

Results: Statewide Hunger Advocacy Group, Half Day Retreat

“What is our vision that we’re attracting new members to co-create?”

Sample Group: A statewide membership organization of direct food providers, advocates and other individuals whose goal is to end hunger and its root causes, including poverty. Their mission is carried out through membership training and technical assistance, information dissemination, organizing and advocacy.

Challenge: Having successfully completed an intensive strategic planning process last year through which the membership, board and 5-member staff clarified what the organization does well and wants to improve, the staff wanted to focus a part of its retreat-time this year to better align individual work with mission. Recognizing a shared reluctance to undertake “bigger picture” visioning (amidst real constraints of limited funding, time, and human resources to take on additional challenges), the executive staff asked SEED to assist the group to explore integration of its community food and public policy advocacy initiatives in the context of strategic plan objectives. SEED added to this agenda an aim to articulate a broad vision and to deepen relationships as the basis for creative collaboration.

Activities Played: “Appreciating One Another” Resource Card; Orange/What/Deepening and Orange/Wow/Designing

Summary Results: Three activities from the game were customized and facilitated to achieve the group’s stated goals, and also to clarify the group’s vision, so that collaboration within and across programs can be improved in part by leading with what they are “for” (versus what they oppose).

People: The group voiced appreciation in recognizing the complimentary gifts that each person contributes. “It’s nice to remember I work with good people and not just focus on work plans.”

Process: The group was held in a more expansive space for visioning and dreaming than they usually cultivate. They found it “helpful to relate to each other and to the work in a different way.” Referencing a poem from the game, one participant exclaimed: “I want to free what waits inside me’... that’s what we’re doing together in this process!” Another person shared that she felt reinvigorated by the experience of “dreaming without worrying how it connects to my work plan.”

Product: The group made concrete plans (which included engaging key allies and members) to help clarify the organization’s vision. A compelling vision statement will be drafted and integrated into all materials, with the aim of attracting new participants, donors, collaborators and partners to share ownership in realizing it.

What new insights were gained?

- Usually, when we brainstorm, we come up with ideas, but we don’t make follow up a priority, because it seems like it will take us away from the core mission of our work... or we will feel overburdened and discouraged in terms of staff time and resources. .
- This conversation makes me think we can explore bigger picture solutions in a well planned way as a vision of where we’re going, and then separately think about how we’re going to get there.
- I think something we all realized is that we can make some progress in terms of our ultimate goals and they are not just “pipe dreams.”
- How to get there might not be a quarterly work plan but a few years out. So the visioning is not over-burdening us.
- This broader focus gives a sense of how to prioritize our work beyond the typical questions we usually ask ourselves.
- When we ask ourselves: How do we build our membership base? Our answers are usually issue-specific. I like that this is more a vision-specific attraction. I can see people being attracted to our organization because of where we want to go.

- We really can expand our membership. In fact we do have the ability to make this a much broader movement, since a lot of people really do care about the issues we care about.
- It was helpful to take a step back and reconnect with the importance of our work and reflect on the great potential of [our organization] and our staff.

How well do I feel we worked together on these activities?

- I think we were all on a similar page.
- People came up with different pieces and new ideas.
- I think we worked well.
- It was interesting to note that we all do have different important qualities. That helps us work well together in a group.
- I remember some of our previous meetings. Even though there are differences, there's less polarization. We seem more willing to build on each other's vision.
- It was a reinvigorating experience.
- It's helpful to talk about things that we don't normally talk about – long-term vision, our personal abilities, and how our work can benefit others.

What did these activities teach me? In what ways am I improving as I participate in the group?

- You definitely have to improve your listening skills. When you do visioning, your thoughts aren't all lined up and people may take more time. You have to listen and then think how it connects to what you're thinking.
- I'm learning to be more assertive in my vision. It's important to go back and articulate the vision, and not just the day-to-day things we get trapped in.
- Trying to improve in connecting with people on our overall goals. I want us to improve in our organizing and connecting with groups so we can build a grassroots movement. It's not easy; it's a learning process, and we need to be flexible.
- Thinking about things from another person's perspective. I feel like I'm open-minded but there's always room for improvement. It's nice to take in other perspectives.
- Learning to step back more often, to prioritize differently when you have that vision in mind.

Do I sense we are making significant forward progress and if so, in what areas?

- We started talking about multi-issues, and I was happy when we moved to talk about organizing techniques.
- We're trying to identify the political barriers to our work and how we're going to resolve those.
- This is the first time we really did a vision exercise that was not just throwing out a whole bunch of ideas, not just purely brainstorming. There was definitely progress in doing it in a more thoughtful way, and making more connections.
- My one concern is that we've known for awhile that money is a major problem. We've tried various strategies and still haven't solved that.
- I think part of it though is that we don't articulate our vision well. We aren't putting forward something that will attract funding. We haven't done it internally before. The health care issue worked because it is more visionary.
- Yeah, I think we'll progress in terms of fundraising by articulating our vision to people who could donate.
- I think this is a good first step. In a few hours we're not going to accomplish a lot but I do value making the re-connection to what we're about, and why. That's helpful.
- It will be helpful from here to commit to target a few ideas and make them happen, so we feel like things like this are useful. If we can do that, I'll feel like that's significant progress.