



# INNOVATION

## APPETITE FOR CHANGE

Appetite for Change knows that big change can't happen overnight, so it works to build both trust and momentum, showing the community that it's here to stay.

### BREAKTHROUGH

Appetite for Change is steeped in community. All of its innovative programming is designed with community input, in response to community needs. The result is a wide range of programs and opportunities that all help build racial, economic and health equity in the neighborhood.

## BUILDING TRUST AND STAYING POWER

Appetite for Change's leadership starts with listening. Going neighbor to neighbor, storefront to storefront, AFC launched with a series of casual conversations that would add up to much more: a way for AFC to identify community needs, and a way for the community to build trust in a new neighborhood organization.

## CHANGES WORTH MAKING

Appetite for Change was designed with community in mind and shifts with community feedback. So do its programs. AFC keeps things fluid, always willing to adjust its systems, goals and processes to better meet the needs of the people it employs and serves.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF INNOVATION



Chatter fills the room along with the clinking of utensils, the hiss of the fire and the shuffle of tossed vegetables.

There's a rhythm to being in the kitchen. Some people cut carrots, while others shell peas and set pots of salted water on the stove to boil. It's the second Wednesday of the month, which means it's time for Community Cooks, a hands-on workshop Appetite for Change (AFC) hosts six times a month. People from all over the Northside of Minneapolis gather in the kitchen at Breaking Bread Café to try their hand at recipes like chickpea brownies and spicy black beans with dirty rice. The setting is homey enough that it's easy to let your guard down. Surrounded by familiar scents, it's only natural to get comfortable and forget you're not cooking with family.

That's the beauty of it. In many ways, community cooking at Breaking Bread is therapeutic — even healing. People work through recipes with someone they've just met, and end up making new connections and relationships, or hearing new perspectives. "We're missing something when we say, 'Go pop it in the microwave,' or 'Grab something from the corner store,'" says Princess Titus, one of AFC's three co-founders. "We stopped knowing everybody when we stopped cooking together."

**"We stopped knowing everybody when we stopped cooking together."**

**Princess Titus**  
Appetite for Change

CHARACTERISTIC **No 1**



In early cooking workshops, AFC accommodated community members who needed child care by allowing children to attend sessions with their parents. The older kids joined in the cooking and dialogue, contributing ideas on how to reach out to local children in the community. The teens would bring ideas out of the kitchen and back to their community to test. Once engaged, many young people became passionate ambassadors for AFC's work and even became youth leaders in the organization. It remains part of AFC's marketing strategy to turn no one away from the kitchen, be it the elders who sit to chat or the children who eat and play. They are all valuable parts of an ecosystem of give and take.

AFC's founders — Latasha Powell, Michelle Horovitz and Princess — were determined to build an organization responsive to the needs of the community as they saw it, not as prescribed for them.

For years, the Northside neighborhood had watched as organization after organization came into the community and told residents what needed to be fixed. Outsiders offered solutions, but never asked for the opinions of people living there. "I didn't want to do that," says Latasha, who experienced outsiders coming into her community to "help" firsthand as a teenager growing up in North Minneapolis. "I didn't want anyone to feel like I felt." In the process of launching the organization, the founders started simply by cooking with, and listening to, Northsiders. Nearly 400 people attended the organization's first eight events.

While preparing guacamole or eating baked fish, AFC asked community members about what they hoped the organization would become. They asked them to describe their ideal grocery store, to list the kinds of food they wanted to see in their neighborhood and to tell the stories behind their favorite meals. It was a strategy built on relationships, not judgment.

"The one thing we all hated was when we went to a meeting and someone stood in front of us and talked, and then we filled out a survey," says Princess. For the co-founders, that approach missed the nuances of community input, and often limited participants to picking from a predetermined list of survey answers. "People don't know all of the answers to write down as options," says Princess, describing a more traditional approach some other organizations take. "You got the answers you wanted to get, because you gave them the choices."

**"Food is a tool to create health, wealth and social change."**

**Princess Titus**  
Appetite for Change



To make space for a variety of thoughts, AFC went with a more open-ended format for its events, one that focused on conversation. It also videotaped the sessions and planted note takers from the community throughout the crowd to make sure it didn't miss a thing. Overwhelmingly, AFC learned that people loved to cook, eat and talk together, just like they were doing at those first eight events. By 2013, AFC turned that format into the basis for its flagship program, Community Cooks.

"We're reshaping the culture of the future. Food is a tool to create health, wealth and social change," says Princess. "We use it to bring people together and show love. The change is individual, social and then systemic."



# BUILDING TRUST AND STAYING POWER

Options in North Minneapolis skew toward the fast and the fried, with more than 30 fast food restaurants lining the sides of the neighborhood's main drag, West Broadway Avenue.

The big box grocery store in the area doesn't follow the standard practice of putting produce at the front — instead it greets customers with day-old doughnuts, soda pop and cinnamon bread.

Latasha, Michelle and Princess were fed up with the options. They wanted food that was fresh and local. They pictured robust community gardens, well-stocked farmers markets and food that boosted people's health — but they didn't want to force the community into anything it didn't want. "We knew a lot, but we knew we didn't know enough to just start a program or service without hearing from the voice of the community," says Princess. But the Northside had seen its share of outsiders

who wanted to take the neighborhood's information and plop in solutions that didn't stick, and the community had become skeptical of researchers and new initiatives. The three AFC co-founders had to demonstrate they were in for the long haul. They needed to build trust in the community, and that would take elbow grease.

To start, they got in on the ground floor, giving cooking demonstrations in front of local stores and handing out samples of the result: fresh mango salsa. Day after day, they chatted with members of the community, whether friends, family or hungry passersby. These casual conversations served as an informal survey of community needs, and it turned out that yes, people were interested in more, and healthier, local options.

AFC also spoke to the local stores and asked for their help encouraging healthier habits in the community. They asked corner stores to stock more fresh produce and to place it near the entrance for high visibility.

## CHARACTERISTIC No 2



There isn't a magic pill to get people to eat better. For AFC, it comes down to continually meeting people where they are and giving them time to grow with the organization. When Latasha first started with AFC, people told her the food she ate wasn't "good." She felt confused. Of course, the food tasted good — it was her grandma's cooking! She realized what people really meant to say was the food she ate wasn't healthy. However, that word came with judgment and negative connotations. "It was a diss in [the community's] face," says Latasha. The word pushed Northsiders away. "How many times are young black kids called beautiful, intelligent or healthy?" says Princess. "We're always hearing, 'You're not healthy.'" Listening to that comment over and over made some community members wonder if being healthy was even something that was desirable or attainable for them. AFC scrubbed the word from all its messaging and started using the phrase "fresh and local" as an alternative. As the community started to learn more about food and AFC's mission, they were open to hearing words that once turned them off. "We removed it from all of our literature until the community started coming and telling us those words," says Latasha. "Then we were able to bring those back in."



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



LOCALLY GROWN PRODUCE



# AFC gives the community the time it needs to gradually change its own relationship to food.

Some store owners were skeptical that people would buy the food and thought it might not be worth the hassle — after all, fresh food generally has a shorter shelf life than processed food. Others agreed to rearrange their stores but procrastinated on making any changes. Fortunately, AFC staff were rooted in the community and frequented the grocery stores where they wanted to see change. They dropped in often with reminders, and over a period of months became trusted regulars. When that happened, store owners started following through on updating the layouts of their stores and stocking fresh produce.

“It takes time for behaviors to change,” says Latasha, referencing not only AFC’s work, but also to the habits people form around eating. When Latasha became a vegetarian, she received pushback from her family and community. However, in the years since, she has watched as family members have slowly come around to her decisions — some even becoming vegans or vegetarians themselves. Knowing first hand that change doesn’t happen overnight, AFC gives the community the time it needs to gradually change its own relationship to food. In the meantime, AFC builds trust and momentum with on-the-ground work.



# CHANGES WORTH MAKING

The room sat empty, cold and full of exposed concrete. The bare bones of the space didn’t look like much, but in it the AFC founders saw the potential to build something they never expected to when the organization first launched in 2012: a restaurant.

The move was a risk. “We had very little money,” says Michelle. “None of us had restaurant management experience, and we were partnering with a chef who had never run a restaurant before.” Despite the apparent hurdles, AFC powered ahead for one reason: “The community said they wanted it, and we didn’t see anyone else willing to step up and do it.” So when AFC agreed to take over the space from a local developer in the neighborhood, it immediately turned back to the Northside community to design it.

In 2014, AFC opened the soon-to-be restaurant as a stop on the Northside arts crawl, FLOW. AFC hosted local artists in

the space and covered the blank walls with butcher paper people could write on. On the paper, AFC asked people to share what their ideal restaurant would look like: What kind of food would it have? What would the atmosphere look like? What would the space sound and smell like? Throughout the day, nearly 100 people wrote down their ideas. AFC took that feedback and in 2015, Breaking Bread Café opened as the only full-service, sit-down restaurant on West Broadway Avenue.

“People wanted a place where they could kick back, sit down and feel like community,” says Latasha. Community members also said they wanted Breaking Bread to be more than just a restaurant; they wanted it to be a place that offered much-needed jobs and training to Northsiders, too. Out of the 30 people employed at the restaurant, most are hired from the community, including a large percentage of people who face barriers to employment like incarceration, homelessness or lack of work history. For many of these employees, chopping vegetables or serving customers comes easy, while skills like conflict resolution and time management don’t.

CHARACTERISTIC **No 3**



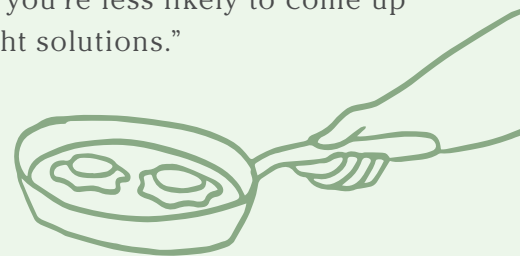
The world of nonprofits can look very different from the communities they serve, but AFC is dedicated to having community representation in its leadership. Two of the co-founders, Princess and Latasha, are North Minneapolis residents and leaders in the Black community, and the third co-founder, Michelle, also has family ties in the neighborhood. Over 90 percent of AFC staff and many of the organization’s board members are African American. This high level of community representation throughout all levels of the organization serves to keep AFC accountable to the community and in touch with its needs. It also contributes to the level of trust and investment the Northside feels toward AFC. Communities are generally more likely to change when encouraged by people they are close to, and AFC’s team of staff, board members and volunteers includes many known and trusted members of the Northside community.

Originally, AFC casually practiced these skills with employees on the job. Yet after running the restaurant for more than two years with an informal approach to workforce development, it realized a more structured format — with classroom time and a dedicated coordinator — would benefit café workers more. In 2018, AFC began formalizing its adult training program at Breaking Bread. It started increasing classroom time to allow Breaking Bread employees to study a broader range of soft skills beyond restaurant service and gave them a less pressure-filled environment to learn in, away from customers. It also added a program coordinator who serves as a coach and mentor for restaurant staff, giving them a confidant to turn to when they’re in need.

Like the training program, the design of Breaking Bread is an ever-evolving plan that changes in response to the people it serves. In 2018, AFC hosted focus groups through its Community Cooks program, and surveyed both new and regular customers about the changes they’d

like to see at the café. People said they wanted faster service and quicker dining options when they were on the run. So when Breaking Bread closed for renovations a couple of months later, it focused on increasing speed. The restaurant bought a cooler, created a hot bar express line to meet the needs of grab-and-go customers and redesigned the menu to reduce wait times for sit-down diners.

“People are hungry for something different, and we’re always willing to look at the system and make a change if it’s going to yield better results,” says Michelle. “The people who are most able to come up with innovative, successful solutions to the challenges they face are the people who face those challenges. If you don’t face a particular barrier on a daily basis, you’re less likely to come up with the right solutions.”



“People wanted a place where they could kick back, sit down and feel like community.”

**Latasha Powell**  
Appetite for Change



BREAKING BREAD CAFÉ



COMMUNITY COOKS



“If you don’t face a particular barrier on a daily basis, you’re less likely to come up with the right solutions.”

**Michelle Horovitz**  
Appetite for Change

By continually letting North Minneapolis residents lead the direction of AFC, the organization has allowed the community to set the pace of its work. AFC gives people the time and space they need to work through their own questions, concerns and ideas about food and healthy eating. Then, when the people say they’re ready to try something new, AFC is right there with them ready to jump.



HERB GARDEN AT AFC



AFC LITTLE FREE LIBRARY



KINDRED KITCHEN



AFC OFFICE



BREAKING BREAD CAFÉ



PRINCESS TITUS



PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING