



## TORONTO CANADA

Title of Practice

### TORONTO: INNOVATIVE SUPPLY CHAINS BENEFITTING VULNERABLE GROUPS

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Category

#### FOOD SUPPLY AND DISTRIBUTION



Main impacts on other MUFPP categories



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#### Context

The City of Toronto contains pockets of **food deserts** and an over-abundance of stores selling less healthy food (i.e. “food swamps”). Typically, these are low-income neighbourhoods that tend not to be served by conventional suppliers of healthy fresh food. Food supply in these areas is currently an inefficient patchwork of ad-hoc purchases and unpredictable donations, which represents a challenge for non-profit and charitable organizations to provide enough good food consistently. Additionally, **public spending is not keeping pace with food inflation and demand**, pushing private organizations to work on their own low-budget solutions in isolation. This in turn affects the quality, number and size of meals distributed. In 2012, the Department of Public Health launched a collaborative initiative called “Grab Some Good”, providing a systemic response to this issue.

#### Overview of the food practice

Grab Some Good is a collaborative initiative between multiple levels of municipal, provincial and federal government, charitable organizations, academic institutions and community agencies. Specifically, Grab Some Good works in partnership with FoodReach and FoodShare, sourcing fresh food directly from the Ontario Food Terminal (the main fresh food distribution centre for Ontario), local farmers when feasible, and other wholesale suppliers. The food is distributed using **innovative approaches** such as the FoodShare Mobile Good Food Market – a converted bus that functions as a store on wheels – visiting low-income neighbourhoods, and community agencies serving meals to vulnerable groups. In turn, vulnerable groups such as seniors, newcomers, people experiencing homelessness, children and single parent families have increased access to **fresh and healthy food**. At present, Grab Some Good supplies and distributes food in four key ways:

- pop-up markets: bright stalls were set-up at the three ends of Toronto’s subway lines (in neighbourhood priority areas). They were open twice a week during peak commuter times and provided fresh produce. This was a pilot that ended in December 2017;
- foodShare Mobile markets: retrofitted trucks that operate as “stores on wheels”, visiting priority neighbourhoods with a mix of fresh produce;
- healthy corner stores: three corner store owners have been assisted in carrying and selling a greater range of fresh produce and other “healthy snacks”; and
- food Reach: a collaborative not-for-profit organization, providing a range of community agencies (including child care centres, school nutrition programs and City of Toronto divisions/programs) with

access to fresh, healthy food at wholesale prices. Members place orders through an online portal, with a USD 50.00 minimum order and free next-day delivery, and receive fresh food sourced from a partner consolidator.

#### Results and lessons learned

The projects promoted by Grab Some Good rely predominantly on leveraging available resources and **building collaborative partnerships** inside and outside municipal government. It is clear that there is no “one size fits all” solution. While the problems faced by different cities, large or small, in high- or low-income countries, are very different, the approach taken in Toronto can be applied to any city. This approach can be summarised as:

- identifying individual groups or neighbourhood locations that would benefit most from affordable access to fresh, healthy food;
- creating collaborative partnerships to explore new ways to supply fresh food to vulnerable groups;
- sourcing wholesale fresh food and local wherever possible;
- using the power of group purchasing to leverage wholesale pricing and to mitigate the impact of sudden price fluctuations; and
- establishing new and innovative supply chains to deliver food directly to vulnerable groups.

In this sense, the initiative applies a food system approach recognizing that systemic, sustainable solutions are required, creating a food procurement system that is working toward enabling a shorter regional value chain while promoting access to good food across multiple sectors and for all residents of Toronto. Grab Some Good is also exploring ways to use imperfect fruit and vegetables in an effort to reduce food waste. Furthermore, **shorter supply chains** reduce food costs, making food more accessible to low-income groups and therefore improving the nutritional quality of their diets. In addition, Toronto Public Health is currently working with FoodReach and Creating Health Plus homeless drop-ins to build **food skills development** and nutrition education through chef training and on-line knowledge exchange.



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