enlivening communities,
empowering entrepreneurs,
creating culinary destinations
Introduction

In 2010, The Food Trust created Night Market Philadelphia to bring communities together and celebrate the joy of food.

Today, Night Market isn’t just a busy night for food truck vendors—it’s an opportunity for local entrepreneurs to grow their businesses and build a lasting customer base. It isn’t just one evening of celebrating a neighborhood—it’s a catalyst for sustained community engagement. It isn’t just a popular event—it’s a creator of jobs, tax revenue and real economic growth.

Over the past five years, Night Market Philadelphia has become an institution by enlivening communities, empowering entrepreneurs and creating culinary destinations.

With support from the William Penn Foundation, The Food Trust began developing a new event for the city of Philadelphia in the summer of 2010. Modeled after similar markets in Asia, Night Market was planned to be a lively gathering with delicious food, locally crafted beverages, outdoor seating and live music. As part of a larger effort to create a local healthy food economy in the region, Night Market was built with four main goals in mind:

• Attract visitors from all over the city and surrounding areas
• Provide residents with a unique venue to enjoy freshly prepared foods
• Support local food entrepreneurs
• Showcase the quality and diversity of ethnic foods in Philadelphia

In the last five years, The Food Trust has hosted 20 Night Markets in 14 diverse neighborhoods, working with over 300 local food entrepreneurs and 100 local artists, performers and arts organizations. To date, Night Market has attracted upwards of 400,000 attendees, with an average of 20,000 people per event. With the continued support of our funders and sponsors, Night Market can expand its reach to continue supporting local food entrepreneurs, celebrate even more neighborhoods and further establish Philadelphia as a must-visit culinary and cultural destination for years to come.

“Here’s how it works: Take a commercial corridor, line it with food trucks, cut off through traffic, and wait for the masses to arrive.”

– JAKE BLUMGART, THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Night Market by the numbers

20
Night Markets

14
Neighborhoods

305
Local Food Entrepreneurs

100
Local Artists + Performers

400,000
Attendees
FROM EAST PASSYUNK TO CHINATOWN AND BEYOND

The first Night Market, held in the newly burgeoning East Passyunk neighborhood of South Philadelphia in October 2010, drew in 18 vendors, including local restaurants and some new gourmet food trucks. Staff predicted a few hundred attendees; by the end of the night, over 4,000 Night Market-goers had arrived hungry and ready to explore the neighborhood.

One year later, in partnership with the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation, The Food Trust hosted its fourth Night Market, taking over several blocks of 10th Street including Chinatown’s iconic Friendship Gate. With almost 40 vendors, over 20,000 attendees—a 500% increase from the inaugural event—and the No. 2 trending topic on Twitter (behind the Philadelphia Flyers’ opening game the same night), it became clear that Night Market was poised to fill a void in the city’s nightlife scene.

“Getting to host the first-ever Night Market on East Passyunk Avenue was definitely a big part of our growth as a food destination.”

– RENEE GILINGER, EAST PASSEYUNK AVENUE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT
I. Impact on Neighborhoods

Philadelphia is a city of neighborhoods. From Rittenhouse to Roxborough, Fishtown to Brewerytown, these communities have their own flavor, their own diversity and their own vibrancy that make them unique. Since its inception in 2010 on East Passyunk Avenue, one of Night Market Philadelphia’s main goals has been to celebrate the hard work that goes into making these neighborhoods great, and to encourage residents and visitors alike to explore areas of the city that may be new to them.

To that end, each Night Market event is co-hosted by a community partner—a civic association, neighborhood group or community center dedicated to community outreach and development. These partnerships serve multiple purposes: to highlight local businesses and take advantage of increased foot traffic; to navigate permit processes and create a seamless experience for the partner and for tens of thousands of attendees; to create buzz around up-and-coming neighborhoods through social media; and to enable our partners to leave Night Market with the tools they need to host their own unique events in the future.

“Night Market really helped put us on the map and got people interested in the neighborhood. The buzz continued to grow throughout the year on Lancaster Avenue, and Night Market was a big boost in that effort.”

- James Wright, People’s Emergency Center
PRIORITIZING THE HYPERLOCAL ECONOMY

In addition to introducing food vendors to different neighborhoods, Night Market also aims to highlight local businesses that are already there. Whether assisting with the permitting process required to conduct on-street vending or thinking creatively about techniques to optimize traffic to storefronts, Night Market staff prioritizes the hyper-local economy of neighborhoods throughout the planning process of each event.

By conducting outreach both on the ground and indirectly through our community partners, The Food Trust works collaboratively with neighborhood businesses, including restaurants, bars, boutiques and coffee shops, to help them make the most of the evening’s increased foot traffic. Of the local businesses surveyed, two-thirds reported increases in sales, visibility or patrons during Night Market.

At any given Night Market, as many as one-third of attendees are visiting the neighborhood for the very first time. When a commercial corridor is flooded with new visitors, business owners have a huge opportunity to increase their customer base. With this increase in foot traffic, community organizations can also showcase their corridors as viable places to live, visit or start a business.

2013 Attendee Survey: Have you been to this neighborhood prior to Night Market West Oak Lane?

I LIVE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

ONCE OR TWICE

NEVER

A NUMBER OF TIMES

YES, I VISIT OFTEN

YES, I VISIT OFTEN

SOCIAL MEDIA BUZZ

Over the past five years, Night Market has continually grown in presence and scope on various social media platforms. This has become a powerful tool to showcase and promote the event’s myriad communities. The Food Trust reaches 34,000 followers on Twitter, 12,000 on Facebook, 12,000 on Instagram and 19,000 via exclusive emails throughout the Night Market season. During each event, The Food Trust staff also promotes Night Market in real time, using the hashtag #NightMkt to unite fans and create a trending topic for the evening.

“I’ve spent almost my entire Philadelphia life in Chinatown, and never have I seen people having such a great time. This was exactly what I wanted it to be: great food, friends, laughs, dancing and general community togetherness. It’s nights like this that make me fall in love with Philadelphia over and over again.”

— NIGHT MARKET CHINATOWN ATTENDEE
The Night Market program has also worked to engage the social media community in new and creative ways:

1) #NightMkt
When Night Market began in October 2010, The Food Trust had been gaining followers on Twitter for a little over a year. A year after the #NightMkt hashtag was introduced at the first-ever Night Market Chinatown, #NightMkt was the No. 2 trending topic on Twitter (behind the Philadelphia Flyers’ opening game the same night). The Food Trust encourages community partners, businesses, vendors and attendees to use #NightMkt in their own Twitter and Instagram posts to unite fans, create buzz and track engagement around each event.

2) Empty Night Market
During 2015’s Night Market Callowhill, The Food Trust invited an elite group of Philadelphia Instagram influencers, including well-known photographers and journalists from Philadelphia magazine, Philly.com and Visit Philly, to a special sneak preview called #EmptyNightMkt. This behind-the-scenes event included a guided walking tour of the neighborhood led by community partner Callowhill Neighborhood Association, as well as food and drink samples from seven local food entrepreneurs.

3) Igers_Philly Meetup
For 2015’s Night Market Lancaster Ave., the Night Market team partnered with the hyperlocal promotional Instagram account @IGers_Philly, which boasts well over 300,000 posts, for a special Night Market meetup, in which thousands of Instagram users were invited to converge in one of our neighborhoods for an evening of local food exploration and photography.

#NightMkt
II. Impact on Businesses

To make Night Market Philadelphia a long-term success, The Food Trust works with small-scale food vending operations—many of which are family-owned and run by women and/or minorities—to increase their customer base and grow their businesses. In addition, the Night Market model can be replicated in other settings, including universities, hospitals, corporations and cultural institutions, bringing more exposure to more businesses over time.

By continuing to develop skills and expertise in assisting these businesses in every phase, The Food Trust can continue to contribute to a climate of inclusion in the local food scene that cultivates a vibrant and diverse array of offerings.

“...you can’t beat it. You would never have that number of people on the streets on a Thursday night. We have also gotten a lot of catering out of it from people who said, ‘We’ve tried you at Night Market.’ It leads to a lot of outside business.”

— Eliot Coven, Owner, Farm Truck

INCREASING VENDORS’ REACH
Through ongoing surveys and qualitative interviews with vendors, The Food Trust has learned that Night Market is an integral part of many mobile food business plans. These events increase vendors’ exposure and help build their brands, making it easier for new businesses to succeed in Philadelphia’s bustling mobile food scene and quickly gain a loyal following. Night Market provides access to a large number of new customers: From 2013 to 2015, the majority of Night Market vendors reported making $1,500–$4,500 during that four-hour weeknight event.

Night Market also connects those seeking specialty food or catering services with vendors who can meet their needs. Many vendors reported gaining new business from clients who tried their food at a Night Market and have since started catering arms of their businesses. Hiring food trucks for weddings and other special events has become increasingly popular and is a significant revenue generator.

“Since we moved to Philly, Night Market is one of the things that has increased our business and allowed us to expand and hire more employees.”

— SEAN PARKER, OWNER, OINK AND MOO BBQ
HELPING ENTREPRENEURS GROW THEIR BUSINESSES

It takes more than one event or series of events to create long-term economic impact; a strong foundation of business owners equipped with the knowledge, tools and resources needed to drive a sustainable movement is also essential. To that end, The Food Trust focuses its efforts not only on sustaining Night Market as an event but also empowering local food entrepreneurs as they build their own businesses. This U.S. Economic Development Association-funded work allows The Food Trust to utilize a more hands-on approach focused on offering business owners more specific, nuanced support—on topics ranging from food sourcing and funding to navigating complicated permit processes—than is typically provided within the context of Night Market. Three such innovative partnerships include:

1) Deb Dasani, owner of Samosa Deb food truck
Originally a corner store owner part of The Food Trust’s Healthy Corner Store Initiative, Deb Dasani started cooking her popular Indian food for store customers. The Food Trust invited Dasani to participate in Night Market as a tented vendor; as she quickly gained a following, she was able to turn that venture into a successful food truck business. In 2015, Dasani was publicly honored by the City of Philadelphia’s Office of Immigrant and Multicultural Affairs for her economic impact on the city’s economy as successful immigrant-, woman-owned business.

2) The University of Pennsylvania’s Healthy Food Truck Initiative
Another way The Food Trust supports vendors who prioritize fresh, healthy products is through its partnership with the University of Pennsylvania’s Healthy Food Truck Initiative (HFTI). The Food Trust has worked closely with HFTI to develop a Healthy Food Truck Certification Program, which identifies healthy vendors and helps them widen their customer base. The Food Trust worked with HFTI to craft criteria for the certification; depending on the level of compliance, vendors may be awarded a certification sticker for display on their truck or cart. Rather than acting as regulators, The Food Trust and HFTI aim to highlight healthy trucks in an effort to break down the stereotype that food trucks and other mobile vendors lack healthy options.

3) Kiva Zip Trusteeship
To help spur opportunities for smaller vendors looking to expand their businesses, The Food Trust has worked with Kiva Zip, a program providing 0% interest loans up to $5,000 for underserved small businesses and entrepreneurs. The Food Trust is a trustee of these loans for several local businesses, including Zsa’s Ice Cream, Surf and Turf Truck and Made in the Shade Lemonade, all regular Night Market vendors. In 2016, Kiva Zip increased its loan cap to $10,000.

In addition to vendor-specific work, The Food Trust has developed a Resource Toolkit for wider distribution. This suite of materials includes information for those seeking to open or expand a mobile food operation, such as a step-by-step guide to special event permitting and interfacing with pertinent city agencies; information on setting up temporary handwashing stations; best practices for special events vending; and a comprehensive guide to external resources and information. The Food Trust also acts as a resource hub for food entrepreneurs by connecting them with training opportunities and resources from other local, business development-focused organizations like The Enterprise Center, Entrepreneur Works and The Welcoming Center.
REPLICATING THE NIGHT MARKET MODEL

As Night Market Philadelphia has grown in popularity, other organizations have shown interest in creating similar events. With expertise in planning food-focused special events, The Food Trust began providing planning support on a consulting basis with Night Market Hybrids in 2012, drawing from a database of hundreds of regional vendors to carefully select a slate of vendors to meet the needs and tastes of any community, company or organization. In addition to curating events, The Food Trust maintains communications with all vendors from the original point of booking through the end of the project. Staff members offer assistance in maneuvering the often complicated permitting process, as well as logistical planning (including site mapping) and day-of, on-site support.

To date, The Food Trust has worked with a wide range of consulting clients, which has allowed the Night Market program to connect local food entrepreneurs to additional opportunities and expose their businesses to thousands of new customers.

“The food truck scene is not just a scene—it’s a culture. And Night Market had everything to do with that, because they set the standard. They were the originator.”

— ROB MITCHELL, OWNER, THE COW AND THE CURD; PRESIDENT, PHILADELPHIA MOBILE FOOD ASSOCIATION

Night Market Hybrid Events

CAMPBELL SOUP COMPANY
GREEN MOUNTAIN ENERGY
INLIQUID’S ART FOR THE CASH POOR
CAMPUS PHILLY, “COLLEGE FEST”
LANKENAU MEDICAL CENTER
PHILADELPHIA FILM SOCIETY
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY
CITY AVENUE DISTRICT, “THE FOOD SPOT”
HOLY FAMILY UNIVERSITY
LINCOLN FINANCIAL FIELD

“The food truck scene is not just a scene—it’s a culture. And Night Market had everything to do with that, because they set the standard. They were the originator.”

— ROB MITCHELL, OWNER, THE COW AND THE CURD; PRESIDENT, PHILADELPHIA MOBILE FOOD ASSOCIATION
III. Impact on Philadelphia and Beyond

In addition to supporting individual businesses and community partners, Night Market supports the city on a broader level. Since 2010, Night Market has had a positive economic impact on Philadelphia and its surrounding areas by increasing consumer spending, supporting jobs and generating tax revenue; these events have added cultural value, as well, through artistic partnerships that create new opportunities for Philadelphia’s creative class. In addition, The Food Trust has developed relationships with key officials and agencies, not only to align Night Markets with the city's operations and goals, but also to open the door for new municipal partnerships as Night Market evolves.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Each year, Night Market Philadelphia generates significant economic impact in the city of Philadelphia due to the direct spending of Night Market attendees. But these events also have a longer-term effect by helping support jobs. The spillover effects of the economic activity within the city extend past Philadelphia’s borders and throughout the commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
Night Market’s economic impact stretches beyond the night of the big event. Since 2010, an estimated $8.8 million of direct spending has occurred at all Night Market events, generating an economic impact of $13.7 million in the city of Philadelphia and $15.3 million for the commonwealth as a whole. In addition, The Food Trust’s surveys show that Night Markets create economic impact by increasing food trucks’ exposure; attracting new visitors to neighborhoods; and creating buzz for local commercial corridors. They have become part of Philadelphia’s dynamic food scene, attracting national attention while supporting small food businesses and local commercial corridors.

The spending at Night Markets in Philadelphia also generates tax revenues for the city and the commonwealth. The majority of tax revenues for the city comes from Philadelphia’s wage and earnings taxes, paid by the employees of the food trucks and locally supported businesses. The spending also generates sales and business taxes for the city and the commonwealth. Between 2010 and 2015, Night Markets have generated an estimated $223,000 in tax revenues for the city and $289,000 for the commonwealth.
ARTS PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS

Night Market has built a reputation not only as a destination for great local food, but also as a venue to showcase some of Philadelphia’s most exciting up-and-coming cultural talent. Each Night Market features a full stage, built and managed by industry professionals, with live music continuing throughout the event. Attendees can also find DJ tents, street performers and other art installations as they explore the space.

While food is always the star of Night Market, arts programming is a key piece of The Food Trust’s approach to place-making and enlivening city spaces.

Working with local partners and Philadelphia artists to curate entertainment gives each event its own unique flavor:

1) Philadelphia Mausoleum of Contemporary Art
An arts-focused organization local to the Callowhill neighborhood, the Philadelphia Mausoleum of Contemporary Art (PhilaMOCA) booked a slate of musical acts for Night Market Callowhill in June 2015—all of which were based in the immediate area.

2) Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens
For Night Market South Street in 2013, The Food Trust partnered with Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens to integrate its annual ART/GAGE festival into the evening’s lineup, including interactive arts installations such as live clay sculpting, body painting, two stages for live music and facility tours.

3) Bujee Magoo
Bujee Magoo is an interdisciplinary artist and performer specializing in interactive theater, circus arts and custom costumes. This artist, who specializes in stilt juggling, has performed at many Night Markets as well as The Food Trust’s farmers’ markets and other special events.

“At Night Market Lancaster Ave., we found a way to really allow artists to operate within that space. We set out to get as many artists out there as possible, whether it be visual artists, musicians or place-making artists. We had 16 different artists participate in 2014, and 12 of them were ‘super-local,’ directly within those five neighborhoods we work in.”
—James Wright, People’s Emergency Center
“I think Night Market has created a whole new industry, to be honest. Night Market has brought mobile food vending into the modern age, to tell people that just because your food’s coming out of a window on a truck doesn’t mean it can’t be the same or higher quality than if it came from a high-end restaurant.”

– Eliot Coven, Owner, Farm Truck

“East Passyunk Avenue has evolved so much over the years, from a strictly Italian-American corridor to one of the most diverse and dynamic dining destinations in Philadelphia. Genuine relationships between old-timers and newcomers have really helped take the area in a new direction — the type of collaboration that’s at the heart of an event like Night Market.”

– Drew Lazor, Philadelphia Food Writer

“Night Market has enlivened Philadelphia’s neighborhoods and helped small-business owners gain more exposure, [bringing] thousands of patrons to diverse neighborhoods across the city, [allowing] food entrepreneurs to showcase their products and [attracting] new customers to bring in a jolt of revenue. The effect of this spending ripples throughout the region and stimulates economic growth and job creation.”

– U.S. Senator Bob Casey
COLLABORATING WITH CITY AGENCIES

The goals of Night Market—economic development, support of small businesses and neighborhood revitalization—are closely aligned with the goals of Philadelphia’s Commerce Department, which has created a strong synergy between The Food Trust and the city. The Commerce Department’s focus on strong commercial corridors, specifically, creates an overlap in strategies with Night Market, and over the years Commerce has played a key role in supporting Night Market community partners by facilitating the transfer of city funds to Community Development Corporations (CDCs), Neighborhood Associations and others to help them cover the cost of their contributions to the event. These efforts have been integral to Night Market’s expansion to new and exciting neighborhoods around the city.

Given the scope of Night Market, it is critical to maintain strong partnerships with a litany of municipal agencies outside of the Commerce Department, as well. Coordinating street closures, traffic, public safety (police and fire), licensing and health inspections requires close communication and collaboration with the pertinent agencies. Between Night Market seasons, The Food Trust collaborates with the Managing Director’s Office and Traffic Department to discuss the feasibility and logistics of prospective Night Market locations. In the run-up to each event, Night Market staff work closely with the Health Department and the Department of Licenses & Inspections to ensure that all vendors have the requisite permits for participation. These strong partnerships allow Night Market to be efficiently run and effectively managed.

“The Knight Foundation proudly supports the Night Market program because it helps to showcase Philadelphia’s vibrant neighborhoods and culture. It also deepens neighborhood connections and harnesses the creative power of the community to grow the local economy and come together.”

– PATRICK J. MORGAN, PROGRAM DIRECTOR, PHILADELPHIA, JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT FOUNDATION
Conclusion

Over the past five years, The Food Trust’s Night Market has created a lasting impact on the city of Philadelphia. Through Night Market, community organizations are empowered to highlight their neighborhoods’ best assets for locals and tourists; new businesses and food entrepreneurs are supported to grow and provide local flavor; and Philadelphia is on the national radar as one of the premier culinary and cultural destinations for visitors to explore.

Looking forward, with support from our funders and sponsors, Night Market Philadelphia can continue to serve as a conduit to community development by expanding its reach to support even more local food entrepreneurs, celebrate diverse neighborhoods and serve as a model for organizations across the country.

“The more high-tech we get, the more visitors and residents want high-touch ways to socialize and interact. Night Market Philadelphia answers that call by providing a gathering place for people who come together in celebration of food, community and Philly.”

– MERYL LEVITZ, PRESIDENT AND CEO, VISIT PHILADELPHIA®

Night Market in the News

“THE BEST WAY TO EXPERIENCE PHILADELPHIA’S STILL-SURGING STREET FOOD SCENE”
– THE NEW YORK TIMES

“There’s no denying it: Night Markets Rule”
– UWISHUNU.COM

“Best City Event of 2014”
– PHILADELPHIA MAGAZINE

“Top 5 Nighttime Markets in the Nation in 2012”
– DETAILS MAGAZINE

“Best Festival or Gathering of 2012”
– PHILEBRITY
THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS:
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Adams Reserve
Bank of America
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Electrical Wizardry
Enterprise Car Share
Green Mountain Energy
MetroPCS
Nu Millennium Sound
Penn Beer Distributors
Penn Medicine
Philadelphia Flyers
State Farm
Visit Philly
Waste Management
Yards Brewing Company

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The Food Trust
ENSURING THAT EVERYONE HAS ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, NUTRITIOUS FOOD

Since 1992, The Food Trust has been working to ensure that everyone has access to affordable, nutritious food and information to make healthy decisions.

The Food Trust’s comprehensive approach includes improving food environments and teaching nutrition education in schools; working with corner store owners to increase healthy offerings and helping customers make healthier choices; managing farmers’ markets in communities that lack access to affordable produce; and encouraging grocery store development in underserved communities.

Learn more about The Food Trust: thefoodtrust.org
Learn more about Night Market Philadelphia: nightmarketphilly.org