

## **Asset-Based Programming**

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### **Presenter**

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this session was to expand the effectiveness of community food systems assessment, organization and action. This session was an opportunity to learn to use assets-based techniques (programming, assessment, etc...) to expand organizational capacity and to work more in-depth with the community.

Before we start, ask yourself the following questions:

***Do you use problems to form the basis for your work? Do you use a needs based approach vs. interest-based approach?*** Most organizations use a needs based approach. They proceed in ways to fill a gap or address issues where a community may lack something.

Remember:

1. People tend to follow their interest and not their need.
2. Groups that are sustainable are groups that focus on interest.

***Are there other organizations that we work with because they complement our weakness?***  
“I’m going to work with this group because we really aren’t good at .... Versus I’m going to work with them because there is an opportunity to learn about.... What is the Nature of true partnerships?

***Do you seek funding based on what is being funded or based on where the organization is headed?***

1. Focus and direction are key to sustainability.
2. Strategic plan is important to pursue funding as well as directing the agency.
3. Be aware of how you project yourself and your organizations.
4. Having a strategic plan also gives the organization the opportunity to say not to funding that does not fit without burning bridges

### **Asset based programming**

Views the community as a place with assets to be preserved and enhanced, not deficits to be remedied.

- Draws on **appreciative inquiry** – A method used to form questions in a positive way to get the most useful information possible.
- Recognizes social capital (examining the power or relationships and how they can be utilized within the process).
- Encourages participatory approaches to development based on empowerment and ownership.
- Creates collaborative economic development models that place priority on making the best use of a community's resource base.
- Strengthens civil society by engaging people as citizens rather than clients.

### **Characteristics of asset based programming**

1. Positive (focuses on strengths instead of needs)
2. Inclusive (includes and respects different roles, experiences and ways of knowing)
3. Realistic (You have to show that you can sustain work within communities).

### **Three groups to include when thinking about asset based programming**

- Individuals
- Associations
- Organizations

### **Cautionary:**

Asset based approach is not a typical understanding of how to do community food systems work because:

1. We are used to working under a social services model that is more deficit based.
2. There has been no systematic paradigm shift.

### **Barriers to using an Asset based approach**

- Lack of experience
- Lack of time (work takes time)
- Resistance on the part of agencies and professionals
- Negative attitudes and fear on part of disenfranchised groups (because they have been wronged or exploited)

### **Why intentionally use an asset based approach?**

Asset based approaches allow communities and partners to document the tangible and intangible resources in the community. Additionally, asset programming –

- involves the community in making inventory of assets and capacity
- builds relationships
- develops a vision of future
- helps to leverage funds
- builds capacity to do future projects and programs

### **Why is it important?**

Consequences of traditional (deficit programming) –

- People tend to internalize labels they are given (our goal is to be very clear about how we are describing people).

- Local relationships are destroyed as a result of needs professionals (go into the community, fill the need and move out).
- Funds are directed at professional helpers and not residents.
- Grant makers create categories for grants that reinforce need, dependency and put communities in positions of helplessness.
- Leaders magnify people's deficits to gain power.
- Failure is often rewarded and dependency produced.

Those who absorb the brunt of deficit-based approaches (those who are left out of the conversation) include:

- Homeless
- Illiterate
- People of Color
- People with no money
- Youth
- Elderly
- People with impairments (mental or physical)
- People with disposable incomes
- Immigrants
- Those with no voice in the community
- People who want to give but don't know how
- Other community based orgs. that don't appear to be natural partners
- Perceived competition
- Working poor
- People who are perceived as noncompliant

### **Why are we excluding these groups? What can we do to get them involved?**

We should organize our work in ways that invite not exclude. The first step to changing our approach is changing the way we think about our work, which means changing the way we talk about our work.

***Words are important to developing how we think about our work as well as how we act within our work.***

### **Power of words**

- 1) Thought and words power our actions
- 2) Word reflect how we view and act upon our perceptions of power
  - i) We versus they
    - (a) We are they!
  - ii) Citizens/residents versus clients/consumers
    - (a) Who is in control?
  - iii) Interest versus need
    - (a) Motivation spur sustainability

What are some of the words that affect our work? (Language is a very important way to get messages across to funders. The language that we use must be respectful to the people with which you work as well as help the funders gain a full picture of your targeted group.)

<u>Deficit-based language</u>	<u>Asset-based language</u>
They	We
Consumer/clients	Residents/citizens
Diversity recipient	(potential) partners participant
Blighted /high crime areas	Indigenous people
	diversity
	Decision maker
	Current redevelopment

**Group Activity:**

People in the training were divided into three groups to examine research data regarding food. They were to come with a list of people within the community to speak with and questions they wanted to ask these people. The purpose of the activity was to help participants develop means for framing questions using asset-based language.

Samples of questions and reframing:

(Posed to commercial growers within a rural area) **How can we help you grow a wider diversity of food for local residents?** This question seems to suggest how the problem could be solved for the community instead of gathering information, knowledge sharing or fostering environments for community members to participate. (How presupposes that the question has been answered.) Question reframed — **What types of food do you grow?**

(Posed to associations and organizations) **Are there nutrition education offered in the community that gives people access to fresh food?** This question seems to be a closed ended question that would limit the conversation. It is important to invite others into a conversation. Asking open-ended questions helps to invite community members into conversation. Question reframed – **What programs are available in the community to provide people access to fresh food?**

(Posed to local farmers) **How do we strengthen the links between small farmers and larger farming organizations?** This question may be difficult for people to answer because it requires that the person assess other organizations. People may not be able to answer the question. Question reframed -- **What relationships exist within the community that can be maximized and what do those relationships look like?**

or

**What are the options in the community to help guide people to healthy food choices?** This type of questions does not limit the answer to program but also allows for other resources both formal and informal.