



UNCHARTED

Uncharted Food Access:
Tackling Food Deserts in Denver

POST-PROGRAM LEARNING REPORT

We're on a journey to learn what it takes to solve problems. The goal of this report is not to show you we have all the answers. Instead, it's to explain what we've learned through our new approach, and to see if you want to partner with us.

In September, we brought together 10 ventures, 28 mentors, representatives from the City of Denver, funders, masterminds, and food experts, all with a single question:

What will it take to end food deserts in Denver?

FOOD DESERT

noun:

1. an area, usually low-income, in which many residents cannot easily get to stores that sell affordable, healthful foods.

The program began with opening remarks from the city's first-ever Manager of Food Systems Development, Blake Angelo.



“Improving food access and food security is not a new problem for the city. The city is turning to you to help innovate and discover new ways to sustainably address this challenge.”

Blake Angelo

FOOD DESERT DENVER STATS

1 in every 3 children is obese or overweight

1 in every 2 adults is obese or overweight, and Denver is considered a healthy county

49% of low or moderate income neighborhoods don't have access to a full-service grocery store

1 in 6 families suffer food insecurity. This means they miss a meal because they can't afford it

Every year, there is a 16 million meal gap

Even accounting for all of the meals served through soup kitchens and nonprofits, the food budget shortfall is so great the county is missing 16 million meals each year

Meet Vernelle. She hands out donated produce in a Denver food desert.



“ There’s no veggies in the neighborhood at all. So everyone comes here for the free produce, and then comes back and asks if I have any more. I just give it to anyone who comes along because I feel like they need it.

We are so far away from fruits and vegetables. We have no grocery store near by. So I just take the truck load. Some stuff I don’t even know what it is. But honey, it goes. I don’t care what it is. It goes real quick.”

We’re building something new that has a chance to create a dent.



“ This program has made a potentially game changing coalition possible.”

Brad Birky, Co-Founder SAME Cafe

OUR PROCESS

Here are the steps we took to create a collective movement of people who can put a significant dent in food deserts.

STEP 1

Hypothesize the drivers of the issue

STEP 2

Identify people who can make a dent in the issue

STEP 3

Get them to collaborate and give them the support to do it
**We call this a collective movement*

1. Drivers

To begin building a collective movement, our first step was hypothesizing what the drivers of food deserts are, so we can recruit people who are tackling the problem from all sides.

Through extensive research, we uncovered these drivers:

- **Access.** People in low-income areas do not live in close-proximity to grocery stores or food markets, and work long schedules which makes it hard to travel distances to reach healthy food
- **Affordability.** The cost of fresh produce is high, which makes it easier to rationalize choosing cheaper processed foods, fast-food restaurants, or corner store snacks
- **Education.** There is an education gap around nutrition, gardening, cooking, and other essential skills for building healthy communities



“ One major challenge to eating more healthfully is the lack of access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods like fruits and vegetables. As a result, food insecurity and diet-related diseases like obesity and diabetes are increasingly more common, especially for low-income neighborhoods or in communities of color.”

[Denver’s Food System, City of Denver report](#)

2. People

The next step was to find the right people to tackle food deserts based on their unique position to address it. We built our cohort and ran an intensive, 5-day bootcamp in Denver to promote collaboration and provide deep support. Specifically we:

- Partnered with the City of Denver for funding, resource, and education support
- Selected 10 ventures who are addressing food deserts through the different drivers we identified, such as mobile markets, education centers, indoor farms, and pay-what-you want restaurants
- Recruited [28 mentors](#) who have deep expertise in building scalable food models and getting food to the low-income. This included the Director of Sustainability at Chipotle, the former CMO at Celestial Seasonings, and the Founder of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative
- Brought in specialists who trained our 10 ventures in critical skills to rapidly make headway and mobilize resources, including the inventor of Google Glass (Tom Chi) and a fundraising expert from For Impact (Kerry Suddes), an organization that’s raised over 2 billion dollars for nonprofit clients

On the next page is a sampling of our cohort, along with what transformed for them during the bootcamp:



RE:VISION

Mission: An economic and social justice organization that develops local leaders, grows community food systems, and builds locally-owned economies

One transformation: While in the midst of re-thinking their fundraising strategy, the For Impact fundraising workshop helped their team refine their messaging and restructure their donor pyramid



GOODNESS GROCERIES

Mission: A social enterprise grocery delivery service that increases access to fresh food delivery via electric powered tricycles

One transformation: Their team went from a 6-week out timeline for their first sale, to making it during the program thanks to personalized help from Tom Chi and his rapid prototyping workshop



THE GROWHAUS

Mission: Create a community-driven, neighborhood-based food system by serving as a hub for food distribution, food production, education, and economic opportunity

One transformation: Getting connected to Uncharted Mentor Rob Ybarra and La Tulense, a big distribution company specializing in Mexican products. (For a market of their small scale, it's very difficult to forge a connection to a big distribution company without an inside contact)



SAME CAFE

Mission: A nonprofit restaurant that provides healthy food to anyone regardless of ability to pay

One transformation: Important timing: They built a 3-year strategic plan right when the co-founders were transitioning out and a new CEO was coming on board



TOM CHI

Uncharted Speaker, Partner, & Mentor
Former UX Lead, Google X. Co-Creator of Google Glass

Tom has pioneered and practiced a unique approach to rapid prototyping, visioning, and data-driven design that has allowed him to both get new things off the ground and move large organizations at unprecedented speeds



CAITLIN LEIBERT

Uncharted Mentor
Head of Sustainability for Chipotle Mexican Grill

Caitlin is responsible for creating and implementing Chipotle's sustainability vision and strategy in more than 2,200 restaurants worldwide— from waste reduction to energy management and water stewardship



BLAKE ANGELO

Uncharted Partner & Mentor
City of Denver's Manager of Food Systems Development

Blake is responsible for supporting food-related business and community development efforts across Denver with a particular focus in supporting a balanced approach to healthy food access, mid-skills food job creation, and the expansion of local food businesses in target neighborhoods



KERRY SUDES

Uncharted Speaker, Partner, & Mentor
Director of Training, For Impact (a fundraising organization that has raised \$2B+)

Kerry has coached and trained thousands of organizations — including The American Cancer Society, Easter Seals, private schools, social service agencies, and social ventures — through successful funding efforts ranging from \$100K to \$30M

3. Movement

With various ventures, industry-experts, and stakeholders in the room, we asked people to strip away their job titles and simply see themselves as a community member committed to eradicating food deserts.

Once again, we asked this question: What will it take to end food deserts in Denver?



**After the program, we surveyed all participants, who cited the most valuable takeaway was building relationships with other entrepreneurs*

We saw the movement take form in two ways:

Partnerships

Ventures committed to each other in various ways, like supply chain sharing, collective purchasing, and combined community engagement.



“ One of the biggest things I’m taking away from this week is the connections with and possibility to collaborate with the other ventures in the room. Work smart (together) not hard (separate). ”

Kathryn Ardoin, The GrowHaus

For example:

- Any Street Groceries committed to working with GrowHaus around maximizing purchasing
- Any Street Groceries committed to partnering with SAME Cafe to provide shopping options for their food truck
- The GrowHaus committed to working with various ventures, such as Re:Vision and Focus Points, around collective purchasing and smart sourcing of products to leverage economy of sale and keep prices more affordable
- Copia will be working closely with Denver Food Rescue (a sister organization of Goodness Groceries), using Copia's technology to help reduce waste and feed more communities that Denver Food Rescue serves



“ We’ve discussed supplying Re:Vision with produce, working with Focus Points and SAME Cafe as a drop off location, and providing donations to Denver Rescue.”

Tyler Evans, Eat Five

Continual Policy Reform

The last day of our bootcamp included a rapid prototyping session where we determined—as a cohort—two major steps we can take to eradicate food deserts

1. Design an initiative to develop and reverse an RFP to end food deserts by 2030
2. Create an advocacy group for food access by using collective knowledge to influence gov't, create new policies, and rotate leadership to ensure everyone feels equally collaborative

“ It almost never happens that all of these people get to get together for a day, let alone 5 days. So, the container to hold space for everyone is incredibly valuable. I think time will tell the real value, to see if relationships and ideas stick.”

Eric Kornacki, Re:Vision



Our Learning

We are still learning what it takes to build a coordinated movement.

After surveying our cohort, here are the parts of our program that were least valuable:

- Town hall (a wrap up session with Tom Chi and announcements for mentor meetings)
- Evening activities (a scavenger hunt, cooking contest)
- Next steps workshop (a prototyping session for building a collective movement; this was our first time running this workshop)

We also didn't nail every single mentor meeting, or bake in enough breaks for people to download a plethora of information. Here is some direct feedback we received from ventures:



“ More time, fewer mentors. There is something to be said for talking to a lot of people and building out those wider ties, but it was a lot of mentors. ”

Turner Wyatt

“ Shared learning didn't always get translated back to the team in discussion. Some more time to debrief and discuss as teams because there were different ideas coming to each person in the venture team. ”

Anonymous Entrepreneur

Here is what ventures want more of:



“ Keep the facilitation going. At our first Next Project meeting, be there to help us define and prototype the content of the Reverse RFP.”

Whitney Bradford, Focus Points Cafe

“ I think we could use your help formulating the collaborative funding ask! Either to the city or foundations. We could also use your help reaching out to the city of Denver to say thanks and ask for more support. ”

Turner Wyatt

Here are additional challenges we faced:

- **This was a short program.** The bootcamp was only five days, which is simply not long enough to create a lasting dent. An ideal version would be at least twice as long
- **Tension between local effort and selection.** We want to attract more folks outside of Denver to fill the city with more resources, like funding
- **Working with a government is never easy.** We're thrilled to be partnering with the City of Denver, and we also are aware of the challenges faced when ensuring vision and resources are aligned

After this program, we realize we are far from perfect. But we believe we're moving in the right direction.

- In October, we hosted a follow-up working session with the cohort to move forward on our reserve RFP and advocacy group action items
- We are hosting a funder happy hour in December, which will include a food expert panel
- Ventures are going to be convening regularly and working with mentors, and we will compile additional metrics in a more in-depth learning report in 2018



AS WE CHART THE COURSE FROM FOOD DESERTS TO FOOD ACCESS, HERE IS WHERE WE ARE. BUT THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED IN JUST FIVE DAYS.



We need more partners as we head into uncharted waters—learning what it takes to put dents in major problems across the world.

JOIN US.

We are looking for partners to launch expanded versions of this program, both in Denver and across the United States. [Please contact us](#) if you have any interest in deploying this model in other parts of the country.

We want to learn from experts who have led coalitions, and proven practitioners who have made a dent in food deserts. If you have experience in this work, [we'd love to hear your wisdom!](#)

[Subscribe here](#) to get our next learning update on how the Food Access Cohort in Denver is making headway on this problem.

THANK YOU!