

Ontario Edible Education Network – Draft Action Plan
Food Skills and Cooking Programs

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Environmental Scan and Needs Assessment

This preliminary data analysis report highlights findings from online and telephone interviews with key informants who have responded to the “Food Skills and Cooking Programs” priority area. To date, we have interviewed 12 people, and have received 8 online responses, and this update provides a current sample of responses. The key informants interviewed for this report responded to standard questions and offered helpful information based on their experience developing, implementing and evaluating cooking and food preparation skills programs. The preliminary analysis of their insights has been grouped under four general headings: current status of culinary programs in Ontario, barriers to offering food skills programs to children (and suggestions to address or overcome these challenges/barriers), the need for province-wide age-specific food literacy and cooking benchmarks established for children, and the role of the Ontario Edible Education Network in successfully delivering food skills programs to children.

Note: We have not begun to format this document as data collection is ongoing. We have requested interviews with another 10 people and are hoping to collect more from the online survey. We have assembled this preliminary data to be able to share what we have learned to date:

I. Current status of culinary programs in Ontario

1. There are resources that currently exist

“I’m certain that information is already out there, given the hard work done by established ‘soup/kitchens’ or community groups.”

“There are lots of guides already out there. I’d suggest first coming up with a list of what already exists.”

“I bet there are so many, but nobody knows about them.”

2. A standard list of equipment/kitchen supplies for organizations looking to start a food skills and/or cooking program would be beneficial

“A list would be helpful for programs that are starting from scratch”

“In addition to the standard list, a list of possible substitutions, like a glass or stainless bowl over a pot rather than a double boiler, and ideas of how to create things, like an air lock from wine-making used to ferment, rather than specialized and expensive equipment.”

“It would take some of the stress out of cooking with kids if you could check an equipment list.”

3. There is a large diversity of programs and a lack of consistency in the implementation and evaluation of food skills and cooking programs

“cooking programs vary by organization and participant characteristics”.

“I can see value in [a manual that provides a province wide standard for implementation of cooking programs] but also see a lot of challenges in developing one manual that meets all communities and groups needs.”

“I don’t know how to really tell people that my program is effective. I know it is, but it would be great to show it somehow in a way other people could see and understand.”

“I think that every site is so different, even in my program that it is hard to evaluate things all by the same measure.”

II. Barriers to offering food skills programs to children (and suggestions to address or overcome challenges/barriers)

The following were identified as challenges/barriers/gaps to offering food skills programs to children:

Agree	
16 (80.0%)	Suitable Location
16 (80.0%)	Transportation for participants
15 (75.0%)	Funding
13 (65.0%)	Kitchen Space
13 (65.0%)	Proper Equipment
10 (50.0%)	Time
10 (50.0%)	Participation of children/youth
9 (45.0%)	Access to healthy ingredients
8 (40.0%)	Easy, healthy, practical recipes
8 (40.0%)	Qualified Staff
8 (40.0%)	Lack of Staff Training
8 (40.0%)	Safety

Suggestions to address or overcome challenges/barriers:

1. Funding

“If we had more money we would be able to provide more programming and not charge as much, we are missing so many kids who can’t afford this. If we had more money to subsidize that would help.”

“Funding needs to be provided for agencies that wish to incorporate healthy meal prep in their programming for children and youth.”

“What we really need is more grants for cooking programs”

2. Support/time

“time is such a huge barrier. If we had more staff or support we could manage our time better.”

“we are understaffed and always rushing. More hands and more time is what we really need.”

3. Space

“look at individuals’ spaces rather than those available in the community, do we really need government inspected, endorsed facilities? Students and children should be encouraged to work in their own spaces.”

“Finding places to run our program is often a challenge – and then once we find space it’s about getting people there and back from it.”

III. Interest in province-wide age-specific food literacy and cooking benchmarks established for children

“This would be great – it would put a lot of people on the same playing field”

“I would really love to be able to look at other programs to see how our kids stack up”

“Yeah I think this is a good idea in theory, not sure how you would actually make it – and then even if you did how you would make people do it There is just so much on our plate, literally”
“absolutely but it would need to be really easy to read and interactive would be great too”
“if there was a standard, it would be difficult to tailor the program to unique participant needs and interests”
“It would benefit our program by setting a standard for funding proposals to implement a cooking program”

IV. Role of the Network in successfully supporting food skills programs to children

1. Teaching

“I have witnessed people on fixed incomes using highly processed food or take-out for the majority of their primary meal. If this has been the norm from one generation to the other, teaching people how to prepare affordable healthier meals is practical. Learning how, can be introduced during childhood.”

“The Network can learn the good things that are being done and teach that to others, you know, spread the good stuff around so others don’t need to learn the hard way.”

“Share ideas and what is working – use example that are working and let others know about them.”

2. Funding Awareness and Assistance

“Share information about funding opportunities. Create a database of resources.”

“Let us know where we can find money.”

“I don’t have time to look for grants – I’m worried about what is happening today. I could use help with that.”

3. Networking

“Create opportunities for people to come together and share-great networking can be done that way.”

4. Mentorship

“Encourage and support mentorship – allow people to learn from those that are already doing great things or have learned and lived experience. That is powerful.”

ACTION PLAN for Food Skills and Culinary Programs

Intro

Sustain Ontario and the Edible Education Network (the Network) are in a difficult position. The Network brings groups together to help share resources, ideas and experiences – which is so important as we all work towards the common goal of helping children and youth develop a connection and appreciation of good, healthy food. We have heard from many groups though, that they do not have time, money or resources to contribute very much to this collaboration process, yet they are hopeful that they can benefit from it.

Unless we see the investment of time and energy into the collaboration process by program facilitators across the province, it will be difficult to gain an understanding of everything that is happening and the impact that will be felt by everyone’s efforts.

So how does the Network address the need for strong collaboration and help to build partnerships between organizations looking to deliver or currently delivering cooking/culinary programs who do not have time or resources to contribute to the collaboration process?

This Action Plan will make recommendations for how The Edible Education Network can work to develop resources for implementing or improving an effective cooking and food skills program, including: information on identifying necessary equipment, finding a suitable location, and understanding what skills children and youth of various ages need to develop in order to want to make healthy decisions with food. It will also propose specific ways to effectively measure the impact and success of a culinary program so that The Network can begin to paint a clearer picture of the collective impact of the many small community focused cooking skills programs in Ontario.

This Action Plan will address the two most commonly identified operational issues when offering food skills and cooking programs; a lack of a proper kitchen space and transportation for participants. We will make recommendations for how the Network can be a valuable resource to program facilitators who want to learn how others overcame these obstacles.

This Action Plan will propose creating a standard project impact measurement or evaluation system that will help small community organizations. It will make recommendations for how The Network may aid in the proposal building process for organizations looking to start new programs. It will make suggestions for how to improve existing programs and help organizations work together to build better food skills and cooking programs across Ontario.

Goals and Objectives

- To establish Sustain Ontario and the Edible Education Network as resources for Culinary program facilitators in areas of:
 - Awareness of existing culinary programs happening across the province.
 - Information and suggestions on starting a new culinary program or improving an existing culinary program.
 - Funding sources and resources.
- To establish a standard evaluation system for culinary and food skills programs and to aid in its design and implementation.
- To organize existing “How to Manuals” for food skills programs, make them available in one place, and if necessary, address any gaps.
- To facilitate the creation of age appropriate food literacy benchmarks for children and youth.

Priorities

- Establish a committee who will begin to assemble a Food Skills and Cooking Program Evaluation Manual. (using the Physical Activity Questionnaire for Older Children (PAQ-C) Manual as a model – see http://www.dapa-toolkit.mrc.ac.uk/documents/en/PAQ/PAQ_manual.pdf).
- Establish a plan for implementing the use of the Food Skills and Cooking Program Evaluation Manual that is created.
- Collect and build on pre-existing “How To Manuals” for food skills programs:
 - provide links to existing “How To Manuals” from one location
 - identify and fill in gaps or inefficiencies or barriers in existing manuals – e.g. location, cost, transportation for youth, materials, proper training of staff, etc.
- Create a database of existing, effective programs that will allow us to share their culinary program models or create a mentorship program.
- Establish a committee to create age-appropriate food literacy benchmarks and a strategy for provincial recognition and implementation.
- Assemble and implement “Funding Resource Plan”.

Timelines, Rolls and Responsibilities - Concrete next steps & Resource and funding plan/Government relations plan

To be developed once approval of Action Plan Concept and Goals/Objectives are reviewed and feedback is given.