

Issue # 5
September 17, 2008

FOCUS on Planning!

As we all know, good planning is essential to a successful endeavor—especially a complex and cooperative effort like School Food FOCUS. Luckily for all of us, we have a couple of planning-leadership-collaborative process pros working with us: Barbara Rusmore and Pam Mavrolas. Both are independent consultants, contracted through the Institute for Conservation Leadership, a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering leaders and building volunteer institutions that protect and conserve the Earth's environment.

Barbara and Pam have long experience in the fields of sustainable agriculture and food systems, and they've worked independently and together on an impressive range of projects and processes designed to help diverse organizational leaders and stakeholders increase their impact by working together on common goals. (See bios below)

We've been working with this incredibly experienced and dynamic twosome on the School Food FOCUS project since April. Already, they've proved to be an invaluable team in helping us to think through this ambitious project, and how the various organizations and programmatic components ("moving parts") might best be approached and coordinated.

Barbara and Pam are currently designing and seeking input on plans for our fall meeting, as well as spurring our thinking about the March 2009 gathering. You'll be seeing and hearing more from the two of them as the October meeting draws ever nearer. Meanwhile, we want to share with you some of the objectives and activities Barbara and Pam are FOCUSED on for the October 30-Nov. 1st meeting and beyond! (Please pardon the pun.)

Objectives

- Help form and support the School Food FOCUS program leadership and solid working relationships among a broad range of stakeholders.
- Strengthen understanding and practice of leadership in this innovative and transformative project.
- Foster and facilitate successful teamwork on designing and developing each of the core program areas.
- Clarify and improve communication and decision-making.
- Understand and integrate the program's evaluation plan into the programs.
- Begin identifying the overlaps and gaps between the work of the program areas, and foster cooperation and synergy.
- Identify and design ways to develop and engage wider circles of FOCUS stakeholders.
- Develop and agree on the coming year's overall program timeline and work plan with deliverables.

Priority Activities Include

1. For the fall meeting:
 - a. Develop the agenda design and materials.
 - b. Facilitate October/November program planning meeting of School Food Focus
 - c. Debrief conference with the Scoping Team.

2. Work with a team to design the March 2009 conference. This includes defining purpose and goals, and considering the need for and possible objectives for a strategic planning process. Facilitate the March 2009 meeting; review and edit drafts of the plan drafted by L&A staff.

We are also exploring the possibility—if funds permit—of Barbara and Pam creating a “Learning Journal” that augments the program evaluation and documents the qualitative and collective learning of the program participants in creating this pioneering national effort.

If you have questions or would like more information about School Food FOCUS planning processes, please be in touch with Claire Spencer, Claire@liquoriandassociates.com.

Bios

Barbara Rusmore, consultant to the Institute for Conservation Leadership, lives in Bozeman, Montana. After 8 years as Senior Program Associate with the Institute, where she managed the western office and developed several programs including the Executive Director Program and the Cultivating Leadership for a Changing Agriculture program, Barbara returned to independent consulting in 2008. Through her consulting practice, Barbara works with leaders, organizations, networks and coalitions to help them more effectively accomplish their purpose. Areas of expertise include: leadership training and coaching, strategic planning, management coaching, participatory research and evaluation, and facilitation of community involvement and policy development processes. She received her Doctorate in Human and Organizational Systems and has spent more than 25 years working as director, staff and consultant with non-profit organizations and program development.

Pam Mavrolas, consultant to the Institute for Conservation Leadership, lives in Helena, Montana. For more than 28 years, she has staffed, directed and/or been a consultant to a variety of community-based non-profits dealing with agricultural, natural resource, and environmental issues. Pam served for 5 years as the Executive Director of Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO), a grassroots membership organization promoting sustainable agriculture, "smart growth" and community self-reliance. Her consulting firm, Mavrolas and Associates works primarily with sustainable agriculture, environmental, arts, and cultural nonprofits. Her areas of specialty include: strategic planning; program and campaign development; evaluation; staff management and team building; board and leadership development; foundation fundraising and grant writing, and organizational problem-solving. Mavrolas holds a MS from the School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan.