PLANNING SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY BASED FOOD PROJECTS

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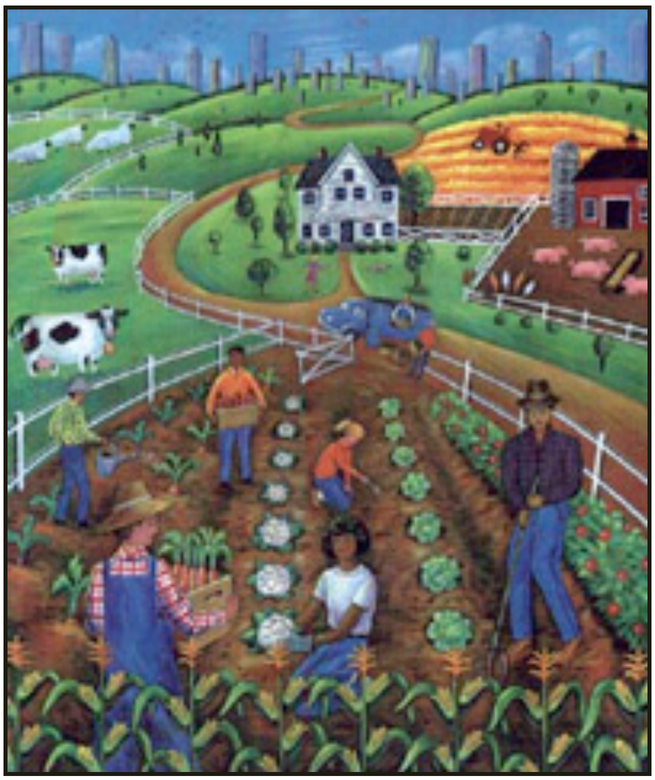

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview and Purposes for this Guide:

This guide focuses primarily on Community Food Projects that are funded by USDA (see http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/communityfoodprojects.cfm) but is applicable to most community-based food projects (CBFPs). Our focus in this guide is on more complex projects that build community food security and local food systems in a comprehensive fashion. For example, the primary goals of Community Food Projects (CFPs) are to:

- Meet the food needs of low-income individuals
- Increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for the food needs of the communities
- Promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm, and nutrition issues
- Meet specific state, local or neighborhood food and agricultural needs including needs relating to
    - Infrastructure improvement and development
    - Planning for long-term solutions
    - The creation of innovative marketing activities that mutually benefit agricultural producers and low-income consumers.

In response to CFP and other funding opportunities, hundreds of interesting projects are conceived every year, although few (typically 10–15%) get funded through any particular government or foundation opportunity. Writing a good proposal is very important, but having a great project is what reviewers are ultimately looking for, and what this guide is about.

Community-based food projects (as in CFP) are complex endeavors. The Request for Applications (RFA) states that:
"preference will be given to CFPs designed to... encourage long-term planning activities, and multi-system, interagency approaches with collaborations from multiple stakeholders that build the long-term capacity of communities to address the food and agricultural problems of the communities." (See http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/communityfoodprojects.cfm for the full RFA)

Building collaboration, entrepreneurship, comprehensive approaches, and sustainability into a project is not an easy or straightforward process, particularly for smaller organizations and start-up projects. But these are the characteristics of the most effective programs. For this reason, **planning** is especially important. Fashioning a project once an RFA is issued does not leave time to work all of this out. In particular:

- Figuring out how all this fits with your organization's mission, strategic plans, and current activities is often complex.
- Collaboration is required in CFP and is not something applicants can easily pull together in just a few weeks. Systematic planning is vital to foster complex relationship-building efforts among diverse sectors of the community.
- Making connections and deciding on complex programs takes time. For smaller organizations and emerging networks, planning steps often get somewhat short-changed. Like evaluation, the day-to-day work always seems to overwhelm the time and

opportunities really needed to do comprehensive planning. Many community groups and networks wait until the issuance of the RFA to plan a significant share of the initiative, resulting in proposals that do not reflect the coordination and input sought by reviewers.

Effective project planning is integral to developing a successful CBFP initiative. In fact, the CFP RFA itself cites problem proposals as those *"with little evidence of strategic planning and participation by stakeholders in the proposed project design."* Many applicants have limited experience and skills to effectively gauge what can be accomplished along these parameters, and to determine what resources are required to carry this out. Many groups are used to organizing simpler projects and they struggle with how to develop a cohesive proposal that integrates multiple food system components. Understanding the needed resources – personnel, funding, and time – to carry out sufficient strategic planning in advance is a critical step. Often the realities of day-to-day operations make such planning seem a "luxury," especially when it involves multiple organizations and constituency-based input.

Purposes and Uses of this Manual:

This guide is designed to help you and partners develop a well-planned initiative – not just to help get it funded, but as importantly to be sure it succeeds. ~~This means~~ Insert something more descriptive, e.g.: We will go over the following key steps of :

- Developing coherent and really achievable initiatives
- Linking CBFPs to your underlying mission, values, and overall plans and capacities
- Building in grass-roots participation, especially from the constituencies you intend to serve
- Building a shared vision with partners, with an inclusive, participatory process
- Linking components of a multi-faceted project to the specific capacities and priorities of each partner
- Establishing realistic goals and outcomes and not promising too much with your initiative
- Defining clear workplans and timelines

SECTION 2: THE PLANNING PROCESS

When to Get Started with Planning:

Far too many applicants wait until the issuance of a CFP proposal to get started on their project planning. But with a project that asks so much of its applicants around collaboration, matching funds, and community based input, fast-track planning makes genuinely effective programs difficult to pull together. The intent for these grants is to engender viable community-based initiatives as part of building local food systems, and doing so means knowing your constituents and having them engaged in the process of transforming food systems to address their needs and aspirations. CFP grants provide an avenue to facilitate this process if applicants are willing to approach it from this perspective. Bottom line – it takes time to make this happen. There are at least two ways to approach planning for CFP:

(1) ***The project is (part of) a new endeavor*****:** Often this is the case with smaller, emerging groups, with limited resources and no? little? prior planning histories. Such organizations have limited internal capacity (including personnel with diverse skills), and are challenged to develop good partnerships if not already present.
(2) ***The proposed project builds onto an existing program*****:** Some of the planning and community relationships might already be in place, or it may represent a new direction for a larger organization (e.g., a culinary training program for homeless shelter residents organized by a food bank, or a beginning farmer training program adding a multi-farmer CSA). The organization or network may be working off a well-developed strategic plan that encourages this type of program.

Planning Calendar or Timetable:

Ideally, a project reflects a well-executed planning process. Applicants incorporate community input and perhaps have engaged in a systematic assessment of conditions and opportunities that makes the case for why a particular project is needed and worthwhile (e.g., a Community Food Assessment). It could be building on work carried out over a number of years. But if not, the planning effort can easily take a year or more. Establishing project planning and an implementation timetable can help you get organized, by helping with:

- Understanding conditions in the target communities
- Establishing the need for and interest in the initiative – i.e. why is this project a good idea, and not just a fundable strategy?
- Identifying collaborators and figuring out their roles in the initiative
- Having stakeholders participate in the planning process
- Knowing where activities will take place and who will participate
- Finding funds, including matching funds or in kind contributions, where it is required by a funder such as CFP, or where the proposed funding does not account for all the needed resources for the overall initiative

Participatory Planning:

Single non-profit organizations typically head up a community food initiative (although some networks or coalitions also undertake specific projects, with a single member organization acting as the sponsor or conduit for funding purposes). They run food banks, CSAs, community farms, farmers markets, school programs, gardens, and other worthwhile local farm and food activities, and look to CFP as an avenue for funding some expanded or new element of this work. But partners play important, sometimes critical roles, particularly in complex projects with many components, and sponsors with limited staff and experience. Organizations seeking to take a ‘community food systems’ approach to their endeavors need to work with many other players in order to succeed.

Farm-to-school, new farmer training, and food policy councils are examples of initiatives that incorporate many aspects of community-based food systems – food production, processing, marketing, wholesaling, retailing, consumer education and participant training. By their design, they engage other community representatives more fully than does a more succinct endeavor, such as a farmers market. These projects need to reflect a community focus rather than just an organizational one. Here, the community to be served should be involved in developing the project, and not just serving as a target for the services to be provided by an organization. Delivering a set of worthwhile services to a community is what many non-profits do well, but engaging the community in the process is more challenging. One facet of this process is represented by genuine coordination and/or collaboration with other actual or potential stakeholders – typically, other non-profits as well as businesses, public entities, and institutions.

The "Plan to Plan":

Given all the aspects a community food project must consider, having a "plan to plan" helps make the project planning happen effectively and relatively efficiently. Answering the following questions will help the organizing group develop a plan to plan:

Who?: These are the initial leaders who think that a CFP is worth doing. These may be people from one or more organizations and community groups. Other groups may join in the leadership core group over the course of the planning process – these groups will be the collaborators in designing and carrying out the CFP.

With whom?: Who should be involved and engaged in doing the community-based plan? Where and who is the community that will be engaged in this project – what is its geographic and social/economic scope?

Why?: What is the problem or potential opportunity to be addressed? What is the situation, context, and need for the potential CFP? Has any type of community food assessment been done, or has the need for this CFP been established in other ways—or does this step still need to be done?

What for?: Is this CFP part of a larger effort or ongoing project? Or a specific project focused on CFP funding? Are there already some specific goals or a vision established, or will they be developed through the planning process?

How?: What is the initial thinking about how to implement this? What assets, skills, and other resources can be brought to the project?

When?: What is the timeframe for the planning process – when does the plan need to be completed? Does it have phases or sections that need to be done in sequence? If so, what are the dates for each phase?

How will you undertake the planning process?: A step-by-step timeline of the planning activities is recommended. Each step may have a process for involving the community and for building a strong collaboration between the partnering groups and organizations.

Outline of Completed CFP Plans:

An inclusive project plan is recommended as an outcome of the "planning to plan" process. It may contain the following components:

a. Describe the Community and its Situation:
   - The context of the project and the community it would serve
   - A vision for the benefits of successfully completing this plan
   - Who is involved in developing this plan and why they decided to work together

b. Assess Needs and Opportunities:
   - Describe the need or rationale for the project
   - Outline the community-based process used to define these needs such as a community food assessment or other 'needs and assets' type of assessment
   - Identify situations or opportunities that make specific strategies worth considering at this juncture

c. The Project Plan:
   - Define the cooperating organizations and agencies, and how they will work together on this project, the cooperative structure, roles played by different groups
   - List project Goals and Outcomes – how they meet the community's needs.

d. Project Implementation:
   - Identify milestones and workplans that describe what will be accomplished, by when, and workplans for "who will do what by when"
   - Evaluation plan – determine how the group will know if its being successful – based on measurable results and outcomes
   - Prepare an initial budget that clearly demonstrates the costs of the activities

Accomplishing this in advance is not an empty exercise. It will identify strengths and gaps, and clarify opportunities. Project planning prepares the team to pull together a formal funding application more expeditiously, since it will contain many elements of the proposal itself.

SECTION 3: GETTING STARTED

Leading off:

If CBFPs are part of a broader vision of community food security, how are the connections made? The selection of a specific strategy and resulting project selected will reflect where the players are coming from:

→ **Who is initiating the project?** Most projects come from groups already involved in community food and farm work. They have missions and structure that define who they are and what they do. They have a history of programs and accomplishments. They have priorities and may have multi-year strategic plans. So projects ought not to arise out of a vacuum if there are established interests and agendas, and applicants are looking for resources to support these. Often there is an existing program or project and the sponsors are looking to expand it or enhance it. In these circumstances, there is already a framework from which planning new initiatives emerges. A project may be initiated by one organization, or it may be a joint initiative of several partners. The leadership can drive the planning process by 'setting the table' of players to be involved in developing the idea.

→ **Who is at the table?** When community representatives come together to discuss ideas and opportunities they bring their individual perspectives, usually reflecting the work they do or the groups they represent. Farmers will look to agricultural opportunities, dieticians will think about community nutrition programs, food bank representatives will think about anti-hunger issues, schools will think about student needs, and community organizers will push for advocacy strategies. While this makes intuitive sense, this is often not apparent in the process of pulling community representatives together to address food security. The people at the table will play a critical role in shaping the overall development or change agenda, and the initiatives that flow from that process will typically reflect the specific interests of those who are doing the planning. They will be thinking: "What's in it for me, for my organization?"

Given these contexts, we encourage project organizers to consider where or how they want the project planning to flow process-wise and what the resulting visioning will produce:

- **If you desire a more open-ended process**, then bring together diverse representatives. For example, if the visioning is broad (e.g., "how do we strengthen the community food system in Jonesville?") then having a wide range of stakeholder input is important to understand the many issues and options available.

- **If the focus is narrow,** (e.g., "How can we build a value-added opportunity to our farming program?") then it makes much more sense to bring in players who have relevant expertise in that arena.

- Many projects fail to bring constituents or intended beneficiaries into the planning process. In so doing, they not only lose this valuable input, but also risk failure because the project doesn't truly answer a need or it does so in a way that does not attract the target participants. Just because you build it does not mean "they will come."

Based on these considerations, the project organizers need to think through who should be core partners in the planning process and who will be involved in less central roles and less intensive ways. Not everyone affected needs to be intimately involved in every step of planning, but important voices should be heard along the way in an appreciative manner.

Defining your Community:

In order to define what kind of planning process your group will use, you will need to determine the parameters of the community you are working with. Components include:

- What are the geographic boundaries?
- Who are the target constituents – intended beneficiaries?
- Who are the voices of these communities, these residents?

- What are the key organizations, agencies, businesses, and programs that may be affected, or become involved?
- What are some essential trends and conditions that help define the current situation that is being addressed and the reasons for selecting this community?

Creating Common Vision and Values for your Project:

Community Food Projects RFA: *"Most relevant is an explanation of why the applicant and its partners selected the activities proposed in the application."*

In general, food insecurity is similar in low-income communities across the country. There is a lack of high-quality food, residents have limited incomes, little healthy food is produced in the community itself, and there are few connections to local farms. Fast food and 'cheap food' are pervasive. Community food projects are designed to address these fundamental factors and to encourage local food connections as part of their response.

But each community will respond differently. Some will propose market gardens; others focus on farm-to-school programs, value-added businesses, or food policy councils. There are many pathways to promoting greater community food security, but what makes these valid? Part of the answer lies in the vision that sponsors and organizers bring to it:

- Each project ideally reflects an underlying visioning plan of what community food security can look like, and how a particular approach is going to help get it there.

- Visioning should also be grounded in the practical realities of what can be accomplished with the capacities of those involved. Visioning is often about changing the world, but typically one step at a time.

- This vision ought to reflect an understanding of community conditions, needs, and opportunities. Visioning should be paired with other planning steps, such as a community food assessment process.

- Visioning is best when it reflects a process that engages key stakeholders who understand the community and what are appropriate community food strategies that follow.

Visioning: How and How Much?

Visioning for a specific project is typically part of a broader strategic planning process. The extent of visioning is related to the stage of development and to how much direction is sought at the time. Developing a vision for one's community food system can take months and evolve over many years as conditions change.

Visioning strategies can be elaborate or simple. The elaborate approach involves bringing many people together, sometimes through a process that has several stages of discussion and engagement before a coherent product emerges. Community food assessments are often frameworks that incorporate visioning with research, multiple stakeholder meetings, and other strategic planning steps that can last a year or more. Sometimes visioning is built into a weekend retreat such as a 'future search' that strives to resolve a new direction over a short but intensive period. Some worthwhile visioning can be completed in just a few meetings within a small group of representatives – staff, board, clients, and so on – when the focus is fairly clear from the onset.

From a project perspective, the visioning process sets the framework for establishing goals and long-term desired outcomes. It generally does not happen alone, but as part of broader strategic planning. The visioning effort should be a key part of the overall scope of the planning that is needed to pull a project together. But it also should take place at a very early stage; the vision is what sets into motion the overall direction of the process that results in a well thought out project.

Values, Mission, and Vision:

Organizational Values Statement: Organizational values are the core beliefs that members of your organization or team share in common. Values provide the foundation from which the organization's mission, vision, internal culture, and programs are built. Values should:

- Connect people in the organization
- Be easily understood
- Be positive
- Be consistent with the group's vision, mission and strategies or actions

Vision Statement: The vision is a broad and inspired picture of the future if your organization is truly successful in its work. An organization's vision statement helps to clarify an organization's direction and destination. A well-written vision statement can motivate and inspire, capturing peoples' minds, hearts and spirits. A vision should:

- Move people toward the future
- Be easily understood
- Be positive
- Be inspiring and motivating
- Be consistent with your organizational values

Mission statement: The organization's mission statement is a brief, engaging, description of the organization that includes:

- Intent or reason for being.
- Territory or scope.
- Who it engages or serves.
- What it does.

The mission is often used to describe and market the organization to the public. It's the first point of connection to a person outside the group. The mission ought to convey action and excitement and provide a 'hook' for an outsider to want to continue his/her interest in the group.

Should a Project Have a Vision?

Yes! Given that the participating players need to coalesce around a common idea, relying on the host organization's existing vision and/or mission is insufficient. A project team will want to reflect these underlying visioning frameworks from each participating organization, while forging something specific to the purposes of the proposed undertaking. Such a vision could integrate some of the proposed impacts from the work to be funded – i.e. what the planning members hope will result from this down the road and how it fits into a bigger vision of food system change.

Following is an example of vision, mission, and values from The Food Project in Massachusetts (see http://thefoodproject.org/our-mission):

Mission and Vision of The Food Project

Creating personal and social change through sustainable agriculture

Our Mission

The Food Project's mission is to create a thoughtful and productive community of youth and adults from diverse backgrounds who work together to build a sustainable food system. Our community produces healthy food for residents of the city and suburbs, provides youth leadership opportunities, and inspires and supports others to create change in their own communities.

Our Vision

We envision a world where youth are active leaders, diverse communities feel connected to the land and each other, and everyone has access to fresh, local, healthy, affordable food.

Our Values

We believe:

- *youth and adult partnerships are at the heart of our best work;*
- *we are stewards of our land, culture and community – and, in turn, they sustain us;*
- *our strength grows from diverse experiences, backgrounds, cultures and points of view;*
- *true learning is reciprocal and requires transparency, humility and bold action;*
- *in hard work that balances rigor, reflection and fun;*
- *all people have a right to healthy, affordable food that nourishes our lives and the planet we share.*

The integration on priorities across multiple dimensions of community food security and local food systems is inspiring. An excellent approach to this is called Whole Measures, developed by The Community Food Security Coalition and the Center for Popular Research, Education, and Policy. Whole Measures Community Food Systems (CFS) is a values-based, community-oriented tool for evaluation, planning, and dialogue geared toward organizational and community change. Priority areas include (1) justice and fairness; (2) strong communities; (3) vibrant farms;

(4) healthy people; (5) sustainable ecosystems, and (6) thriving local economies. For more resources see http://www.foodsecurity.org/evaluation.html

SECTION 4: ASSESSING NEEDS AND OPPORTUNTIES

In general, we can expect that every low-income community has multiple food security issues that are not being adequately addressed, or at least in ways that community food advocates may prefer – e.g., using local food solutions. Every year, 300 or so communities confront similar issues and each one chooses a particular set of strategies to respond and create changes to the food system. How does your project decide what to take on? On the surface, all may sound like good ideas. But on what are these choices based? What makes some more compelling than others? What suggests one strategy will work better than another? Community food assessments are one approach to grounding your approaches in the geographies and constituencies to be targeted.

Fitting a community assessment into some phase of project planning is an increasingly integral aspect of Community Food Projects. The Community Food Projects Request for Applications (RFA) states:

"…applications should describe local capabilities, such as those identified in a community food assessment, and involvement of low-income communities in the context of project activities and operations."

"Ensure that low-income residents are actively involved in planning project goals, objectives, and outcomes. In particular, describe how the communities being served – particularly the targeted residents and organizations – were involved in planning the project and will be engaged in its implementation. Reference planning activities, assessments, meetings, or other activities that demonstrate community input into key decision-making."

Community Food Assessment (CFA):

One of the best tools to integrate CFP priorities into project planning is a community food assessment (CFA). A CFA is defined here as: "a collaborative and participatory process that systematically examines a broad range of community food issues and assets, so as to inform change actions to make the community more food secure" (from What's Cooking in your Food System – see http://foodsecurity.org/pub/whats_cooking.pdf. CFAs can integrate research, planning, community organizing, and action to establish project needs, identify capacities, set priorities, and mobilize resources to address them.

Community food assessments can vary greatly in scope and purpose. Some emphasize research, information-gathering and broad inquiry as important elements. Some are broad and open-ended; others focus on just one or two priority areas, which is more practical for smaller organizations and limited budgets. These more concise versions can be a vital part of project planning because they can address major several CFP priorities in sync:

- Getting community-based input to the proposed idea / project
- Fostering collaboration in developing the project
- Leveraging resources critical to the matching requirement
- Helping to clarify priorities, including broad objectives and activities

- Planning joint efforts in the context of longer-term planning for project sustainability
- Building linkages between different food system sectors. and developing comprehensive responses to complex issues

Historically, community food assessments have been 'stand-alone' initiatives, meant to precede or lead to community-based initiatives, including CFP projects. In other words, the CFA process often creates a foundation for stakeholders – non-profits, institutions, businesses, and residents – to come together to identify needs and priorities and then to plan community-based responses. CFP now funds a few stand-alone CFAs, primarily as Planning Project grants (for $25,000 or less). CFP assessment work can also be integrated into a full project as a more focused or end-stage undertaking. It can help fill in the final details of a new undertaking, once the basic components and players are identified. For example, end-stage CFAs can be added to the first year of a two or three-year project to identify locations for activities, secure additional partners, and recruit participants.

If you plan to do a community food assessment, either stand-alone (before an application or as part of a CFP Planning Project) or as part of a regular CFP proposal, there are some useful resources available to familiarize you with the CFA process[1]. Because a CFA can be very resource intensive on one extreme, knowing what you will need or what can be done with a finite level of funding and in kind funding is a critical step. Many applicants propose CFAs without understanding what is involved or what it takes to engage in and complete the objectives they set out to accomplish with the assessment. Few groups have CFA training or experience or can realistically identify how the assessment process is really going to be integrated into an effective project component.

A CFP-oriented assessment process must be more defined in scope and purpose than a stand-alone assessment. In a regular application, sponsors need to offer a succinct, well-thought-out plan of action. An assessment in this context works best if it takes on a specific focus area and is used to figure out the specifics of a fairly well-defined initiative. In this context, opportunities for research and data collection – important aspects of conventional CFAs – are more limited. It is better used to help build collaborations, refine proposed activities, and improve strategic planning. For example, you may have identified marketing locally-produced foods from a group of producers in your community and then proceed to use an assessment approach to identify the locations, sponsors, resources, participants, and other details of the program. This has to be carried out over a relatively short time period – usually several months – to allow time for the project activities themselves to be implemented within the grant period.

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1. For example, see *"What's Cooking in Your Food System? A Guide To Community Food Assessment"* http://foodsecurity.org/pub/whats_cooking.pdf

<u>Building In Grass-Roots Participation</u>:

Needs and priorities are driven by some kind of organizing process. CFP project ideas and priorities can be generated from the experience of a small number – even one – advocate, and sometimes the freshest and most inventive endeavors have such origins. In the visioning section, we noted the influence of sponsors and partners in the determination of responses to community food security – how their missions, histories, and priorities often establish the agenda. But whether a particular approach comes from an individual, an organization, or a collaboration of their partners, good ideas may not work if the community does not support them. A vital aspect of this is the role of the community in the determination, design, and implementation of the project.

Building in and reflecting constituent roles and interest is often a challenging element of CFP grant narratives when the applicants have not 'done their homework'; i.e. taken time to build in this important element in an earlier planning phase. CFP application language is quite specific to the importance of addressing this priority.

RFA: *"…applications should describe…Involvement of low-income communities in the context of project activities and operations."*

RFA: "*Ensure that low-income residents are actively involved in planning project goals, objectives, and outcomes. In particular, describe how the communities being served – particularly the targeted residents and organizations – were involved in planning the project and will be engaged in its implementation. Reference planning activities, assessments, meetings, or other activities that demonstrate community input into key decision-making."*

USDA/NIFA expects CFP projects to be to be rooted in community. This suggests "*of* the community" or "*by* the community" rather than "*for* the community" or "*to* the community." They are looking for more of a bottoms-up versus a top-down planning approach, wherein priorities are driven by residents and stakeholders; not just by the applicant organization and its professional partners. Again:

"In addressing this aspect, there is an expectation that the project reflects needs and priorities that are supported by those intended to benefit from it; that they will support it and will participate as projected. Applicants who can show evidence of how they grounded their project in the community should expect better consideration as this is an increasing emphasis in the RFA and by proposal reviewers. This input can be garnered by bringing broader representation into the initial planning process. It may occur through community food assessments, or through working with community-based collaborations. Interviews, forums, focus groups, and other strategies are also informative to the planning process. This takes some time to build into the planning; it doesn't easily occur once the RFA comes out. In this respect, the planning of a CFP ought to begin well before the planning of the proposal writing itself."

Why is this important? Because projects for the community will work best if it:

- Reflects the needs of the constituents who are intended to benefit from the initiative
- Incorporates their ideas on how best to design and deliver the program
- Increases the likelihood that the project will endure because the residents and key stakeholders are invested in it from the onset, and have a sense of ownership in it
- Brings the right people and organizations to the program
- Leverages resources and ongoing support for the initiative

The critical planning step here is determining **how** the community is invested into the process. As mentioned earlier, low-income communities have a myriad of food security challenges. One can, in fact, surmise a rather common set of food challenges that persist across most of them:

- Lack of high quality retail food outlets
- Limited access to affordable locally-grown foods
- Disappearing farmers and farmland that can supply local fresh foods to communities
- Lack of good food in school meals and in other food programs

What is the community for CFP planning purposes? It is typically the residents, the institutions, the businesses, and the organizations. How can they play a role in the project planning, and should they? Which ones should be involved? Often, applicant organizations are already rooted in the community, and feel they understand many of its needs and concerns through ongoing engagement. That is definitely a good start and is likely why the organization is considering a CFP application. Such input may have already come from board or committee members, through prior strategic planning, and/or from ongoing connections related to other work. But there are a few caveats to consider here:

- Whether new or established, the identification of current food security and food system needs is always evolving and cannot be assumed. Conditions are not static.
- Staff is always changing, as are partners, and residents. The parties that may have developed an agenda a few years ago may not be familiar or relevant to current community residents or stakeholders.
- Specific initiatives need their own focus. Farm and food initiatives need to reflect current conditions from the perspective of those who will be involved in them.

Therefore, community-based planning should not be taken for granted. The process of community engagement can occur in many ways, including a community food assessment (CFA). If there isn't a comprehensive CFA opportunity, then pieces of that process are still valuable, such as:

1. Surveys, focus groups and conversations with stakeholders
2. Hearings and community meetings with residents and other stakeholders
3. Relationship-building through established networking processes, such as existing boards and committees

However you proceed, time is needed to do this planning phase properly. In some respects, it takes years of involvement to build the strongest relationships and understand community conditions and capacities. In a more deliberative manner, CFAs can easily take a year or more to produce practical information and other community-building results. More basic networking and collaborative planning can take several months. In 2006, Kellogg's Food and Society program launched a series of community food and fitness initiatives, designed to support 7+ years of work to promote changes at the local level in the ways residents eat and stay active and healthy. But before fully funding these activities, they required a two-year planning process for each group, preceded by at least six months of planning for the preliminary steps of submitting initial proposals in and receiving funding. By the start of the planning phase, the nine funded communities already knew whom their key partners were and had a basic budget to work with for implementation. The two-year planning phase was primarily used to build internal administrative structures, hire staff, conduct local needs assessments, engage neighborhoods, develop strategies, and find other resources to go forward. In many ways, this is akin to getting a Project Planning grant before launching a full-fledged initiative, but ramped up to reflect a much more ambitious agenda than a typical CBFP. The lesson here is that funders are increasingly looking for good planning that is rooted in community. To that end, CFA-type planning (whether formal or informal) is helpful when it looks for the following:

- What is already going on around community food security – programs, groups involved, policies behind initiatives and potential funding. What can one build on, what is working, what could use strengthening?
- Similarly, what is already in the planning stages around community food security efforts – where are potential connections, and also where are possible redundancies?
- What do the targeted residents or participants want and need? Have they focused on these issues before? Is there already an established agenda or framework to work from?
- Do residents and key stakeholders want to be involved in the planning and implementation? Who is to be served; what are the target constituencies? What can work in a practical manner to secure this engagement? Have community leaders been brought into the process?

Sometimes a project idea 'hits it on the nose' in terms of local support. For example, immigrant communities are often looking for somewhere to grow food, so proposing a local garden or urban farm responds to an existing desire to produce ethnic foods that may otherwise be unavailable or unaffordable. Dozens of such programs have sprouted up over the past decade. But for a less familiar or more complex initiative, we can't assume residents are inherently lining up to offer their time, energy, and skills to participate. If they see a benefit, there will be buy-in. If their representatives support it, they are more likely to be on board. To accomplish this, they need information about what is proposed, how it works, and what options are available in terms of design, user base, and overall implementation. For example, farm-to-institution programs don't necessarily involve most residents directly, so they need to understand the relevance to them before getting behind it. Simply assuming a community wants this is to challenge the community's role in priority setting around responses to food insecurity, even if the project seems inherently worthwhile. It also risks failure or less-than-optimal results if residents don't participate except as passive recipients of changed services.

Collaboration Building Steps:

The process of building collaboration can be very intentional or it can be more fluid in terms of how it is carried out and who gets involved. There are benefits to both strategies:

→ **Open-ended planning process:** This is similar to an open-ended CFA, where there is consideration for diverse types of initiatives, and where more broad-based community representation will bring these options into focus. This approach allows and encourages voices to come to the table that might not otherwise have been expected or initially engaged. In other words, organizers are not relying solely on the established networks, but looking for fresh energy and ideas, participation of new interests and constituencies, and building broader stakeholder alliances. Open meetings or forums, diverse stakeholder interviews, and general surveys can be tools to find new players who want to be more involved.

Seeking diverse food system input can also make it harder to build consensus on what to take on and how to do it. Everyone wants a piece of the action; agendas need to be heard, multiple interests try to incorporated succinct projects cannot be all things to all people. For example, food policy councils often invite a broad representation of constituents to the process – from anti-hunger advocates to local farming proponents, nutritionists to gardeners – and then build so big an agenda that it is hard to move forward effectively on a succinct set of policy initiatives. The challenging task is to find the necessary balance between adequate representation and the need to arrive at a succinct agenda that can be accomplished as a 'project.' This can apply even to broad policy undertakings.

It is important to re-emphasize that whoever is at the table sets the agenda. If farmers are at the table, farm issues will come to the fore; if they are not, this sector may fall off the radar screen.[insert another example to show that the *idea* applies not just to farmers but all groups] In particular, if the planning is more of an open-ended approach, be aware of the food security and food system areas and issues you want to be sure to address, and invite representatives accordingly.

Similarly, if the planning team lacks diverse voices from target communities, the process of inclusion is not as straightforward as simply inviting a few new faces. Communities of color are used to poor treatment from well-meaning groups who seek to bring social change without having them at the table in a formative and inclusive manner. Genuine coalition-building efforts necessitate full participation of affected community representatives, and/or residents, from the onset and not just as part of an already-formed project.
Similarly, if the planning team lacks diverse voices from target communities, the process of inclusion is not as straightforward as simply inviting a few new faces as token representatives. Multi-cultural Toolkit explains that "Communities of color understand that great differences separate them from the European American mainstream culture. In contrast, European American communities do not have much awareness of the magnitude of differences. Occasional events or activities may open a small portal to this awareness, but European Americans do not experience cultural differences as a central concern in their lives. For communities of color, the differences are not only central, but vast and inescapable." (see http://www.awesomelibrary.org/multiculturaltoolkit.html)

Genuine coalition building must include well-informed strategies for engaging full participation of affected community representatives, and/or residents, from the onset, not just as part of an already-formed project. To get a much deeper appreciation and understanding of these factors, project planners are encourage to explore cultural sensitivity, diversity, and dismantling racism trainings, and similar experiences. In addition to the Toolkit above, some initial readings and resources can be found at WhyHunger's webpage on "Race and the Food System" (http://www.whyhunger.org/portfolio?topicId=24) and by participating in the Growing Food and Justice for All initiatives, (see http://www.growingpowerfarmconference.org/gfji/).

→ **Focused project planning:** If sponsors already have a more defined planning effort – e.g., they are already clear about the type of project they want to pursue and mainly want input into it – then they will mainly want to seek input from potential partners who have natural affinities to this type of work, and to direct beneficiaries – those they hope will participate or gain directly from the project. It is also natural to want to start with those you know and have worked best with. This is a place where alliances can come together around a common agenda. Contacting existing members of a network, of committees, and of known organizations gets to some of the expertise and resource support that projects often need to have sufficient input and overall capacity.

<u>Formalizing Collaborations for Planning Purposes</u>:

Community meetings, stakeholder interviews, community food assessments, surveys, and other input strategies can help ground your project in the targeted community. Another logical part of the community planning process is the formation of a working group, task force, committee, or similar structure to move the process along systematically. Such a body brings in participants who will have a role not only in the design, but also in the subsequent implementation and/or evaluation. Such a group can emerge from planning activities such as CFAs. Or they can follow the initial stages where there has been an opportunity to identify persons and organizations that have a real interest in participating around a common agenda.

By design, Community Food Projects are meant to promote collaboration among multiple-sector representatives. Partnerships are valuable to share roles and work, to generate resources, including match; to represent the communities where the project takes place; to bring skills and connections. Creating an effective planning body needs to take into account:

- Who will actually be the core partners in the project? Are 'key' players at the table?
- What is the interest level and commitment level of each?
- What roles might each play?
- Who is bringing capacity – time, energy, funds, connections, other resources?
- Who is looking for funding from the project? Are they providing matching resources?
- What are the politics and relationships – will the partners work well together?

In many CFP projects, a single organization retains the overall management, use of funds, and carries out the work plan. Sometimes, multiple organizations create a network approach and share resources, often to work in different communities. However roles are determined, genuine collaboration itself is challenging and takes much planning and effort to enact and maintain.

Complex projects can be more effectively implemented if you can bring together the capacities of different entities with different assets, capabilities, and missions. This is a fundamental building block of community-based projects – not starting from scratch or working alone, but working together to create new, innovative multi-faceted endeavors that require multiple players and roles.

Participants should be clear about their (and their organizations') roles, needs, and agendas for participating in a CFP cooperative grant. In addition, this is the point at which to be clear about expectations in the planning process – the time and commitment to come to meetings and perform follow-up such as contacting other potential participants, providing letters of support, and finding matching funds.

SECTION 5: GOING AHEAD WITH THE PROJECT

Project Governing Structures, Roles, and Decision-making:

What capacity is needed to carry out a Community Based Food Project? Grants vary in size, but CFP awards, for example, may be up to $200,000-$300,000 over 2-3 years, with a match requirement that doubles overall resources dedicated to this endeavor. Many projects of this scale will involve the work of several persons managing varying components – both programmatic and administrative. Because federal grants can be complex to manage, smaller or emerging organizations and networks need to be concerned with many elements of organizational capacity in the planning phases.

Funders may wonder if groups that submit such proposals are able to fully execute the proposed program. Surprisingly, many applicants state **what** will happen, but do not provide many details as to **how** they will carry it out. They perhaps assume the reviewers understand that they have these specifics figured out. But have applicants determined the resources and capacity needs to organize, set up, and run a project, or just made up a budget and scale of effort that fits the funding parameters?

The planning phase is the point where the implementation details are best figured out. This begins with figuring out all the steps needed to get from start to finish. For example, say your team proposes to start a farmers market. This assumes you have already determined that a farmers market is desirable and will be part of your project. Given the 5000+ farmers markets across the country now, this undertaking seems straightforward. Implementation can include:

- Finding a sponsor to host and manage the operation
- Selecting the location, and getting necessary approvals
- Deciding the type of market and who will be selling there
- Determining facility needs and costs – supplies and equipment, structures, signage;
- Identifying farmers who will sell there
- Conducting promotional and outreach activities – signs, PSAs, ads, posters, media coverage
- Finding a market manager and other personnel to manage the operation
- Establishing schedules, fees, and management details (e.g., set up, take down, trash, etc.)

To address these, an implementation should ask:

- Who will take the lead and responsibility for the activity?
- What are the roles of various partners, and are these established or just proposed? What is the overall coordination plan with partners?
- Who will do the work in each phase? How much time is involved? What positions need to be hired as part of this? What training or skill development is needed for these persons?
- What resources are needed – space, equipment, communications, transportation, and such?
- What are the matching funds – types and best sources?

- Is there a framework and process for participatory evaluation?
- What are the documentation needs?

Fortunately, there is plentiful guidance on farmers markets that can help eliminate much of the guesswork in figuring out how to proceed. And there is similar guidance for some more complex projects, some of which can be found at the Community Food Security Coalition's website: http://www.foodsecurity.org/pubs.html. More in-depth guidance is exemplified by The Food Project's field guides and manuals that provide in-depth descriptions of how to organize and implement food and farm projects for youth (see http://thefoodproject.org/books-manuals). What's generally in short supply, however, are the detailed narratives of how projects carry out their specific initiatives, with the successes and challenges, the best practices and lessons learned. For example, there are now dozens of new and emerging beginning farmer incubators, all looking for guidance on how to proceed and what other programs have done. Community Food Projects has funded many of these over the years. We have some guidance materials from the more advanced programs, but what is lacking are detailed histories of how they evolved. Such project stories could explain how they handled the complexities of working with challenging audiences, such as immigrants and refugees, and how they succeeded or struggled with the nuances of scaling up within the urban agricultural environments – finding land, building infrastructures, recruiting appropriate partners and trainees, and many other facets of a comprehensive training program.

Without these narratives many community-based food project organizers are somewhat on their own, relying on the available expertise within the planning team, and often using guesswork to estimate the time and effort it takes to actually carry out the project. Working on the specific implementation steps at this early stage can help identify some of these unknowns, help to calculate time and effort (and personnel) needs, and result in a budget that fully reflects what is anticipated. It means that the scope of the project can be more easily adjusted to reflect the real efforts that it takes to accomplish each phase of the program. Planners should feel encouraged to contact similar projects to gain as much information as possible. New projects are also encouraged to build in a stronger documentation component to their work – so others can learn the steps that were taken, what worked or didn't, with some 'lessons learned' and 'best practices' to disseminate.

Creating a Project Operational Workplan:

It's important not only to determine what will be done in the broad sense, but also how the larger objectives will be implemented in detail. In essence this is the workplan. Too often, workplans are handled as an afterthought – they are developed as part of a proposal rather than thought out during the initial planning phases. Well-developed workplans help to justify the funds being requested, and also help reviewers see that understand the true scope of work for the funding level proposed. Many proposals seem overly-ambitious relative to the resources offered. They may not have considered the overall effort it takes to achieve a set of outcomes, may not have anticipated obstacles, and may not have taken into account all the organizational and collaborative effort it takes to do community-based planning and implementation.

Contingency planning: Beyond these factors, it is vital to plan for contingencies – for what can change, for what can go wrong with original plans and expectations, and how you will deal with these. Community Food Projects are replete with ongoing challenges, and at the initial planning stages, one usually cannot anticipate all the specifics that will be faced in moving ahead.

We will use a hypothetical culinary training program in "Maryville" as an example. This is a proposed training and small-scale food processing/preparation business incubator that ultimately wants to produce 20 new small start-up businesses for local residents. But what if not enough residents sign up, or those who do sign up fail to attend and complete classes needed to prepare for starting such operations? What follow up or back up scenarios are needed to make up for this lack of response, and do you have the reserve capacity to take this on? Is it acceptable to then have a smaller group of start-up incubator projects, or will you need to do more and different types of outreach to recruit participants? Do you need to change your instructional timetable or other logistics to retain higher attendance? Project sponsors will be much better prepared if they have contingency plans already in place, rather than being forced to make crisis types of decisions because the project is well underway and needs to move ahead without delay.

Project Administration and Management:

Funders give money to support projects with defined activities and expected results. They want a workplan that describes what you will accomplish and how – and who will be responsible for doing what. Enfolded in the workplan is the overall administration of the project. This is not just the elements covered in the Indirect Cost Rate, for example, but all the steps that aren't really programmatic.

The ~~overall~~ [insert something else: e.g. "The primary project managing organization typically…."] organization typically covers personnel hiring and supervision; payroll and HR management; grants management – start-up, drawdowns, budget updates; office management; and sometimes board activities. Large organizations are set up to handle the basics of core administration, while smaller or start-up entities are challenged to address these essential elements. In addition all sponsors will have specific project management requirements that are above and beyond these overhead components. These may include:

- Writing grants and other fundraising activities
- Hiring project-related personnel, training and ongoing development
- Making purchases and doing expense reimbursements
- Managing and maintaining technology equipment (computers, etc.)
- Trainings and other administrative meetings
- Managing communications – emails, websites, etc.
- Finding and managing volunteers
- Conducting media, public relations, and membership communication
- Conducting evaluation, reporting and other documentation;
- Strategic planning and follow-up project support and development
- Hosting Board meetings and other relations
- Managing the day-to-day office work

Organizations at every size should consider these requirements at the planning stage so as not to underestimate these managerial demands. It is not unusual for the combined organizational and project-specific administrative work to consume up to half the total time and effort. This often cannot be totally reflected in the budget. The overhead and indirect costs, for example, don't always cover such activities. Take development (fundraising) as an example. Many funders specifically disallow their resources to be used for this purpose, and it is not generally incorporated into a CFP or similar budget narrative. A difficulty is that the funding source like CFP wants 100% match, yet like most funders, does not expect to see a line item for funding development.

The lesson here is that the planning stage is the time to be on top of all these administrative needs, to include them in the internal workplan, and to be sure there will be resources for them in the budget. A further consideration is efficiency. It can be more challenging for smaller organizations to make complex projects work efficiently, as they tend to have fewer resources and the requisite personnel to address the complexities of non-profit management. For example, large organizations have efficient HR departments whereas small organizations often rely on part-time accounting help or contracting out for payroll and similar necessities of project administration. So it is important to identify and cost out all these non-programmatic components, especially those not covered by a negotiated indirect rate with the federal government. If done at the planning stage, it results in a more realistic budget for determining how ambitious a program can be developed within a given budget.

Planning the S.M.A.R.T. Way:

Goals and **outcomes** are two constructs used to describe the intended directions and expected results of a project. Are these similar or different, particularly insofar as CFP narratives ask for goals and/or outcomes. The ideal place to formulate these is during the initial project planning – not when writing the proposal. Establishing goals and outcomes is a great way for your program planning team to agree on what it wants to achieve.

In many proposals, the **goals** are often written in very general terms that reflect the overall vision or long-term impacts sought. In this sense, they outline more of the hopes and dreams for the project, and less of the practical and specific end results that might be achievable. For example, the goal is "to improve the community food security for low-income residents in Jonesville," or "to improve access to locally produced foods by low-income residents of Jonesville."

Because goals are often written in vague language, CFP and other grant-making entities are now encouraging the substitution of **outcomes** to help identify what will actually result from the project. There is a concrete difference between reformulating the overall vision and characterizing the achievable outcomes for a time-delineated effort. Goals are often reflective of the longer-term impacts the project looks to achieve. For example, planners may want to have Jonesville residents obtaining 10% more of their food from local sources. That may be an overarching end-result toward which the community is striving to realize, and it might well be achievable, but not necessarily through a two or three year grant. There needs to be a specific project-related significance to the expression of intended results, and they should, in turn, express the intent of the specific project being proposed. This is where using outcomes can be more helpful.

Outcomes defined: Your project may be easier to plan if the expected results are framed in specific, calculated language. This can help to focus your efforts, and to more clearly define what you are going to do. Specifics can include:

- Who is involved, and/or who is the target audience or participants
- Where the activities will take place
- When – over what period – it will happen
- What is expected to happen
- Why this is going to happen – i.e. what problem is addressed, what results are expected.

Outcomes describe what will happen to the intended beneficiaries, be it the participants and/or their community as a result of the project taking place and being completed successfully. Outcomes should not focus on the project, the sponsors, and the partners; rather, on who directly benefits and in what ways. More succinctly, outcomes look to track **changes** that should result from the project – in what people do, in conditions in the community, or as precursors such as attitudes, perceptions, or even policies that can lead to behavioral changes among targeted recipients of services or as improved conditions in the community.

S.M.A.R.T. Language: *The CFP Request for Proposal states: "Outcomes should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely, describe what will be accomplished and who and how many people, e.g., residents, participants, will benefit." This is known as S.M.A.R.T. language, wherein measurable targets can be planned and progress toward achieving them can be tracked –* ***so one can see the change occur****. Putting measurable parameters allows you to make such a pre-determination that everyone can understand.*

Following is a description of S.M.A.R.T. components. There is no clear consensus about precisely what all 5 SMART keywords mean, or even what they are. Typically, however, they include (1) *specific* and (2) *measurable* as key elements:

- **Specific:** Be clear about exactly what action is going to be taken, and by whom. Outcomes are as precise as possible – not general or vague.
- **Measurable**: Quantify or otherwise show the change that will occur; using numbers, time periods, etc. as to when these will occur. How will you and others know when you have achieved your outcomes using common standards of measurement?

Specific and *measurable* suggests that achievements are linked to a rate, number, percentage, or frequency. For example: "To promote public health nutrition for residents of Jonesville through better access to locally produced foods" becomes more concrete if written as: "To change the diets of 500 low-income Jones residents by the equivalent of one F&V serving per day between May 2008 and September 2009." Measurable does not mean simply placing numbers to a goal or outcome. It also means these numbers can actually be tracked. So this approach will help to frame the evaluation objectives and procedures as well.

Next, if one is looking to change people's diets, think about what that means in terms of specific and measurable outcomes:

- Is this a short term or long term change?
- How is nutrition changing? Diets are very complex to track and assess.

- How will the change(s) be measured? Dietary assessment can be expensive, perhaps needing baseline measures using specialized tools and skilled practitioners. Is there a proxy measure that is more realistic to apply here?

It might be more practical to target a particular component of diet – for example, increasing fresh produce consumption among a target group. But that is still a challenge to measure accurately. So 'changes in purchases of fresh local produce' might be as far as you can get on a small grant in terms of a measurable outcome. With produce purchasing data, some assumptions can be made with regards to its consumption, since one assumes most or all of the food will be consumed.

The A.R.T. in S.M.A.R.T.: Many terms have been used to define the A., the R. and the T. in S.M.A.R.T.:

- **A**: Achievable, Attainable, Appropriate, Actionable
- **R**: Realistic, Relevant, Results-oriented, Resourced
- **T**: Time framed, Time-based, Timely, Time-Specific, Trackable

Some of these [insert word. "terms"?] are explained as follows. Which [insert noun. E.g. "concept"] to emphasize depends on each variable.

- **Achievable:** This refers to objectives that are set with people need to be capable of being reached,; there is a likelihood of success with the actions proposed.
- **Attainable / achievable and realistic**: This is the "practical" vs. the "ideal" – making sure that what you set out to do can be attained.
- **Realistic**: This suggests that setting impossible goals will lead to failure. Realistic takes into account the overall capacity of your organization and partners – the funding, the personnel, other resources, the time available, the obstacles that will need to be addressed.
- **Relevant:** This means in relation to the overall conditions, needs and opportunities you have outlined (optimally through a community food assessment).
- **Relevant:** This can also refer to (1) the issue being addressed. Will the project actually have a real impact? (2) Is it a priority for the organization? Does it relate to CFP priorities, and does it have the support of the community?
- **Resources:** Being sure that you are able to accomplish your project with a known and attainable amount of resources.
- **Time-bound:** Establishing timetables from the onset sets the framework for all activities. Since CFP grants have specific timeframes, so should goals and outcomes, especially in terms of the 'one-time' funding parameters you are asked to address.
- **Time-scale:** The scheduled time allotted for completion of each milestone or activity. Even if you have to adjust this as you progress, it will help to keep you moving forward on schedule. A well-devised work-plan is a first step to setting a logical timetable.
- **Timely:** Suggests that if you don't set a time, the commitment is too vague. Time must be measurable, attainable and realistic. Is there a finish and/or a start date clearly stated or defined? If you are not sure how much time and effort is involved in a new initiative, take the time to contact others who have done this work.

Performance Targets: The overall project outcome expressed with S.M.A.R.T. language can be termed the ***Performance Target***. For the example above, an example of a performance target is: "Of 1000 low-income residents who enroll in the farmers market coupon program, 500 will purchase a total of 5000 lbs. +/- of fresh locally-grown produce between June and September, and increase their produce consumption by the equivalent of one F&V serving per day during this time period." Here, you are summarizing and quantifying the key result by which your project can be tracked and assessed. Next, you can similarly describe the programmatic steps or stages that will get you to this result.

Milestones: Once your outcomes are determined and defined, it is much easier to figure out how to make them happen. ***Milestones*** represent a description of the planned steps – a way of getting there which makes the outcomes realistic. Milestones should include all significant activities needed to get your project to its targeted outcomes. Like outcomes, milestone should incorporate the specific S.M.A.R.T. types of language – the who, what, where, when types of information.

Milestones versus Objectives: Objectives state the steps to achieve a goal. Milestones are stages of getting to an outcome or, more specifically, to a performance target. In the conventional proposal format, objectives generally describe major programmatic elements and like goals, objectives are often not specific or outcome-oriented. While they do state what you seek to accomplish, they are not necessarily sequential or tied to the goal the way a milestone is to an outcome. Milestones, by comparison, should represent the sequencing of activities that lead to the final result or outcome – as a continuum, if possible. They transform what are usually more vaguely described objectives and activities and incorporate a chronological progression of steps critical to the eventual achievement of the overall outcome or performance target. In other words, each milestone is a transitional outcome that in combination or succession should result in achieving the overall intended result. In this respect:

- Milestones are also helpful as an evaluation tool, both for tracking progress and for changing directions if the project does not go quite as planned (which is often the case).
- Milestones should also incorporate the numbers of beneficiaries who reach certain critical interim stages, and help you to evaluate their roles and activities during the course of the project. In that respect, the exercise of developing milestones will help refine your estimates of the numbers of people who will be reached and will ultimately benefit.

For example, let's consider target participants. You may have already identified a constituency – lower-income households. In this CFP project, the major outcome is to engage a specified number of residents in incubator food processing value-added enterprises using a new community kitchen. You have decided that 10 participants would be an achievable and desirable end number to actually start up such micro-businesses. Milestones help you figure out how to get to that result, by having thought through (1) what stages you need to get to the end result, and (2) how many participants are needed for each stage of development. To achieve this, you have identified four development stages, and an important intermediary step of skill-building classes on food processing. Consider how building a participation continuum helps you get to your target numbers:

1. How many initially sign up
2. How many of those sign-ups start the classes
3. How many of those who started actually complete the classes

4. How many save money through an IDA or Individual Development Account; i.e. an incentivized matching savings account or other mechanism to fund the business
5. How many of those go on to start a micro food processing enterprise

In initially planning this project, you might not intuitively know how many recruits you need to get to the final 10, so consider working backwards. Perhaps research or experience suggests that: (a) of 60 who are recruited, (b) 30 will start the classes; (c) 20 will complete the classes; and, (d) 10 will save money and start a food processing business. The advantage of working backwards is that you can use some reasonable assumptions to derive what initial response you need for your program outreach and then decide what time and resources it will take to do it.

Some simple milestones to this outcome might be:

- 60 residents will sign up to learn about and consider participating in the project
- Of these, 30 residents enroll in a course on value added food processing enterprise development
- Twenty residents will satisfactorily complete these classes and save money
- Ten residents will set up and engage in value-added food processing businesses

As these examples demonstrate, the overall value of S.M.A.R.T. planning is to help you determine your overall strategy, timetable, resource needs, and budget at the onset. Surprisingly, few projects engage in such projections. More typically, projects project their initial recruitment goals and then try to rationalize why so few 'succeeded' at the end. In the above example, the planning team estimated they would need six times as many initial recruits to get the ten they need at the end. They were realistic about the dropout rates. As such, they not only put in the time and effort to engage a large pool of prospects, but they also achieved a realistic result that is a measurable success rather than a disappointment.

<u>Using Project Planning Software</u>:

There are software tools available that can help you plan the activities and implementation of projects – project management software programs to assist in developing plans, assigning resources to tasks, tracking progress, managing budgets and analyzing workloads. These include the popular **Microsoft Project** (or MSP), but there are dozens available (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_project-management_software for a list). Many of these programs include mathematical algorithms for scheduling and costing out a set of project activities. They allow you to construct models of the project that include (a) a list of activities required to complete the project (b) the time each activity will take to completion, and (c) the dependencies between the activities. Similarly, they can create budgets based on assignment work durations and resource rates. As resources are assigned to tasks and assignment work estimated, the program calculates the cost, based on time allotted at a specified pay rate. The time and the pay scales can be adjusted to produce varying scenarios across different budget levels.

In essence, planning software can help you to manipulate schedules and activities with tree-like options, make varying assumptions about the time each person involved will take to accomplish the task, and cost these accordingly. In reverse, this allows you to figure out how much time you can allot to specific personnel or activities for a given level of resources. However, the planners, not the software, need to determine how long various tasks can take to complete during each time period. This is at best a 'guestimate' effort, since the time required for even well-defined tasks will vary with the experience and skills of those doing the work and with extenuating circumstances that frame the working environment. Whether or not you use software, the more accurately you can allocate time and effort, the more you can make your budgets and scale of delivables reflect realistic conditions.

Here is a useful exercise to illustrate this point: Make a list of all the tasks you do (or are supposed to include) in your current job. Create a simple one-week table with 35 hours (or your official work week), and allocate the time for all tasks you need or should address in that template. Include ongoing activities, new priorities, administrative tasks (per above), and allow time for emails, phone calls, routine meetings, and other tasks that eat away at the clock. Most likely, you will quickly see your time reach a deficit relative to all that is on your plate. How much of your 'official' work week is really focused on core tasks?

The lessons here apply to project planning. If you allocate the entire 35-40 hours of someone's official work week to core activities, that does not leave room for all of the other details that make up a job. As a result, you may either underestimate personnel needs, or overwork the employee(s) assigned to the project. Sound familiar?

Logic Models and Evaluation:

Most grants require you to include Logic Models, program evaluations, or both. These follow more easily from the process of developing outcomes and milestones. You can often cut and paste outcome language into a Logic Model template. Similarly, the quantitative outcome tracking is already set up for many indicators when already embedded in your Performance Target and Milestones. The planning stage is also the best for structuring evaluation, because it allows you to establish baselines for reference, and determine when and how to track progress along a set of clear-defined milestones. Detailed evaluation tools are available from the Community Food Security Coalition at: http://www.foodsecurity.org/evaluation.html.

Planning Budgets and Getting the Match:

Only once these steps are completed can you develop a reasonable budget that reflects the overall time, effort and other real costs. Such budgets have to be fixed in size for a proposal. However, it can help to use a range internally, allowing adjustments within and across line items to account for changes and uncertainties as to time, cost of resources, and other expense areas. Within a real budget, this will occur anyhow. Many projects feel they need to stick to line item caps as funded. This is rarely the case. Budgets are best treated as estimates, and allowed to change within reason. Funders are more concerned that you stick to your plans than to your specific budgets. So in preparing a budget, be aware that you will have reasonable flexibility to adjust it from initial projections as circumstances change over the course of implementation.

Matching funds: CFP requires 100% match. Finding enough of a match is one of the biggest challenges for most applicants, not just smaller ones. The match must be demonstrated right up front with submission of the grant. The match is one the key constraints to community organizations that want to apply to the program, and often limits the amount they request. Planning well in advance to identify a match is often a key to meeting this requirement.

Absent foundation or other non-federal funds, much of the match for CFP is through in kind, particularly time and effort by partners. Therefore, establishing early partnerships can form the basis for accruing a large share of the match needed. For small grants, in kind time can add up, which is why partners can be invaluable. But to get a large grant, most applicants will need to have other non-federal funding to make up a decent share of the ask. Foundation grants, local contracts, and similar resources not only help make the match, but provide additional real funding that projects need in addition to CFP money. The project planning phase is the critical period when consideration and pursuit of matching resources should take place.

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(3) Note: Specifics on matching grant requirements are found in the CFP RFA and other guides.

SECTION 6: ARE YOU READY TO APPLY?

Part of developing a project plan is assessing and developing the capacity to carry it out. There is a certain amount of simultaneous decision-making needed to figure out what the project needs, and to then decide what capacity is needed to realize it. The time to make this decision should be well before a funding RFA is issued. In deciding this, the planning team can address the following criteria:

- The specific need for and support for the project is clear to everyone involved
- The project scope is well defined and workplans are developed
- The project has sufficient input from the target community and constituencies
- Partners and their roles and resources are worked out
- Amounts requested can cover the scope of work proposed, including administration
- Matching resources line up to equal the amount requested
- The applicant has the capacity to administer a federal grant. Financial administration responsibilities include having accounting systems to manage payroll and other expenditures; other HR capacities; and the ability to cover costs if drawdowns or payments are delayed
- Plans for facilities and other infrastructure are in place to carry out program activities
- The applicant is able to do electronic grant filing

Finally, it is important to have assessed the potential viability and success of the proposed project beyond the capacity to implement it. This is the step of making the decision to go forward with the grant request now that you've assessed the risks, benefits and costs of doing it. Factors in this decision may include:

- Assessing organizational size and capacity (resources, infrastructure, personnel, etc.)

- Assessing the level of community support and participation
- Having the needed stakeholders aboard – with their influence and interest, and capacities to leverage community resources

<u>Final thoughts</u>: The purpose of the guide is not just to describe specific planning steps for new or expanding projects. We also hope that many organizations that have reviewed this document will gain a new appreciation for project planning, and allocate time and energy well in advance of grant announcements to design effective project templates. This not only facilitates the grant application process, and is advantageous with respect to describing the actual project elements and demonstrating community-based input, but it helps to assure long-term viability once the initiative is underway.

APPENDICES

The following exercises are supplied by Barbara Rusmore as examples of useful tools to strengthen the group planning process:

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Exercise: Clarify Your Organization's Reasons for Cooperating

The following are key questions to discuss within your organization. In cooperative efforts, full understanding and involvement throughout all levels of the organization (board, executive, and program staff) makes for a good start. Some of these questions can be answered at the onset; others may need to wait until you have had some experience in the cooperative effort.

1. How important is this cooperative effort in helping to achieve our mission? Why is it important now?

2. What are the risks in doing it? What are the risks in not doing it?

3. What are the three most important results that we hope to accomplish? By when?

4. What assets, resources, and time are we able and willing to bring to the cooperative effort?

5. What are the main reasons for <u>NOT</u> joining forces now?

6. Will the organization's major stakeholders and members support this effort?

7. What would partnering organizations need to know and understand about your group? (E.g., How we make decisions? What are your organization's other key commitments and where does this fall in your list of priorities? What are your organization's resource limitations?)

8. What are the breakpoints – what do we need partnering organizations NOT to do? (What could other groups do that would break our trust and ability to work together?

9. What does our organization need (bottom line) to get out of this cooperative effort? Should we do it?

Exercise: Identify Your Personal Reasons, Needs and Motivations

Leaders in cooperative efforts wear a number of hats and must track activities and relationships at multiple levels – your personal reasons, your organization's agenda and managing the relationships inside your organization around this cooperative effort. Awareness of these levels will help you think well about this cooperative effort and allow you to be a clear and positive force. Here are a few questions to help you, as a leader, get better grounded for the work ahead.

1. What are my personal reasons for participating? (What do I hope to gain or learn?)

2. What personal concerns do I have entering this cooperative effort?

3. What is my existing relationship with the players at the table?

4. What is my role in representing my organization in this cooperative effort?

5. Who must I communicate with and how can I involve others in my group as I participate in this cooperative effort?

6. What leadership responsibility am I willing (or is my organization allowing me) to assume? What level of decisions can I make without my organization's approval?

7. What leadership strengths and skills do I bring to this effort?

As you continue to reflect on your reasons and roles in this cooperative effort identify what is working well for you – where are you able to be effective? How might you clarify areas that are confusing or problematic? Who can assist you in doing this?

Choose a Structure That Fits the Work

> "Especially when working with volunteers, it's important to create just enough structure that people can see what needs to be done and can feel empowered to go and do it. I can't do it all. So being able to create the structure and not get bogged down in reinventing the wheel or always revisiting decisions is essential."
>
> Barb Cestero, Greater Yellowstone Coalition

Key Points:

Form follows function. Get really clear on the purpose of your cooperative effort, then choose your structure.
Keep it simple. Choose a structure that is as simple and efficient as possible for your purpose.
Be intentional about terms you use to define your cooperative structure. Use the archetypal models in this publication as a starting point in your discussions.
Trust is the essential glue that holds it all together. Invest, on the front end, in building relationships, trust and respect.
Cooperative efforts can change to fit new situations. Notice when your effort needs a change in structure and fully explore the ramifications before acting.
Write a Cooperative Agreement and sign a Memorandum of Understanding to clarify your commitments and structure.

Explore Cooperative Structures

The Language of Cooperation

> "It was such a relief once I understood that I don't always have to form a coalition in order to work with other groups. There are a number of structures and configurations to choose from – ones that may fit our needs better and that require less energy to create and maintain."
>
> Bob Ekey, The Wilderness Society

We have noticed that the language of cooperation is often full of miscommunication and confusion. "Coalition" is probably the most widely misused term, applied freely to a wide range of ways groups actually work together. Leaders creating a cooperative effort often attribute different meanings and expectations while using the same term and/or don't realize the variety of formal and informal options they can choose from. In our workshops, we've heard a number of remarks and insights:

"You mean all activist multi-group efforts are not coalitions?"

"There are big differences between a network and an alliance. I always thought they were different words for the same thing and it didn't matter which we called ourselves."

"It's good to know that a partnership is an actual structure, not just a feel-good process of working together."

In this publication, we use the term "cooperative effort" as an umbrella to include a variety of approaches and structures for multi-organizational work. This chapter will help you see the differences between structures and define the language to use as your groups consider joining forces.

As a starting point, consider these differences as a continuum between three commonly used terms that actually refer to three very different forms of structuring cooperative efforts:

Terms:	**Network**	**Project Partners**	**Coalition**
Purpose	Education and information	Joint work, projects, short term	Mobilize partners on common goals, long term
Structure	Simple	Connected	Complex, multi-layered
Processes	Informal, loose	Coordination of work	Formal agreements, strong systems

What Is the Purpose of Your Cooperative Effort?

Before you continue reading this, write down:
The most important central purpose of a cooperative effort you are involved in.

Are there a few other purposes? Probably. Note these too.

What's your hunch about which of the above terms best describes your effort?

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Note: Tom Wolff and Associates offer a number of free and for purchase publications that explore the nuances of cooperative structures and the language of coalition-building. See: http://www.tomwolff.com/healthy-communities-tools-and-resources.html. In particular: http://www.tomwolff.com/collaborative-solutions-newsletter-summer-05.htm
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Exercise: How Sound is Your Footing?

Here's an assessment tool to help an emerging cooperative effort determine if all are on-board and ready to move forward together.

1. Common ground on understanding of the problem and solutions.

1	2	3	4	5
Little common ground		Some common ground		All agree

2. Now is a good time to tackle this issue at a larger scale of involvement, and a cooperative effort is the best strategy.

1	2	3	4	5
Little common picture		Some agreement		All agree

3. What's your collaboration's history of working together?

1	2	3	4	5
Negative history		No history		Positive history

4. How successful have you been to date in working well with the differences in the group?

1	2	3	4	5
Wide divergence and conflicts		Some agreement		Good progress

5. Agreement on core strategies that will be used to effect change.

1	2	3	4	5
Strategies potentially in conflict with each other		Possible to coordinate		Compatible strategies

6. Leaders share trust, understanding, and mutual respect.

1	2	3	4	5
Underlying distrust or loss of respect		Some trust built		High level of trust and history

7. Collaborative skills and intentions of leaders in this effort.

1	2	3	4	5
Highly individualistic, own agenda		Good negotiators		Welcome difference as a resource

Total up your scores:

- 7-14 – Risks are pretty high, and it appears that this cooperative effort is facing some significant hurdles. Figuring out how to address the areas with low scores will help start the group off with a higher chance of success. Or consider other ways to coordinate work that require less intensive cooperation – perhaps a network to exchange information will be sufficient.
- 15-21 – Some risks are present – what can be done to improve the situation?
- 22-35 – Your cooperative effort has a good opportunity to get going fairly easily.