**Farm Incubator Project**

**Administration and Management**

**A Brief Overview**

**History and Context**

At its inception, New Entry was largely a partnership project between Tufts University, UMass Extension, Farm Service Agency, local “mentor farmers”, and other agricultural service providers. Project Administration and Management was conducted by the original founder and director, Hugh Joseph, an adjunct faculty member at the Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy. Prof. Joseph engaged an active Advisory Board of farm partners to develop programs and share responsibilities for various aspects of the program. Several graduate student interns from Tufts were also hired to assist with specific programmatic projects (land access, farmer training, production assistance, and marketing). Eventually, through increased grant writing and financial resources, the Project Director was able to hire additional staff, including a Project Coordinator who then took on much of the staff coordination, program management, and financial management aspects of the organization. As other program staff were hired, the role of the Advisory Board diminished and much of the programmatic responsibilities were adopted by core staff. Over time, the original founder/director transitioned the role of Project Director to the Project Coordinator who became the new Director.

Today, New Entry’s Project Director is responsible for overseeing all program operations and staff. The director is responsible for strategic and program planning, budget development, fundraising and grant writing, grants management and reporting, building and maintaining key community partnerships, hiring, managing and evaluating staff performance, evaluating project performance and impacts, and maintaining the organization’s focus on mission-driven outcomes.

**Staffing and Key Partners**

**Staff**

New Entry operates under a unique organizational structure. It is a “program” of both the Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy and Community Teamwork, Inc. (a local community action agency). These institutions assume “fiscal sponsorship” of New Entry by providing the administrative support of New Entry’s federal and foundation grants, program income, and other financial and human resources. The fiscal sponsors also provide additional financial management, accounting, bookkeeping, auditing, and legal/human resource functions.

The current Project Director is officially a Tufts University employee (funded entirely through external “soft” money – grants, fee for service or individual donors) and the remainder of New Entry staff are Community Teamwork, Inc. employees (also funded entirely through soft money). Subcontracts are passed between both institutions to cover staff salaries and program expenses. The Project Director (1.0 FTE) is assisted by a 0.80 FTE Program and Financial Coordinator and a 0.40 FTE Project Developer (grantwriting and strategic programming). The responsibilities of the Program and Financial Coordinator are to assist with grant management and reporting, financial management and reporting, communications, office administration, procurement, special events planning, and assist in general program coordination.

**Key Partners**

New Entry partners who engage in program management and administration primarily include our fiscal sponsors: Tufts and CTI as well as our incubator farm landowner, the Dracut Land Trust, Inc. who assists with overall management of the incubator farm sites (road maintenance, tree clearing, neighbor relations, etc.).

Over time, New Entry has engaged an assortment of project consultants or pro-bono volunteers to assist in various aspects of project management, via strategic planning, marketing and outreach support, branding/visual identity, executive coaching, and more. We also network with many other key partners for specific programmatic components of our work. At various points in its history, New Entry has also engaged the support of an Advisory Board.

**Resources**

Over time, New Entry has utilized various technologies to facilitate program administration and management. Early in the program, staff tracked their time and major activities on spreadsheets (Excel) and then we upgraded to Microsoft Project software to develop project work plans that could create timelines and resource allocations for projects. Early on, we also tried several contact management software applications, one of which was “ODB” a donor management database. It quickly became cumbersome to use and was abandoned. When financial management became more complex than Excel was able to offer (for invoicing farmers for land rentals, event registration, and as we expanded our Food Hub), we also integrated Quickbooks into our management toolbox. We now also use the following programs for Admin/Management tasks:

* Constant Contact for our e-newletters and program outreach, for event registration (with a PayPal account), and evaluation surveys.
* SurveyMonkey for more detailed farmer surveys
* GotoMeeting for educational webinars. For partner-based virtual meetings, we use Adobe Connect.
* Salesforce for contact management and task management and program evaluation (following ALBA’s model of rigorous client outcomes reporting)
* Adobe Indesign / Photoshop for graphic design and print layout
* Dropbox for cloud-based file sharing (Tufts system is VPN)

**Budget**

Staff Administration and Management: $126,722 (includes salary and fringe)

Professional Development: (conferences): $500

Interns: $747

Office Supplies: $2,335

Mileage: $1,846

Consultant: $750

Phone/Fax: $163

Rent Allocation/Utilities/Internet: $20,437

Computers: $4,400

Postage: $574

Misc: $252

Audit, annual: $1,440

Annual Indirect Costs: $72,875 (based on an annual operating/program budget of $857,416

Total: $233,041

**Key Activities**

* **Strategic and program planning**: facilitating a strategic planning process for the organization, gathering stakeholder input, and shaping annual work plans and budgets; maintaining the organization’s focus on mission-driven outcomes; developing key programmatic objectives, goals, and work plans including staff tasks/activities and evaluation metrics
* **Program Budget development:** developing staffing plan for program activities, supplies and materials and programmatic costs for all program areas; incorporate budget needs into all funding requests and allocate proportionally all overhead/administrative costs
* **Fundraising and grant writing:** searching for appropriate funding opportunities to meet funder and program mission; review RFPs for suitability to support program goals; responding to RFPs via proposal / budget development; secure partner support for proposals; fundraising and individual donor cultivation and engagement; conduct annual appeals, fundraising dinners, and special events (Spring Launch, Farm Tour, Open Houses, Festivals, etc.).
* **Grants management and reporting:** tracking and maintaining monthly report of program activities by all staff and developing financial and program reports to funders; conduct funder meetings, site visits, attend project director meetings/conferences, teleconferences, etc.
* **Building and maintaining key community partnerships:** Represent project at events, workshops, panel presentations, meetings, etc.; participate in working groups for collaborative projects; engage in local, regional, and national policy and advocacy work.
* **Staff management:** hiring, managing and evaluating staff performance; ongoing coaching and supervisory “check ins” to assess progress toward goals; facilitate staff cohesion and team building.
* **Program Evaluation:** evaluating project performance and impacts either via data collection, discussions with clients, through participant surveys, focus groups, partner feedback, etc.
* **Direct Program Work:** engage indirect programmatic work (livestock workshops, MPPU, National TA, Food hub planning, farmland planning, training and technical assistance, farm site management, etc.)

**Goals/Strategies**

One of New Entry’s administrative goals is to enhance the organizational capacity of New Entry to sustain itself as a learning organization\*. Success is measured by:

* Financial resources and support needed to operate programs effectively
* Employee retention, satisfaction, and professional development opportunities accessed
* Strong internal and external program monitoring and evaluation structures
* Communications systems provide clear data to evaluate programs and report results to stakeholders (ie, Salesforce implementation)
* Clear staff and partner (external stakeholder) understanding of New Entry’s values, mission, goals in context of larger “food system”

\* *A* ***learning organization*** *is one that: seeks to create its own future; assumes learning is an ongoing and creative process for its members; develops, adapts and transforms itself in response to the needs and aspirations of people, both inside and outside itself; and allows people at all levels, individually and collectively, to continually increase their capacity to produce results they really care about.*

**Lessons Learned**

New Entry had very humble beginnings, as many new organizations do. The organization was started by a visionary who is keen on bringing a broad range of partners together to strategically conceptualize a project and then seek the resources to support it.

Selecting competent, dedicated and passionate individuals to be part of the “founding” of the organization is critical – New Entry has always attracted extremely bright and talented graduate students and then staff who were empowered to grow and shape the program. Recognizing the key strengths of each team member and the competencies they bring to the organization is paramount and providing opportunities for professional development and personal growth among staff is key to employee retention and good client relations. Not every member of the founding group needs to be a “Jack or Jill” of all trades, but having a diversity of administrative skills in project and financial management, program evaluation, fundraising/grant writing, and supporting a diverse team environment with on-the-ground programming are all critical factors in successfully administering a complex program.

 Deciding what the organization wants to take on in terms of administrative burden is also a key decision: will the organization become a 501(c)3 or seek fiscal sponsorship in the start up period? New Entry has grappled with the question almost since its inception: to remain a program of Tufts/CTI or become an independent non-profit organization. After studying the issue (and engaging various graduate student and MBA research projects to answer that question), New Entry has determined it makes more sense to remain a “program” than become an independent organization. This is in large part due to the benefits that being part of a much larger “parent” organization brings to our capacity to manage and administer good agricultural programs rather than spend too much time managing administrative responsibilities directly. All major human resource, legal, and financial accountability policies and procedures are part of our fiscal sponsors and have not been directly integrated into the administrative burden of New Entry’s core staff or directors.

Also, one of our keys to success has been our ability to adopt the principles of a “learning organization.” New Entry has constantly been in a process of “recreating itself” to meet the most pressing needs of farmers through their continued feedback and input to program development and to the creation of core programming to meet those needs. We started slowly with the basics and expanded programming over time – we did not build “Rome” in one day. Capacity and new programs were added over time as funding became available and we are a “lean” organization by multi-tasking, layering job responsibilities, and keeping our expenditures on overhead and administration in check. Our focus is on program delivery. We never take ourselves for granted and change is always on the table – if something doesn’t work, we fix it, change it, adapt it or work on it until it benefits the farmers and the program both. We learn from our mistakes, try new things, build new programs, and constantly evaluate the outcomes to continually improve what we do and offer.