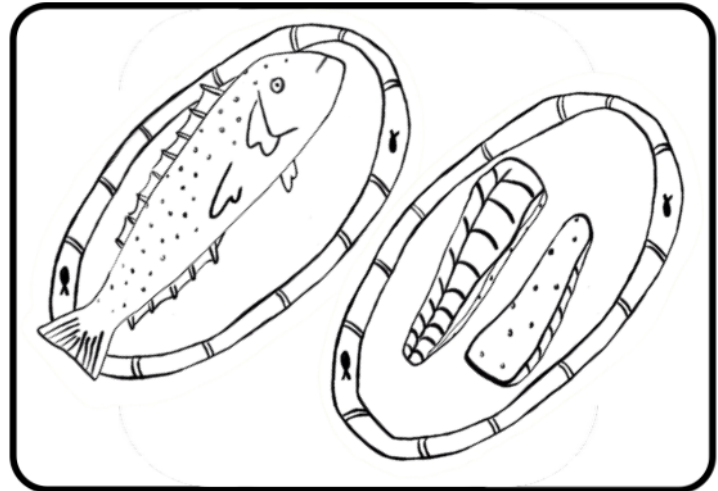
Different people prefer fish in different forms.

Example

Fishadelphia currently offers two kinds of fish preparation:

- Whole fish (1.5-4 lbs of whole fish, not scaled or gutted)
- Fillets (~1 lb of fillets)

The price is the same; whole fish shares include the amount of fish that would be processed for the fillet share, plus a little bit more to account for the cutting labor costs. For large fish (e.g., swordfish, tuna, sharks), everyone gets fillets.



Why do this?

- Whole fish appeal to a different audience than fillets do — we've found that our Asian customers disproportionately choose whole fish over fillets.
- Frankly, processing is a huge challenge for all of us, and we would love to do less of it.

Things to keep in mind

- We would love to be able to offer more cuts: scaled and gutted, or butterflied. Hopefully we'll be able to do this in the future.



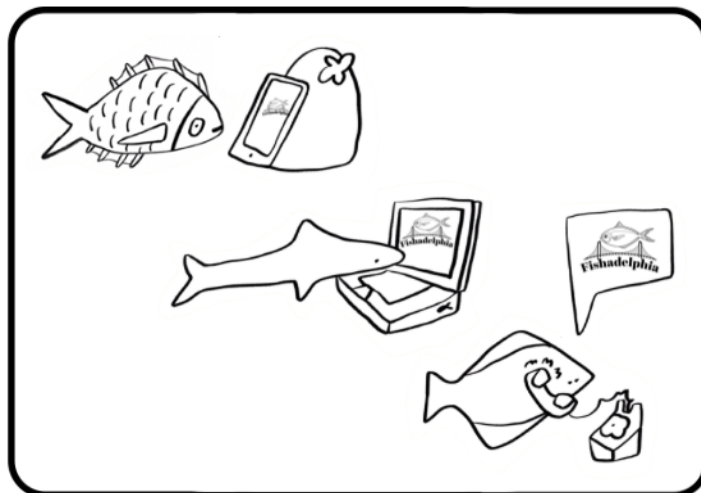
Multiple communication channels and languages

Different people prefer to communicate in different ways.

Example

Fishadelphia communicates with most members by email, but also uses:

- Phone calls
- Text
- WeChat (Chinese instant messaging app)
- Social media messaging
- In-person



We also translate our paper promotional materials into languages appropriate for our target communities.

Why do this?

- Not everyone is that comfortable using email — it works better with Wi-Fi and a device that supports email, and is used more regularly by people in some jobs than others. Some older people don't use email that much. We don't want email comfort levels to be a barrier to eating seafood.
- Our members who communicate with us through means other than email are disproportionately older, non-English-speaking, and people of color.

Things to keep in mind

- We keep track of members (mostly elders) who need support by phone and have at times offered phone call notifications before automatic renewal charges. This was cumbersome for us but appreciated by those members.
- We have found that translating written material sometimes isn't enough; some of our members are not fluently literate in their native languages and require verbal communication.



Pickup location

Location really matters — different pickup locations are welcoming to different groups of people.

Example

We do our best to choose our pickup locations with care. For example, we've chosen to host pickups at a local high school or corner store familiar to long-time neighborhood families rather than at a new co-op that serves newer, wealthier residents.



We also list accessibility features about each pickup location. For example:

Site description: The cooler will be located on a porch of a suburban residence.

Accessibility:

- ✓ Vehicle friendly
- ✓ Side street parking
- ✓ Sidewalk concrete and wheelchair accessible
- ✓ There is a light on the porch and a post light that lights the walkway.
- ⚠ There are eight steps — in groups of two and three with hand rails.
- ♥ This host is happy to bring fish out to the car, if needed.

Why do this?

- Some places feel really different to different people. Tasha, our Director of Seafood Management and Youth Programming, says this:

When I think of high quality food, I usually think I have to go to a fancy place to get it, like Whole Foods, or a co-op. And I go to those places sometimes, but when I'm there, they make me feel a little out of place, I don't know, like, "I'm fancy now today," and I know that space wasn't created for me, and I know that's not my norm, and I can't shop at those

places all the time. Fishadelphia is a place where my family and I can get really high quality food not just for affordable prices, but also without feeling all “bougie” about it. Fishadelphia feels comfortable, and I don’t feel like I stick out like a sore thumb shopping there. It’s not just about the prices, it’s also about how it feels to shop there.

We want our pickup spots to be places that people feel comfortable going to, or else it feels like our program isn’t for them.

- We have customers who go out of their way to pick up from a site further from them that’s hosted by someone they know.
- In our detailed study, we found that members of color were more likely to pick up at a community-based site (like a school or park) or a site hosted by another person of color.

Things to keep in mind

- If you aren’t sure, it might be worth asking local folks about the feel of a particular pickup site: Who lives in the neighborhood? Who goes to that site?
- Transit accessibility is another factor to consider with pickup locations: is it possible to get there without a car?

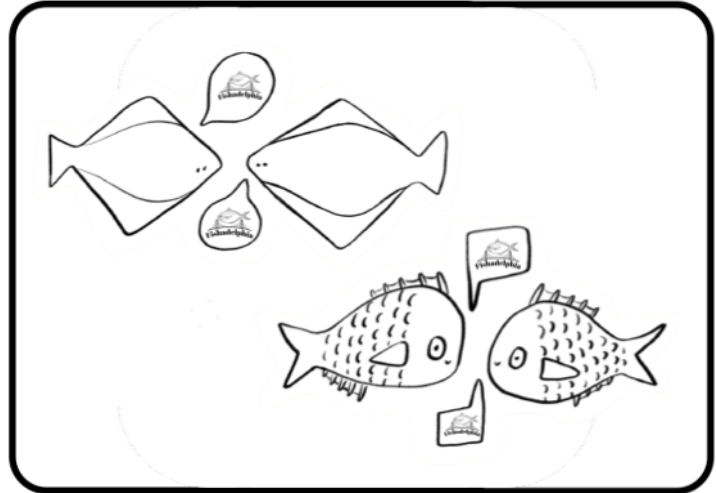


Recruitment method

Different recruitment strategies work for different target groups, and relationships matter.

Example

Fishadelphia conducts outreach through a wide variety of platforms, including the internet, the press, social media, and in-person. Our members of color disproportionately heard about the program by word-of-mouth.



Why do this?

- We know that a trusted referral is more valuable than any ad. Broadening outreach effectively involves getting referrals from within communities we want to reach.
 - It's probably not surprising that humans largely socialize with similar people. We found that most people who had been referred to Fishadelphia had been referred by someone who matched their race and educational background. In other words, white people mostly referred other white people, Asian people mostly referred other Asian people, Black people mostly referred other Black people, and people with college educations mostly referred other people with college educations.

Things to keep in mind

- A large portion of our referrals come from our staff, who we hire from within our target communities. See the "[Tactical vs. structural inclusion](#)" and "[Relationships matter](#)" sections below.

Start with values

Sometimes this work can feel overwhelming: where do we start? We have found it helpful to return to our core values as a guide: what is most important to our identity and mission? How do those values point us toward inclusion and broadening our outreach? Set goals, and then figure out next steps, at a reasonable pace. This work happens one step at a time — not all at once.

Each organization's goals will be different, depending on values and priorities. Are there specific communities that we want to serve better? Do we want our retail base to reflect the demographics of our region?

Tactical vs. structural inclusion

We here at Fishadelphia sometimes think about two specific approaches to inclusion: **tactical** and **structural**.

- **Tactical inclusion** is about **what we do** — specific program features like the ones described in this report: pricing, payment systems, product offerings, and communication. These tactics can be transferred in a fairly straightforward manner.
- **Structural inclusion** is about **who we are** — the people and places that comprise Fishadelphia, and is more complicated to transfer. But some basic principles can be broadly applied.
 - Inclusion efforts are most likely to be successful when they are led by members of the communities we seek to serve. Ultimately, widening reach to other communities requires hiring and promoting to leadership members of target communities.

Tracking progress

Once we've set goals, how do we track and measure progress toward those goals? Everyone is different, but we can tell you about how Fishadelphia tracks metrics.

- We ask all new members to complete a pre-survey when they sign up and ask everyone to complete a post-survey at the end of each season. Both surveys are optional, but new members are pretty enthusiastic, so we get many more pre-survey responses than post-survey responses. We used to offer a \$2 promo code for completing the survey (which people rarely used).
 - At in-person locations, we have a QR code option as well as paper copies which some people complete on the spot (which also allows us to do live-interpreted surveys in languages other than English).
- Managing our survey data requires some effort and someone to own it.
- We have similar survey response rates among members paying reduced rates as we do among members paying above-market rates.
- Both surveys include optional demographic questions at the end (see below). We use US Census categories for race to allow us to compare with regional census data.

- What languages are spoken / written / used in your home? (Please select all that apply.)
- What race(s) do you identify as? (Please select all that apply.)
 - African-American
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - Two or more races (please indicate:)
 - Other (please indicate:)
- What is your highest level of education? (Please check one.)
 - Elementary school (Kindergarten - 4th grade)
 - Middle school (5th grade – 8th grade)
 - High school (9th grade – 12th grade)
 - College (but did not graduate)
 - Graduated from college
 - Attended or completed graduate school

Relationships matter

One key thing we've learned in this work is that personal relationships are an important part of broadening outreach. Most of Fishadelphia's members have come to us through a referral from someone they know (and that's probably true for a lot of other CSFs too). Our research suggests that people continue to participate in Fishadelphia in part because of pre-existing relationships they have or relationships they have built in the program.

Inclusion is a journey, not a goal

Inclusion isn't a one-and-done thing that we can finish and move on from. We here at Fishadelphia definitely don't have all the answers and still have a lot of work to do. We talk a lot about how our current programs and policies are not as inclusive as we want them to be, and strategize about how we can continue to evolve toward increased access and justice. We would love to be in conversation with you as we continue with this work.

Acknowledgements

This work has been made possible by so many individuals and funders, including the amazing Fishadelphia staff who make this work possible (Tasha Palacio, Victoria Oh, Omi Masika, Harmony Lu, Ronnie Sterling, Ruben Alexis, Zakheem Lindsay-Moore, Wenxin Weng, Feini Yin, Althea Baird, George Mathis, Gregg Cyril, Kristin Hunter-Thomson, and Gabe Cumming), and our members, suppliers, processors, and harvesters. Thanks also to Kim Murray, Carla Norwood, Don Barber, Helen White, Niaz Dorry, Josh Stoll, Laughton Elliott-DeAngelis, Sonia Strobel, Chris Kantowicz, Pete Halmay, and many others in the LocalCatch Network.

This report was funded in part by the Smith Fellowship, USDA-LFPP program, NJ Sea Grant, the NOAA Saltonstall-Kennedy program, and the Schmidt Foundation. AT was funded by Bryn Mawr College's Summer Internship Funding Program and MT was funded by Haverford College's Hurford Center Self-Designed Internship Program.



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Additional links

- Soul Fire Farm — <https://www.soulfirefarm.org/>
 - [Sowing the Seeds of Food Justice](#)
- Local Catch — <https://localcatch.org/>
- [Alaska Seafood Distribution Network](#)
- [Fish to Families](#)
- [Monterey Community Seafood Program](#)
- Food Bank Programs
 - [California and Massachusetts](#)
 - [Maine](#)
 - [Mississippi](#)
 - [Florida](#)
- [Aorta Training Co-op](#)

Information on...

- [Community Supported Agriculture \(CSA\)](#)
- [Food justice](#)
- [Food apartheid](#)
- [Food security](#)
- [Mutual aid](#)
- [Income inequality](#)
- [Sliding scale](#)
- [Accessibility](#)
- [SNAP / EBT](#)