A Collective Impact Approach to Food Systems Change

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What is Farm to Plate?

A coordinated collaboration among organizations to achieve the 25 goals of Vermont’s Farm to Plate Strategic Plan and to enhance the participating organizations’ ability to meet their goals.

The three overarching outcomes of the F2P Strategic Plan, as authorized by the Vermont Legislature, are to:

• increase economic development in VT’s food system
• create jobs in the food system economy
• improve access to healthy foods for all Vermonters
A Collective Impact Initiative

1. Common Agenda: Farm to Plate Strategic Plan
2. Mutually Reinforcing Activities: Farm to Plate Network
3. Continuous Communication: Network, Website
4. Backbone Support Organization: VSJF
5. Shared Measurement System: Results-Based Accountability
6. Funding: Broad support
Common Agenda Essentials

• Systems level change initiative
• The PROCESS by which the common agenda is built is most important; good design
• Relationship & trust building – it takes time
• Shared story / shared values developed
• Vision / mission bigger than any 1 organization
• Will require diverse network to accomplish
• Framework for data and analysis; good design and clear, accessible writing
Key Insight:
Supporting the development and evolution of a diverse Network of organizations is a critical component for the Mutually Reinforcing Activities condition.
Network Building Takes Time

Results
- Completion of the task
- Achievement of the goal

Dimensions of Success

Process
- How the work gets done
- How the work is designed and managed
- How the work is monitored and evaluated

Relationship
- How people interact
- How people relate to the team, organization or network
- How people feel about their involvement and contribution

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A “network mindset” opens up new ways of doing work, innovating, and collaborating

- Centralized
- Controlled, “silobed” flows of information
- Structured ways of working/making decisions

- Decentralized
- Open, interconnecting flows of information
- Adaptable, self-organizing to get work done
BUILDING TRUST THROUGHOUT THE FOOD SYSTEM

- Plan
- Implement
- Monitor
- Learn + Adjust

- Sharing responsibility
- Sharing information
- Establishing relationships
- Promoting learning

BREAKING DOWN SILOS

- Across value chains
- Across organizational sectors
- Across issues/policy domains
Governance Structure: Not too tight / Not too loose

- F2P Steering Committee composed of:
  - Secretaries of Agriculture and Commerce (or designees)
  - Rep. from VT Food Funders Network
  - Rep. from Sustainable Ag Council (has statute)
  - 5 WG chairs
  - Co-chair of Food Access CCT
- VSJF/F2P Network Coordinator facilitates SC meetings
- Considering whether to expand to include other CCT chairs
- Has an updated “job description”
Support Others’ Leadership

- Working Group & CCT chairs are elected annually by their group members; receive stipend
- Task Force chairs naturally emerge; if need exists then stipend provided
- Stipends available for farmers, small producers, food chain works, or other private sector folks who otherwise would be challenged to attend
Network Types: Distinct Attributes

Connectivity
Connects people to allow easy flow of and access to information and transactions

Alignment/Peer Learning
Aligns and connects people with shared identity with opportunities to learn and advance their work

Production Network
Fosters joint action for specific outcomes
2014: Information Sharing
2014: Collaboration/Coordination
Mutually Reinforcing Activities Essentials

- Take a network approach; get training in network theory & practice
- Use PIMLA (plan, implement, monitor, learn/adjust) framework at all levels
- Don’t get attached to the network structure – it WILL change over time
- Build in time for reflection / adjustment / emergence + annual renewal and FUN!
- Survey members every 2-3 years to ensure relevance (network as whole + members)
Continuous Communication

www.vtfarmtoplate.com

Farm to Plate is Vermont’s food system plan being implemented statewide to increase economic development and jobs in the farm and food sector and improve access to healthy local food for all Vermonters.
Continuous Communication Essentials

- In service to relationship building and connectivity
- Transparency builds trust
- Supports Network as a whole + individual Network members
- Accessible, frequent, timely information
- In many forms and for different purposes
Data from multiple sources is used to estimate employment throughout Vermont’s food system. We estimate that employment increased approximately 9.9% (5,589) from 56,611 in 2002 to 62,220 in 2013. Restaurants and bars account for the largest percentage of jobs in Vermont’s food system.

Legend:
- Food Service and Drinking Places
- Food and Beverage Stores
- Manufacturing
- Distribution and Storage
- Farm Operators
- Hired Farm Workers
- Farm Inputs

Metrics Essentials

• Have an agreed upon metrics framework (e.g., RBA)
• Build process to identify and collect the right data (from trusted sources, from members)
• Build process to track progress over time
• Linked with Continuous Communications
VSJF: Network Coordinator
Backbone Organization Services

• Guide vision and strategy for the Network as a whole
• Convening – neutral space to imagine, vet, act, reflect
• Support aligned activities -- facilitate dialogue across the Network, “connect the dots”, “weave the web”
• Mobilize funding (projects + network support needs)
VSJF: Network Coordinator

Backbone Organization Services

• Provide professional development and leadership training opportunities for Network leaders
• Manage core Network communication needs
• Build public engagement through public/community outreach
• Track metrics; report on progress
Backbone Organization Essentials

• Serve a particular role / function - can be “fired”
• In service & accountability to the whole
• Not a stand alone 501c3
• Network weavers / dot connectors
• Able to galvanize new funding – expand the pie; don’t compete with project funding
• Curious about Networks, system level change, emergence, shared leadership
A 6th Condition: Funding

• Funding PARTNERS – from the beginning
• On Steering Committee; involved in projects
• Multi-year commitments to backbone org. + Network projects
• F2P Network Fund (mini-grants; 90 day projects)
• Invested in real systems change
Leading in Large Systems – approaches

Complex
Collaboration

Complicated
Hierarchy

Chaotic
Autocracy

Simple
Hierarchy

Uncertainty

Certainty

From Dave Snowden’s Cynefin Framework