Urban Institute
SHAPING FUTURE CITIES

Invitation to collaborate on digital infrastructure project: Self-organising Action for Food Equity (SAFE)

We need your help on an exciting digital project. Self-organising Action for Food Equity (SAFE) is a University of Sheffield project that aims to help our cities food systems work better for their citizens.

The idea is that we provide digital infrastructure that supports citizens and organisations in developing and supporting local initiatives that self-organise to share learning and skills and trade goods. We hope that by supporting self-organising social networks with digital infrastructure, we can increase participation in initiatives which enhance food quality, affordability and access in low income communities.

We are working across three cities – Sheffield, Manchester and Gothenburg. Numerous food based initiatives and networks exist in each city region. However, like most cities internationally, there is a lack of understanding on how best to organise, harmonise and capitalise on the energy of these separate projects. We need your digital expertise to help us tackle this challenge and come up with innovative, creative, open source solutions. Each of the three cities will pursue a different approach that suits the local circumstances.

We don't know what the solutions will look like, but the digital infrastructure could mean any, all, or none(!) of the following:

- A wiki - a website on which users collaboratively modify content and structure directly from the web browser
- An interactive map of local services (including production, processing, distribution, retail, catering, consumption, waste disposal and health promotion)
- Cloud services for on-demand capacity to link up the above services, including a comprehensive database of projects, skills, services, produce and requirements
- 'Internet of Things' sensors for sensing real-time conditions (e.g. organic waste receptacle full, harvest ready for collection, certain ingredients required, delivery/collection van passing nearby etc.)
- Linked smartphone apps

We want these digital services to be accessible to any member of society with access to a computer or smartphone, and we want the system to be open source so that anyone with an interest in the food system can get involved and help the system to evolve to suit the needs of the city.

If this sounds interesting to you we would love to hear from you, so please contact the project coordinator Nick Taylor Buck for an informal discussion on n.taylor-buck@sheffield.ac.uk or 07989 683218.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLES
Below are outlines of a selection of case study projects (not all food based) that have achieved the type of coordinated impact we are aiming for here:

- **Growing Middlesbrough** (https://www.menvcity.org.uk/gm/) brought together more than 1,000 citizens to find a new way in which the town of Middlesbrough could sow the seeds of a more sustainable economy. The result was that people could source food from places closer to home and could also effectively link the many people and

organisations who already participate in the social and environmental regeneration of the town. The culmination was an annual 'Town Meal' - a celebration of local food growing and eating (http://www.lovemiddlesbrough.com/whats-on/event/6784/middlesbrough-town-meal-2017).

- **Feeding Milan** (http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/sii/ctp/project-feeding-milan) was intended to design a more efficient and effective agri-food chain. The core idea was to develop services such as the 'Earth Market', a local 'bread chain', a veg box scheme, the creation of a local distribution hub in the city, and a vegetable garden in the campus of Politecnico di Milano. Before the project, few efforts had been made in terms of developing an urban food plan. The project sought to create connections between various actors: food producers, users, gastronomic scientists, experts, and then to turn discussions and conversations into practice.

- **Cleaning day Helsinki** (http://siivouspaiva.com/en/info/basics-of-cleaning-day) is a 'carnival-like' event that occurs twice a year where anyone is encouraged to sell, swap and donate things that people have at home and don't use anymore. Cleaning day has developed from an initial conversation between friends, via Facebook posts, to a working group of active people that created a platform (tools, information, resources, communication channels) that citizens use to turn Helsinki into a giant flea market for a day. The initiative continues and has spread to other cities. This is an example of a self-organising group that has built momentum for the event and successfully mobilised people. After the first Cleaning day took place, the City of Helsinki public works department approached the core organising group to discuss possibilities for cooperation. Amongst other things, this has led to change in the way city authorities deal with the provision of permits for selling second-hand goods in public spaces.