LESSONS LEARNED IN ORGANIZING COMMUNITY FOOD SKILLS WORKSHOPS
A FACILITATION GUIDE
Through the Food Connections Project, we’ve done some experimenting, made a few mistakes, and learned a thing or two about connecting communities with their food.

From simple suggestions to tricks of the trade, this facilitation guide is intended to be a resource for any and all their community to foster skills around preparing, preserving, and storing local food.
### THE FOOD CONNECTIONS PROJECT

- Initiatives of the Food Connections Project  

### FACILITATING FOOD SKILLS WORKSHOPS

- Facilitating Food Skills Workshops for the Public
- Finding a suitable kitchen space
- Choose the Type of Workshop That's Right for Your Group
- Setting the Date and Time
- Finding Instructors and Guest Speakers
- Balancing Cost and Accessibility
- Advertising your Workshop
- Workshop Registration
- Running a Smooth Workshop
- Facilitating Food Skills Workshops with Community Groups

### EFFECTIVE EVALUATION

### CONCLUSION

### HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Food Action Committee Publications
- Other Atlantic Canadian Resources
- Sustainable Seafood
- Other Facilitation Guides
- Buying Local

### APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Sample Registration Form
- Appendix B: Request for Instructors
  - Email Request
  - Poster Request
- Appendix C: Sample Workshop advertisements
  - Cooking Class Advertisement Sample 1
  - Cooking Class Advertisement Sample 2
- Appendix D: Sample Surveys
  - Cooking class Pre-Survey to be handed out at cooking class series beginning
  - Cooking Class Post-Survey to be handed out at cooking class series end
  - 6-month Follow-Up survey sent out by Survey monkey
- Appendix E: Instructor Survey
- Appendix F: Activity Log
  - Food Action Activity Log
Food Connections grew out of the Food Miles Project, a previous initiative of the Food Action Committee. The Food Miles Project was a research, education and policy initiative that delved into the Nova Scotia food system and culminated in a report entitled Is Nova Scotia Eating Local? (http://www.ecologyaction.ca/?q=node/761). With the aim of increasing awareness around the impacts of our food choices, the Food Miles Project examined our current diet, made up primarily of imported food items, and looked at the social, economic and environmental benefits of a more locally-based diet. Through this work, we discovered many people felt that they did not have the necessary skills to truly make use of the diversity of foods produced in Nova Scotia and in response the Food Connections Project was born.

The Food Connections Project began in April of 2010 with the support of multiple donors. With this project, we have been working to increase the skills needed to fully enjoy the food that is grown here in the Maritimes through capacity building workshops. The aim of our workshops has been to encourage and facilitate food skills which enable individuals and families to purchase, eat and store local sustainable food. We also hope that preparing and preserving food together in a group will also strengthen our community and give us a common ground to make our city a better, healthier place in which to live and work.

Our public classes are designed to be self-sustaining with regard to ingredient costs and kitchen rental. Any additional money raised is used to support the overall project. Increasing food skills among Nova Scotians will empower our communities to buy local products, support local farmers and producers, reduce food transportation miles, and improve our diets and our health.

Specifically, the Food Connections Project has four goals:
• Increasing food preparation and preservation skills through a series of capacity building workshops
• Connecting food educators with farmers and local food markets
• Supporting emerging and alternative local food distribution systems
• Evaluating the impact of this project on the purchasing behaviour and eating habits of participants in the project.
SEASONAL COOKING CLASS SERIES

Winter veggies, tender spring greens, sweet summer berries, and autumn apples – our cooking classes make eating by the season easy. Each season we host a Seasonal Cooking Class Series composed of three evening classes taught by three different instructors. The classes are hands-on, as opposed to solely demonstration-based; everyone is involved in preparing the meal and cleaning the space. Each class finishes with a shared meal, good conversation with new friends and an enriched awareness of seasonal cooking.

SPECIAL EVENT SEASONAL COOKING CLASSES

Every so often we are inspired by a holiday, a vegetable or a passionate volunteer to organize additional cooking classes. For example, on Valentine’s Day we hosted a cooking class entitled “Lovers Love Local: An Evening of Local Aphrodisiacs”. We were also approached by a local chef who taught a “Gourmet Made Easy” local cooking class.

BREAD MAKING WORKSHOPS

During the winter, we stay warm hosting bread making workshops. Although our terrific instructors introduce us to a diversity of bread recipes, methods, and flavours, the ingredients are familiar – Maritime grown and milled flour, local dairy, and farm fresh eggs.

PRESERVING WORKSHOPS

Preserving the harvest is a big part of eating locally year-round. In addition to canning workshops that offer techniques to can jam, pickles, tomatoes and fruit, we’ve also held classes teaching lacto-fermentation skills, preserving herbs in honey, and blanching and freezing fresh produce.
FOOD SKILLS WORKSHOPS.
We’ve recently switched up some of our traditional cooking classes to hold workshops focusing on one specific food skill – such as growing sprouts or making homemade cheese. Learning these skills is empowering and increases the connection to food production.

ROOT CELLAR TOUR AND CONSTRUCTION.
Root cellars are the original food storage system, and they don’t require energy to preserve your winter produce. We’ve held several root cellar tours in which community members opened their homes – and more importantly, their root cellars – to a curious crowd. We’ve also built a community root cellar for communal vegetable winter storage in our own office basement, and during the construction, held a workshop to show how it’s done.

CONNECTING PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS—LOCALLY!
In support of emerging and alternative local food distribution systems, such as buying groups, community supported agriculture (CSAs), and farmers’ markets, we have held public talks, developed literature, and invited local producers to attend our events, in order to raise awareness and participation in these systems.

“ADVENTURES IN LOCAL FOOD”
Our blog, which was launched in October 2010, is used to advertise upcoming workshops and summarize them afterward, to share information (such as recipes, tips and photos), and to celebrate local delights. With the help of volunteers and other contributors, we publish approximately 3 blog entries each week. We track the number of viewers visiting our blog and continue to publicize its existence. The blog can be viewed at: http://adventuresinlocalfood.wordpress.com/
Through the work of our 2007-2010 Food Miles Project, we saw increasing interest and awareness of local food systems. We knew there was an audience in our city hungry for more knowledge about working with local foods, and after identifying their needs, we organized our first public cooking class. The pilot series was held in January 2009 and within 24 hours of advertising the class, registration was full. The pilot class was well-received and well-attended and we soon began receiving requests for other types of public workshops such as preserving, bread making, and other food skills.

At the same time, we have been developing relationships with various community groups that have led us to develop food skills workshops at community centres, school gardens, and other community organizations. These workshops are a vital part of our work, and allow us to build capacity within specific groups that may otherwise be underserved by the community. Our relationships allow us to tailor workshops to the specific needs, interests, and personalities of each group, and as a result are extremely rewarding to all involved.

This guide is designed to combine the lessons we’ve learned and to provide direction for other organizations to hold their own workshops to build capacity around food skills in the community. We hope to offer tips and lessons learned that will prove to be effective for many organizations for both public and community-driven food skills workshops.
Facilitating Food Skills Workshops for the Public

Our public workshops have been a great way to build capacity throughout the community, and to raise awareness about local food systems. Our seasonal cooking class series aim to widen skills and local food knowledge through new recipes, conversations with other participants, and information from guest speakers. These classes require more involved facilitation, but provide the opportunity to reach out to community members who may not otherwise be connected to local food systems in an entertaining and fun way.

We generally start our classes with a round of introductions, including names and motivation for attending the class. Next, we ask the instructor to introduce him or herself and tell the class why they are excited about local food and/or how they chose the dishes we are about to prepare and enjoy. Over the past couple of years, we’ve heard a lot of great stories from our instructors – from reminiscences of their mother or grandmother’s traditional Nova Scotian dishes, to stories of recipes learned during international travel and then adapted to local ingredients, to advice on how to use foods grown in backyard gardens. Not only are we facilitating food skills, we’re attempting to connect people in order to learn from each other, and much of this work happens through casual conversation during the class.

We have experimented with a variety of techniques in our cooking classes and workshops. Ultimately, you too, will have to decide what works best for your group. Some things to consider:

• Where will you hold your workshop? How does the kitchen set-up lend itself to different teaching styles and class sizes?
• Who is your audience? Do they already have a lot of cooking experience or are they beginners? Will the class be hands-on, demonstration style or a combination of both? How will you build on techniques learned in previous classes?
• When is the best time to hold your workshop?
• Who will teach your workshop?
• How can you keep your workshops accessible? How can you balance costs with accessibility?
• How will you advertise your workshop?
• How will you manage registration?
• How do you keep your workshop running smoothly?
Finding A Suitable Kitchen Space

Here are some questions to consider when choosing a location to hold your cooking class:

• How many people can comfortably cook in the kitchen?
• What’s the cost to rent it?
• Is it accessible? Is there a wheelchair ramp? Is it easy to access by public transportation?
• How frequently is it available?
• Equipment: How many ovens do they have? Do they have all of the necessary kitchen supplies (such as mixing bowls, measuring cups, wooden spoons, etc)? Do they have enough dishes/tables/chairs so that we can eat together afterwards?
• Is there a store nearby in case we have to run out for a forgotten ingredient?

Class Size: Our cooking classes generally have 10-15 participants (including the instructor and facilitator), depending on the size of the kitchen we’re using. For classes with children or with more complicated dishes, you may want to consider having fewer participants. We generally limited participation in canning workshops to 8 participants, in order to keep batch sizes manageable and allow participants to take home 2 jars. In a class of 12 participants, consider breaking the groups into groups of 3 or 4. Each group can take on one dish OR each group can prepare the complete meal. Make sure to clarify with your instructor in advance as to which method you’ll use.

Cost. Because we aim to have self-sustaining workshops, the cost of renting a kitchen is an important consideration. Many businesses, churches, and community centres around the city are willing to give non-profit organizations very reasonable rates for cooking spaces.

Accessibility. The kitchen space we use most often is wheelchair accessible, which allows us to welcome participants who use a wheelchair, and is located on a major bus route. We include this information on our workshop advertising, and our registration form includes detailed bus information. We also take steps to organize carpooling amongst participants.

Availability. Great public kitchens are often in high demand! In particular, many church kitchens have extensive programming during the school year and can be tough to book in the evenings, when we tend to hold our own cooking classes. However, these spaces may be free during the day, or in the summer when their own programming goes on a break.

Equipment. If you are teaching a cooking class with many dishes, or holding a preserving workshop, you will likely need a kitchen space with more than one stove. Most kitchens will have basic cooking supplies, but you may need to confirm what tools are available to you before you hold your class. For example, many commercial kitchens don’t use regular measuring cups and spoons because they tend to measure by weight. If you are planning to do a lot of chopping, you may want
to confirm there are lots of cutting boards. These are simple tips, but can save you a lot of stress during your class if you know what tools you will have available to you, and where they are.

**Our own experiences.** We ran our cooking class pilot in the winter of 2009 in a teaching kitchen at a university. It was the ideal set up for teaching a cooking class, as the kitchen was designed with multiple work stations. Each station had a stove, sink, and the necessary cooking equipment. In return for use of the space, we set aside spots for their students. The following year, the university changed its policy about allowing outside organizations to use the teaching kitchen, so we did not hold further cooking classes there.

Recently we have been holding the classes at a nearby retail shop and catering company that specializes in local, ecologically produced food. While the kitchen is smaller, the location provides an opportunity for valuable learning experiences. A young farmer sells vegetables at a stand outside the shop on Wednesdays, another local farmer uses the location as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) drop-off site, and the shop itself sells focuses on selling local products. Another advantage of this site is ease of food purchasing. The shop sometimes orders food items in bulk for us and we can make last minute purchasing decisions, should we wish to add an extra ingredient to a dish.

In 2011, we held our canning and preserving workshop series in a large church kitchen with several stoves spaced throughout the kitchen. This gave us a lot of room to use two canners at once without any crowding, and gave us a comfortable space to prepare produce. This particular kitchen is very busy with regular programming during the winter months, but was available in the middle of summer – exactly when we held our preserving series.
Choose the type of workshop that’s right for your group

It’s helpful to have a clear idea of the skills you want to pass along to your participants. If there’s a strong enough focus on a particular skill, you may want to consider a workshop that focuses on one thing. For example, we held a workshop on growing your own sprouts that was very well received. In addition to demonstrating how to grow sprouts and offering tips, we brought along a wide variety of sprouts for people to taste, and also provided participants with a simple grow kit to allow them to start using their new skills immediately. Because this was such a simple workshop, we were able to hold it in our own boardroom space. Other single-topic workshops have included bread-making, jam-making or pickling.

However, a majority of our public workshops focus on cooking a seasonal meal. In our experience, most participants in our cooking classes want to get their hands “dirty” and cook, and we plan all of our workshops for full participation. Certain skills are demonstrated by instructors, but we find it important to let our participants also try out these techniques as well.

We’ve received very positive feedback when our participants learned new techniques, or got to taste a unique local food they hadn’t tried before. Sometimes these techniques don’t need to be complicated or exotic – one of our six-month workshop follow-up surveys had very positive feedback from several folks who had attended a class where the perfect technique for boiling hard-boiled eggs was taught! Another class with good feedback was entitled “All About the Jerusalem Artichoke”, which introduced the participants to a Nova Scotia vegetable they knew little about, and incorporated it into several dishes.
We’ve run cooking classes at various points throughout the year. As our mandate includes promoting seasonal foods, we have hosted a cooking series each season. In our experience so far, we’ve found the classes in the cooler months to be significantly easier to fill than the summer months, when most people would rather be at the lake than in a hot kitchen. We are now planning to do the summer classes in June, and limit the summer season to preserving workshops when produce is in season.

If possible, set the dates and begin advertising one to two months in advance. While a successful class can be put together in a shorter amount of time, it’s definitely more stressful.

The majority of our public workshops are in the evening, from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm. Cooking classes typically start 6pm, with the aim of eating dinner together by 8:00 pm. More complicated menus will require more time, and it is important to realistically judge the amount of time needed for each class so that an accurate time can be advertised. For preserves, workshops generally run 6pm to 9pm (and occasionally also run late). Budget time in your workshops to include 10 minutes or so for introductions at the beginning of the class, and also leave plenty of time for kitchen clean-up.

Some single-subject workshops such as bread making, cheese making, and growing sprouts have been held on weekends during the daytime. We have received requests for more daytime classes. We have occasionally included a potluck component, if the workshop is scheduled over the lunch or supper hours.
Instructors. The Food Connections Project began by recognizing the expertise and experience of seniors within the province, and looked to older members of the community as culinary teachers and mentors. In the early stages of The Food Connections Project, we dedicated time to meeting with seniors groups in hopes of finding individuals or organizations interested in working with us. While they were supportive of our project and could see the need for it, it was challenging to find instructors. We saw a certain amount of reluctance, or even shyness, from individuals in the groups we approached. As the classes continued and word about the project spread, we found community members of all ages volunteering to teach classes.

Our current method of finding instructors draws on relationships, personal as well as professional contacts, and word of mouth. At this point, instructors of all ages approach us with ideas. Often a former instructor will recommend a friend of theirs or volunteer to teach again in the future. In search of new instructors, we call or email our contacts (who in turn call or email their contacts) explaining the Food Connections Project, outlining our timeline and requesting volunteers. [See Appendix B for a sample “request for instructors” email.]

Once you have found an instructor, it’s a good idea to meet to develop a menu for the class so it can be included in the advertising. Because we focus on seasonal cooking skills, menu planning can sometimes be a little tricky because it can be hard to predict what we’ll be able to find in the farmer’s market a month or two in the future. It is a good idea to base main dishes around a guaranteed staple that will definitely be available. Sometimes the personality of the instructor lends itself to a more spontaneous workshop; we recently held a class focused on CSA vegetable boxes which meant we wouldn’t know our ingredients until a few days before the class. Our instructor was able to come up with a very adaptable menu that would work with a variety of vegetables. This class provided a great lesson on the need to be adaptable when eating seasonally!

Guest Speakers. We also have found that inviting guest speakers to our workshops can be a great way to connect participants with the farmers who grow their food, introduce them to new food businesses in their community, or raise social justice and environmental issues. Speakers can really provide great context for the
food being prepared in the class.

Potential guest speakers include:
• Local farmers or fishers
• Restaurants or caterers that focus on local, sustainable food
• A representative from a food co-op or buying group
• A representative from a food bank, women’s shelter or family resource centre
• A representative from a community garden

Depending on schedules and kitchen space, it’s nice to ask the guest speaker to join you for the class, or the meal at the end. However, sometimes it’s easiest to catch farmers when they are making a delivery into the city, in which case the talk can be a simple 5-10 minute discussion at the beginning of the class or part way through while everything is in the oven.

Here are some questions to get the conversation started:
• What do you grow/sell?
• What does your organization do?
• Where are you located?
• How did you get started?

Our workshops are designed on a cost recovery model, where the minimum registration fee for a class must cover the cost of one person’s share of the ingredients as well as rental space. (The fees do not cover staff time to organize the workshops.) At the beginning of the project, a general estimate of the cooking class cost per person was set at $10 and since then, as rental space costs have increased, we have found this to be closer to $15. We price our standard cooking class (that is the seasonal three class series) on a sliding scale of $15-$25. Special event cooking classes tend to have a higher cost due to ingredients (i.e. expensive cuts of meat, cooking with local wine). Some of our special event classes have been priced on a sliding scale and some have not.

We price our preserving and bread making workshops in a similar way (i.e. on a sliding scale beginning with a price that reflects the cost of ingredients and rental space). Our bread making workshops thus far have been priced on a sliding scale from $20-$25. We use local flours which have a higher cost than their conventional counterparts. Participants in these classes took home bread and enjoyed food during the class.
On the other hand, we were able to put on our workshop on growing sprouts for only $5, due to the low cost of supplies and the fact that we were able to hold the class in our own building and thus avoid rental fees.

The first year that we ran preserving workshops we decided to price the jam workshops as a suggested donation of $10. This suggested donation covered the cost of ingredients (fair trade sugar being our greatest ingredient cost), jars, and rental space. We went wild berry picking, so the berries were free. Each participant took home two jars of jam and we kept class sizes small.

Preserving workshop series in our subsequent years were priced at $20 which was the average cost for ingredients. Some classes used less expensive ingredients than others, but we thought it would make sense to keep standard prices for the series. Prices were also evened out by providing participants with larger jars of less expensive produce like sauerkraut, and smaller jars of things like canned pears.

Keeping costs accessible. By offering registration along a sliding scale, we increase accessibility for a range of participants while ensuring we cover our costs. Surplus from the upper range of the sliding scale goes back into our programming. For example, it allows us to offer free and/or subsidized spots to participants who might not have otherwise been able to afford to take the class. Often these spots are offered to clients of community organizations with whom we’ve built relationships. The surplus also offers a buffer should we have underestimated costs or have unexpectedly low registration.

Childcare and child-friendly workshops. Currently, we do not offer childcare during our classes; however, most classes are child-friendly and occasionally children attend. Offering childcare would increase the accessibility of our events, and is something we are looking into for the future.
Once you have made a plan for your cooking class or workshop, it’s time to get the word out! Our advertising strategies are inexpensive, efficient and (we think) effective. We have fine-tuned our efforts over the course of our project as we learned what works (and what doesn’t), as word of mouth and reputation have come into play, and as we have gained support from various local initiatives.

You will save yourself some trouble by knowing all of the details of the class, including the location, time, cost, and the menu before launching your advertisement efforts. Including the menu in your advertising will allow your participants to make educated decisions, and also save you time as potential participants will have fewer questions for you. Many people have food allergies or dietary restrictions that might limit their ability to participate, so it is important to mention what will be prepared in the class. We have begun to incorporate more gluten-free and vegetarian or vegan menus in our cooking classes to enhance our accessibility.

**ADVERTISING METHODS**

**Electronic communication and Social Media.** Electronic communication and social media has proven to be the most effective and efficient advertising tool at our disposal for our public workshops.

- **Email list.** We have developed (and continue to expand upon) an email list – essentially a database of contacts via email. Our email list includes past workshop participants as well as individuals who expressed interest in the past but were not able to attend for various reasons, Ecology Action Centre staff who we have asked to forward the information on to their committees/volunteers, the Food Action Committee, contacts within local universities (departments such as International Development Studies, Nutrition, Nursing, and Environmental Studies/Science), local social justice, environmental and
community groups (such as NS Public Interest Research Group, Slow Food, and a local gardening network), a local MP’s office which maintains and publicizes a list of community events, and seniors’ groups which we have met with in the past. [See Appendix D for a sample email advertisement.]

• **Facebook.** We use the Ecology Action Centre Facebook page to advertise events.

• **Website.** We use the Ecology Action Centre website to advertise our events as well.

• **E-newsletter.** The Ecology Action Centre releases a bi-weekly electronic newsletter to its members and subscribers. Upcoming local food events are listed in this newsletter.

• **Blog.** We publish information on upcoming workshops on our blog (www.adventuresinlocalfood.wordpress.com/). Following each workshop, we also post information about what took place; we share photos, give recipes, and offer tips from class. This is a great way to attract new participants to our classes.

**Local media.** We have developed a list of (primarily free) local media outlets that includes newspapers of various types, community radio stations, and community event listings. We have used both print media and online outlets. Occasionally local media will hear about our classes through our blog, and contact us to promote our classes. For example, a free weekly newspaper heard about our mozzarella making class, and wrote up a feature about the upcoming class.

**Posters.** This is an effective tool to reach populations that may not have regular internet access. We create simple posters for most of our events (i.e. seasonal cooking classes, special events, and preserving workshops). Sometimes, we print approximately a dozen of these posters (designed to fit a standard paper size so that we can print the posters ourselves) and display them in strategic locations (i.e. organic food stores, the farmers’ market, university campuses, coffee shops). We also display posters in the doorway of our office building. While we continue to create simple posters for some events, we do find that this marketing effort is less effective and more time consuming than other marketing methods. [See Appendix C for a sample event poster.]
Keeping track of registration is sometimes the most challenging part of running a workshop. Some classes are slow to fill up, and further advertising will be necessary (usually through Facebook or our blog). Other classes fill up quickly, and we then start a waitlist in case of cancellations. We find that keeping a spreadsheet that includes the name and contact information of each registrant keeps us organized and able to easily add or delete information.

It is inevitable that at least one participant will be unable to attend a class, but we try to encourage attendees to let us know with as much notice as possible. Last minute cancellations prevent us from filling an open spot, and often result in wasted food at the end of the class. (Although participants are always willing to take home leftovers!) For this reason, we strongly suggest having a cancellation policy, as well as insisting on payment upon registration. We find that once someone has already paid, they are more likely to contact us well in advance if they are unable to make the class. We have come to include these policies in our registration form and are happy to explain them to potential participants.

Our policy now reads as follows: Participants must pay upon registering for the class. We will accept a credit card number to secure your spot. We can accept payment by cash, cheque or credit card. Please note that we can only refund your registration fee if you cancel a minimum of two business days prior to the class. If you are unable to attend, you are welcome to invite a friend to come in your place. In this case, please be conscious of allergies and dietary needs.

We have very recently begun using an online workshop registration program that eliminates some headaches around registration tracking, and we encourage this method if it is feasible for your organization.
Managing Participants. Our cooking classes generally have 10-15 participants, depending on the size of the kitchen we’re using. For classes with children or with more complicated dishes, you may want to consider having fewer participants. For example, we generally limited participation in canning workshops to 8 participants, in order to keep batch sizes manageable. In a larger cooking class, class of 12 participants, consider breaking the groups into groups of 3 or 4. Each group can take on one dish OR each group can prepare the complete meal. Make sure to clarify with your instructor in advance as to which method you’ll use.

Perhaps the most important role of a workshop organizer or facilitator is to create a welcoming and inclusive environment. Participants are typically keen to meet and interact with one another. As facilitator, you want to encourage and support this. One effective way of doing this is splitting participants into smaller groups. If you notice an individual outside the group, make a point to interact with the person and introduce them to another participant. There may be language barriers between participants as well as cultural differences and age gaps. We have had great success with diverse groups and feedback from all participants regarding group dynamics has been very positive. Food is an excellent way to build community!

Menu planning, (or Less is More). Being local food lovers, we can be easily swept away with excitement when organizing a class. A number of (small) mistakes are likely to follow: first, over-purchasing ingredients (which results in an overabundance of leftovers and unnecessary costs) and, second, deciding on a menu with too many dishes. In this case, while the dishes may be simple and/or inexpensive, they are unnecessary. A third mistake that often results from excitement as well as good intention, is selecting an overly complicated menu. Class participants are eager to learn how to prepare each dish listed on
the menu; however, in this case, they are forced to focus on one or perhaps two dishes due to complexity. In the end, participants are likely to feel disappointed about what they missed out on as opposed to happy about what they were able to learn and prepare.

Our suggestion is finding a balance; for example, if your menu includes a complicated dish that requires a bit more know-how, keep the remaining courses simple. This will allow time for demonstration, questions, and everyone’s involvement. On the other hand, do not shy away from complicated dishes all together as participants often enjoy learning something a little extra special!

**Time Management.** Another reason to choose your menu wisely is time. We typically allow two and a half hours for our cooking classes. This includes introductions, food preparation, cooking time, enjoying the meal together and cleaning up. While it is tricky to know exactly how long the class will take, time is an important consideration. Those attending (participants, instructors and guest speakers) may have plans following the class and expect things to wrap up on time. By keeping to schedule, you will also have a much more relaxed and participatory cleanup.
Facilitating Food Skills Workshops with Community Groups

Developing workshops with community organizations (such as family resource centres, schools, afterschool programs, service organizations etc.) is one of the most rewarding ways to strengthen food skills in our neighbourhoods. We spend time building genuine and long term relationships with these organizations in order to create a sense of community and connection to the work we do, and the type of workshops we help facilitate reflect the unique needs and interests of individual groups. There isn’t really a set ‘how-to’ model on how to develop community group programming, but we can pass along a few tips that we’ve found work well when planning workshops with an established group. We believe that working collaboratively creates engagement, leadership and builds capacity as a community.

Effective community workshops incorporate some of the same planning as the public workshops, but because organizations often host the workshops in their own space, and facilitation is usually done by the Food Connections staff, these workshops are often a little simpler to co-ordinate than our public programming. However, the same considerations apply.

Who is your audience? Do they already have a lot of cooking experience or are they beginners? Will the class be hands-on, demonstration style or a combination of both? We have held workshops with all kinds of folks: young children learning to eat the veggies from their community gardens, new Canadians with vast cooking experience, people with cognitive disabilities, busy teenagers... All of these groups have different skills, and it’s important to develop a workshop with these various skills and interests in mind. If you develop longer term relationships with these groups, you will often see the same participants over and over, and it will be possible to build on techniques learned in previous classes.

Where will you hold your workshop? How does the kitchen set-up lend itself to different teaching styles? Workshops are generally held in community centres or in the organization’s space. It is a good idea to check out the kitchen ahead of time so you do not overextend the capabilities of the space. If the space doesn’t include a kitchen, there are still many opportunities to get together and learn about local food. Workshops on making salads or growing sprouts do not necessarily need a kitchen space, and can still be very valuable learning experiences.

Balancing costs with accessibility Often our partner organization will have funding to pay for workshop ingredients. Occasionally we can provide donated equipment, such as canning jars for preserving workshops. As mentioned earlier, we also provide subsidized spaces for our community partners in our public workshops. We have slightly different arrangements with each of the organizations depending on what works best for all involved. The key is to be flexible.
In order to improve upon your classes and assess whether or not you’re meeting your outcomes, you’ll need to evaluate your classes. Participant and instructor feedback for all of our workshops have been tremendously helpful to this process, in addition to our own reflections. Community workshop feedback is collected through more formal interviews and casual conversations with participants and facilitators, but we tend to use surveys for our public workshops.

We use surveys to – among other things – collect feedback from workshop participants. Using questions such as, “Would you consider attending future cooking workshops? Yes or no and please elaborate” and “Is there anything you would change about the class? Or do you have suggestions for future classes?”, we hope to draw out honest answers, constructive criticism, and new ideas. We also find that these completed surveys help us identify measurable, quantifiable outcomes that are very valuable when writing project reports and future grant applications. You may find that you use surveys more extensively at different points in your project to help you refine your project goals, and they may need substantial tweaking from one year to the next, depending on the stage of your project.

We have developed a system of surveys that reflect our own class structure, and that ask questions that relate to our own funding. (The full survey texts are included in the appendices.) In the case of our three part cooking series, we do three sets of surveys: one before the classes begins (to find out what skills and knowledge people already have and what they are interested in learning), immediately after the classes (to find out what worked well and what didn’t), and a follow-up survey approximately 6 months later (to see what skills and knowledge were most lasting).

As our objectives include building food skills and increasing awareness of the importance of local and sustainably produced food, we developed survey questions with both of those goals in mind. [See Appendix D for sample surveys.]

We initially sent out the pre-cooking class survey via email using the online survey tool, Survey Monkey. As response rates were sometimes not very high, and early technical glitches caused us to lose some information, we also brought paper copies to the first class. We also found that the response rate was higher when we brought paper
copies of the post-cooking class survey to the final class or used paper surveys at the end of canning workshops. The follow-up surveys six months later tend to have the lowest response rate. We have tried email surveys and telephone surveys; however, we have had the most success with using a survey tool, such as Survey Monkey, and offering respondents a chance to win something in a draw.

We also asked the instructors and guests for feedback. [See Appendix E for sample questions.] Additionally, we took our own notes of what went well, what didn’t, how many people were in attendance, how much local food we used, etc.

In addition to feedback about our workshops, we also keep logs of all our activities that include demographics of our participants, any handouts we gave away, and volunteer assistance. Although this evaluative tool is not directly part of food skills facilitation, we have included it in Appendix F because we have found it to be a valuable tool when evaluating the overall project in final reports, which is often necessary if you depend on grants for your funding.

Finally, there are often exciting or unintended outcomes that are not always captured by a survey. Sometimes it’s a story told by an instructor or participant, sometimes it’s a photograph of a grinning child, sometimes it’s an email received months after the fact or a comment heard second hand. Experiment with your evaluation methods. Try photography, video, audio recordings, or just take a few notes.

**CONCLUSION**

We know it is inevitable that certain information in this package will be more pertinent than others, but we hope you will find it helpful as a starting point to develop your own programs. Feel free to modify our sample surveys in the appendix so that they suit the needs of your project. If you’ve found this guide helpful, or if you have a few tips of your own, we’d love to hear about it! Together, we can share our knowledge and collectively continue building food skills capacity in our community.
HELPFUL RESOURCES

Food Action Committee Publications

**Eating for a Better World pamphlet:**
An 11 x 16 pamphlet covering the basics of sustainable eating: local, organic, fair trade, balancing protein consumption and breastfeeding.


**Eating By the Seasons:**
The Food Action Committee’s popular cookbook, featuring over 100 pages of locally inspired recipes organized seasonally. Farmers are welcome to reprint these recipes in newsletters. Please credit the Ecology Action Centre. This cookbook is available in hardcopy or on CD for $10 (plus shipping).

  - [http://www.ecologyaction.ca/content/food-action-publications-eating-seasons](http://www.ecologyaction.ca/content/food-action-publications-eating-seasons)

**Adventures in Local Food:**
The blog of the Food Action Committee. This blog showcases the work and workshops of the committee and includes articles related to cooking, preserving, root cellaring, gardening, CSAs and more.

  - [http://adventuresinlocalfood.wordpress.com/](http://adventuresinlocalfood.wordpress.com/)

**Is Nova Scotia Eating Local? Report and Education Toolkit:**
Our 2010 report on the social, economic and environmental benefits of a more locally-based food system, with corresponding educational materials.

  - [http://www.ecologyaction.ca/content/food-miles-project](http://www.ecologyaction.ca/content/food-miles-project)
HELPFUL RESOURCES

Other Atlantic Canadian Resources

Select NS
http://www.selectnovascotia.ca/

Seasonal Availability Guide

Farmers Markets of Nova Scotia
http://www.farmersmarketsnovascotia.ca/

Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network
http://acornorganic.org/

Sustainable Seafood

SeaChoice
http://www.seachoice.org/

Other Facilitation Guides

London Community Resource Centre – Cook it Up! How to Manual
http://lcrc.on.ca/ESW/Files/Cook_It_Up!_How_To_Manual.pdf
HELPFUL RESOURCES

Buying Local

Places to buy local food in and around Halifax

**Halifax Seaport Farmer’s Market**
Hours: Tuesday - Fridays 10am-5pm, Saturdays 7am-4pm, Sundays 8am-4pm.
[http://halifaxfarmersmarket.com/](http://halifaxfarmersmarket.com/)

**Halifax Heritage Market**
(Keith’s Brewery)
Open Saturdays 7am-1pm

**Partners for Care VG Farmers’ Market**
Open Fridays 9am-2pm (indoors during the winter)

**Dartmouth Farmers’ Market**
(Alderney Landing Cultural and Convention Center)
Open Saturday 8am-1pm and Wednesday 12pm-6pm.

**Hubbards Farmers’ Market**
(#57 Highway 3, Hubbards)
Open Saturdays 8am-12pm.*Closes for the season at the end of October but holds two Christmas markets in November and December.*
[http://hubbardsbarn.org/](http://hubbardsbarn.org/)

**Bailey’s Supermarket**
1189 Bedford Highway

**Dave’s Valley Fruits and Vegetables**
322 Main Street, Dartmouth

**Grainery Co-op**
2385 Agricola Street 466-3301

**Home Grown Organic Foods**
6188 Allan Street, 492-1412
Fresh produce, eggs and bread delivered to your home.
[http://www.hgof.ns.ca/](http://www.hgof.ns.ca/)

**Local Source Market**
5783 Charles Street
localsourcemarket@gmail.com

**Planet Organic**
6485 Quinpool Road
[http://www.planetorganic.ca/ourstores/halifax/](http://www.planetorganic.ca/ourstores/halifax/)

**Speerville Mill Co-op**
Located in New Brunswick, supplies locally-grown grain and related products to grocery stores, co-ops, and buying clubs. 1-866-277-6371
[http://www.speervilleflourmill.ca/](http://www.speervilleflourmill.ca/)

**Masstown Market**
10622 Highway # 2, Masstown, NS
1-866-273-0614
info@masstownmarket.com
Appendix A: Sample Registration Form

Please email to Keltie at keltie@ecologyaction.ca

Name:
Daytime phone:
Email:
Address:

Do you have any food allergies?

Are you interested in car pooling? If yes, from which area of town are you traveling?
___ Driver ___ Passenger ___ Either

Please Note: The #7, 42, 80 and 81 buses have stops along Robie Street. While #2, 4 and 52 buses have stops along North Street. We will also attempt to match participants interested in car pooling if possible.

Method of payment and Cancellation Policy: Participants must pay upon registering for the class. We will accept a credit card number to secure your spot. We can accept payment by cash, cheque or credit card. Please note that we can only refund your registration fee if you cancel a minimum of two business days prior to the class. If you are unable to attend, you are welcome to invite a friend to come in your place. In this case, please be conscious of allergies and dietary needs.
Seasonal Cooking Class Series: Request for Seniors as Instructors

We are, once again, looking for a few seniors interested in sharing their culinary knowledge and experience with others who are hungry to learn! We are currently organizing, on behalf of the Food Action Committee of the Ecology Action Centre, the “Promises of Spring” Seasonal Cooking Class Series which will take place in March. Our intergenerational cooking classes are taught by seniors and attended by food-lovers of all ages. If you are a senior with a zest for cooking locally - or know someone who is - please contact us! Thank you for your support.

About our classes:
The Food Action Committee (FAC) of the Ecology Action Centre organizes and hosts seasonal cooking classes which feature local ingredients and foster food skills in our community. The classes are fun, informative, and participatory. After preparing the recipes as a group, we sit and enjoy the meal together.

Instructors are welcome to cook in pairs and will receive loads of support from the Food Action Committee (FAC) staff. As a teacher you would be asked to share your knowledge in choosing the recipes and share your skills in leading the class. FAC staff would register participants, purchase ingredients, set up and act as a helping hand in the kitchen.

For more information, email Keltie at keltie@ecologyaction.ca or phone 442-1077.
Seasonal Cooking Classes: Winter 2011

The Food Action Committee of the Ecology Action Centre is hosting a three part workshop on cooking seasonally. The classes will be fun and informative, featuring local and seasonal ingredients. After we cook, we will sit down and enjoy the meal together.

At this time, we are looking for teachers!

If you are a senior with a zest for cooking locally – or know someone who is – please contact us! Teachers are welcome to cook in pairs and will receive lots of support from the Food Action Committee (FAC) staff.

As a teacher you would be asked to share your knowledge in choosing the recipes and share your skills in leading the class.

FAC staff would register participants, purchase ingredients, set up and act as a helping hand in the kitchen.

Dates: Thursday, January 20th
Location: Local Source Market (5783 Charles Street, Halifax)
Time: 6-8:30pm

For more information, email Keltie at keltie@ecologyaction.ca or phone 442-1077.

Keltie Butler
Food Action Committee
Ecology Action Centre
www.ecologyaction.ca
Fall Seasonal Cooking Class Series: Squash, Pumpkin & Sweet Potato... Oh my!

*It’s time to turn up the heat... in the kitchen!*

Would you like to learn to cook delicious, simple, and seasonal? The Ecology Action Centre is presenting a local, seasonal cooking course and we’re looking for participants!

**Location:** Local Source Market (5783 Charles Street, Halifax)

**Dates:** 3 evenings – October 27th, November 3rd and November 10th

**Time:** 6-9 pm

**Cost:** $15-$25 (sliding scale) per evening. Payment for all 3 classes will be upfront and participants are asked to commit to all three classes.

We are striving to make the course accessible to a range of income levels. By paying $15 per class, we are able to cover our ingredient costs. If you are willing and able to pay more, please know that the money will help support the Food Action Committee of the EAC.

**About our project:** Since this is an educational series, we will be asking participants to fill out three short surveys to gather your feedback and help design future courses. One of the surveys will be sent out to participants before the first class to gain an understanding of your current cooking skills. The second survey will be given out after the final class. The third and final survey will be sent out 6 months later to gain an understanding of how the class changed your cooking skills.

**About our instructors:** Instructors will be senior volunteers who have a wealth of knowledge and experience which comes from years of cooking and baking. Each class will be taught by a different, enthusiastic senior eager to share his or her skills.

For more information: Email Keltie at keltie@ecologyaction.ca or call 442-1077.
Seasonal Cooking Class Series: January 2011

*Three talented teachers, Two hours of cooking, And a (free-range) partridge in a (local) pear sauce!*

Looking for a fresh gift idea this Christmas? Hoping the delicious meals last beyond the holiday? Hungry for local?

The Food Action Committee of the Ecology Action Centre is hosting the winter edition of the Seasonal Cooking Class Series in January of 2011 and gift certificates are available! You’ll get three nights of terrific instruction, delicious food, and good fun—plus you’ll go home with new recipes!

**Dates:** “All About the Artichoke” on January 13th, “Winter Classics” on the 20th, and “It’s All About Appetizers” on the 27th

**Time:** 6-8:30pm

**Location:** Local Source Market, 5783 Charles Street

**Cost:** $10-$25 per evening (sliding scale). Participants are asked to commit to all three classes so that we can build on lessons learned in previous classes. Payment for all 3 classes will be upfront.

We are striving to make the course accessible to a range of income levels. By paying $10 per class, we are able to cover our ingredient costs. If you are willing and able to pay more, please know that the money will help support the Food Action Committee of the EAC.

To register, purchase a gift certificate, or simply ask questions, contact Keltie at 442-1077 or via email at keltie@ecologyaction.ca.
Appendix D: Sample Surveys

Cooking Class Pre-Survey
TO BE HANDED OUT AT THE BEGINNING OF OUR COOKING CLASS SERIES

Ecology Action Centre

The Ecology Action Centre is conducting seasonal community-based cooking and food-preserving skills classes. Your input and feedback is very important to us: we want to learn more about how people experience the world of food! In addition, future classes will be developed based on what you tell us. Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. Responding to this questionnaire is purely voluntary: you may choose not to answer some questions and you may choose to stop answering questions at any time. Thank you for your valuable contribution!

1. Have you ever taken a cooking class (anywhere) before?
   ___Yes   ___No

If yes, please describe it (where / who organized it / what kind of class):

2. What motivated you to sign up for this class?

3. What do you hope to learn from this class?

4. How would you describe your confidence in your cooking skills?
5. Please tell us more about your regular cooking situation.
Total number of people in my household: ____ How many are children (under 18)? ____
Who does most of the cooking in your home?

Do you cook for anyone with special dietary needs or preferences? (Circle one) Yes / No

Please specify more about the dietary need / preference:

Any other information about your cooking environment that you want to share?

6. Do you have any experience with the following food-related skills?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check here if yes</th>
<th>Food Skills</th>
<th>Where/from whom did you learn this skill:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freezing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dehydrating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gardening or farming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Please think about where you bought your groceries in the past three months. Please circle ANY that you make purchases at.

Please also RANK the TOP 4 sources of food for your household:
1= highest percentage of your total grocery budget is spent here
2= second highest percentage of your budget is spent here
3= third highest percentage of your grocery budget is spent here
4 = the lowest percentage of your TOP 4

Grocery Store (such as Atlantic Superstore, Sobeys) ___
Farmers’ Market (where: __________________________) ___
Small Independent Retailer (i.e. Local Source, Masstown Market) ___
Health/Organic Food Store (i.e. Planet Organic, Super Natural) ___
Specialty Shop/Deli/Ethnic Food Store ___
Food Box Delivery/Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Share ___
Buying Group (Who buys together? __________________________) ___
Directly from Local Farmers at their farm(s) ___
Other sources (please specify: __________________________) ___
Grow or produce food for myself ___

8. Please tell us more about your experience finding, buying and using local food.
Is buying local food something you actively try to do? (Circle one) Yes / No / Not sure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Activity</th>
<th>Level of difficulty</th>
<th>Finding it / knowing if a food is local</th>
<th>Buying / Affording it</th>
<th>Cooking with it</th>
<th>Preserving it</th>
<th>Other :</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>easy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>somewhat easy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>somewhat difficult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>difficult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Please indicate your age range by checking next to one option below:
   - under 25     
   - 25-34    
   - 35-44    
   - 45-54    
   - 55-64    
   - 65 or over  

10. What is your gender? _____________________________

11. Is there any information you want that would help you remain motivated to cook and to buy food locally?

Thank you for completing our cooking workshop survey. We like to follow up with people who took these classes, about 6 months afterwards and a year afterwards. We can do this by phone or email. This is totally voluntary, of course. If you are willing and interested, please write your name in and check your preference and provide preferred number(s) or email address(es).

Name: ______________________________________________________
  ___ Email : _________________________________________________
  ___ Phone: _______________________________________________
Thank you for attending the winter local food cooking series!

To assist us with this project, please take 5 minutes to answer the following questions. Your responses will help inform future classes, as well as contribute to the research and evaluation of our programs.

We will also be conducting one additional survey in six months, as we are conducting research on changes in cooking and food purchasing habits over time. This survey will either be an email survey or a phone survey. If you do not wish to participate this survey, please contact Marla at foodaction@ecologyaction.ca.

Thank you!

1. Which classes did you attend? Please check all that apply:
   ___ Class 1: Pesto fish & Kale Salad
   ___ Class 2: Roast Chicken & Gnocchi
   ___ Class 3: Braising

2. What were the top three things you learned from the classes?

3. Was there anything you expected to learn from the classes but didn’t? Please explain.
4. Is there anything you would change about the class?

5. Are there other cooking or food skills workshops that you would like to see us organize?

6. Do you have any feedback on instruction style? Do you prefer a demonstration style or more hands-on? Do you have any suggestions to give to future instructors?

7. How did you hear about the classes?
   ___ EAC e-newsletter
   ___ EAC website
   ___ Food Action Committee listserve
   ___ Through another email listserve
   ___ Adventures in Local Food Blog
   ___ Facebook
   ___ Through Local Source Market
   ___ Word of Mouth
   ___ Other (please specify)

8. Would you consider coming to future cooking workshops?
   ___ Yes  ___ No

   Please elaborate

9. Please add any additional comments or feedback here.
1. What were the top three skills or pieces of information that you learned in the cooking class(es)?

2. How many cooking classes have you taken with us?

3. Do you feel that there have been any changes in your attitude to local food since taking the class(es)? Please explain.

4. As a result of the cooking class(es) have you bought more food grown in Nova Scotia? If yes, what information has influenced you to buy more local food?

5. Have you joined a CSA (community supported agriculture) program since participating in the cooking class(es)?

6. Was there a farmer or other food producer as a guest speaker in the class you attended? If yes, please comment on the information you gained from this visit.

7. Are there any additional comments that you would like to add?
Appendix E: Instructor Survey

1) Please rate your experience teaching the cooking class (poor, fair, good, very good, excellent)

2) Do you know other seniors who might be interested in teaching a cooking workshop?

3) What was your favourite part of the class?

4) What could we improve for future classes?

5) Would you be interested in teaching a class again?

6) Any additional comments?
Completed By:

Activity Title/Description:

Date:

Location:

Duration:

Was there a fee? If so, how much?

In partnership with (if applicable):

If this is a new partnership when and how did it begin?
Any observations during this activity related to the overall goals of our food action work?

Any other notes or observations for future reference?

How many volunteers helped with this event and how many hours did they contribute?

How many people (not including EAC staff) attended this activity?

Were there any children (12 and under), youth (13-?), seniors, rural communities, new Canadians or other demographics present? If so, approx. how many?

Did you distribute any material resources (tools, compost, jars etc.)? If so, approx. how much?

Did you distribute any information resources (hand-outs, recipes, blog links etc.)

Any changes you noticed related to participation or involvement?