

## **Collaborations in Community Food Work**

An educational session at the 2007 Southern SAWG CFS Leadership Training  
July 26, 2007

### **Presenters**

Keecha Harris, Associate Program Manager  
Southern SAWG Community Food Systems Program  
Harris and Associates  
Birmingham, AL  
205-678-3120  
keecha@earthlink.net

Ruth Peebles, Funding Development Director  
Southern SAWG  
The INS Group  
Raleigh, NC  
919-231-2870  
rpeebles@theinsgroup.com  
www.theinsgroup.com

**Purpose:** This participatory, innovative session was designed to encourage group participants to think about potential relationship building opportunities as well as the kinds of collaborations in which they are already involved. Additionally, group members gave feedback about new ways of working within collaborations.

### **Group Exercise**

The larger group was divided into four smaller subgroups. Once the groups were established, each group was assigned a specific collaborative group (faith-based organizations, academia /academic collaborations, governmental agencies and businesses/corporations). The subgroups were asked to discuss the strengths, challenges and opportunities involved in developing collaborative relationships with their assigned group. The following is feedback that was received from the groups.

*Academic collaborations*—relationships with schools and academics of all kinds

### **Strengths**

- We are able to educate communities more effectively through youth who give access to parents and other community members.
- Nutrition education in school—reduces the amount of unhealthy food intake (soda, snack foods, etc....)
- Bridging gaps with the community-- community gardens building relationships with teachers and schools
- Teachers in the school may be able to access their personal faith based institutions to collaborate
- Using college students to design services and interns for implementation

## **Challenges**

- Disconnect between faith based institutions and schools
- Turnover of personnel (new staff may not want to continue projects)
- Teachers do not have access to a curriculum that includes “nature”
- Projects perceived as not accessible to the community
- Maintenance
  - Parents inputs
  - Bureaucracy
  - Vandalism
  - Bureaucracy

## **Opportunities**

- There is a need for help in schools teaching horticulture/ gardening
- Math/science lessons
- Character building
- Leadership
- Alternative Schools
- Grants for start-up (challenge grants)
- Mentoring through extension service police dept. etc..
- Potential employment opportunities for underage people (13-15 year olds)
- Grant opportunities
  - Kidsgardening.com
  - Non-profits going into schools

## ***Business collaborations***

### **Strengths**

- Financial resources available to help local food efforts
- Businesses will offer pro bono (legal, accounting, marketing, etc...) services once the project has started.
- Companies are interested in going green and buying local

### **Challenges**

- Possibility of “green washing”
- Getting too cozy with the business could dilute your impact, credibility and/or the organizations message can get distorted.
- Potential exploitation of message
- Make sure the businesses are doing what they claim they are
- Credibility erosion
- Business partnerships may cause animosity and strain relationships with other community nonprofits
- Lack of knowledge or language to communicate effectively with businesses

### **Opportunities**

- Great opportunity to learn some effective business strategies, policies and practices

- Develop relationships with businesses in the food distribution area
- Opportunity to help businesses turn a profit
  - Television stations can help raise money for grocery store gift cards
  - Create “win-win” opportunities for the organization and the corporation
- Modeling successful business practices applied to orgs.
- Sponsorships
- Developing relationships with businesses
- Corporate staff may be a large volunteer base
- Get community involved in developing relationships with businesses

### ***Faith Based Collaborations***

#### **Strengths**

- Can have significant financial support
- Numerous faith based organizations
- Churches are accessible
- Have missions that involve helping/ highly motivated and eager
- Fabric of the community
- Significant political influence
- Large volunteer bases

#### **Challenges**

- Conditional support (their terms of who they’ll help and how)
- Denominational exclusivity
- Navigating Internal and diverse church bureaucracies
- Conflict of interest with decision makers within the church/ whimsical and arbitrary decision making
- Hierarchical structures limit that makes decisions
- Some faith-based orgs are significantly under funded
- Judgmental

#### **Opportunities**

- Relationship building
- Partnerships and networks
- Provide access to social services and class room space
- Access to existing infrastructure: meeting space, kitchens, personnel
- Volunteers and calling networks
- Potential donors.

### ***Governmental Collaborations***

#### **Strengths**

- Financial resources
- Collaborations give organizations credibility
- Other necessary resources available

- Ability to raise local consciousness about problems
- Some are knowledgeable of the issues org is trying to address
- Repository of information and data

### **Challenges**

- Cumbersome/ red tape / paperwork
- Political navigation / party affiliation
- Bureaucracy
- Guidelines may conflict with goals / alignment
- Internal conflicts
- Government corruptions

### **Opportunities**

- To influence politicians and staff
- To influence people by calling in favors
- Gain better understanding of the power structure
- Educational opportunities
- Partnerships within different department
- Connections to other funders and governmental partners
- Help governmental agencies accomplish their goals and missions
- Policy changes
- Establish precedents