

Food, Hunger, Water, Agriculture Policy
Communication Action Team
5.18.20 ± 3:30 – 4:30 pm
Meeting Notes

Facilitator: Lilly Irvin-Vitela, New Mexico First

Notes: Sharon Berman, New Mexico First

In Attendance:

- Sherry Hooper, The Food Depot
- Melanie Sanchez Eastwood, New Mexico First
- Tsiporah Nephesh, New Mexico Thrives
- Wendy Wintermute, New Mexico First

Lilly commented that she would like to highlight a few things and then see what could be done to support each other and elevate communication efforts. She also wanted to connect a dot from the Funding & Philanthropy team. Melanie wondered if it would be interesting to address social media, getting the word out, sharing each other's work. She extended an invitation to the group to share their posts with New Mexico First, and she would be sure to help get the word out. Lilly added that she appreciated the information and posts she received from The Food Depot.

Lilly noted that NM First had been tracking and sharing communication about food, hunger, water and ag. NM First was also supporting media work by drafting, reviewing and helping distribute press releases as well as sharing and cross referencing them on NM First's social media and website. Lilly added that there is a lot of information coming at us that we're all trying to digest. She wondered how others were making judgment calls about what to share, adding that sometimes it's hard to discern what's helpful to folks and what is contributing to "noise."

- Sherry said that the Food Depot keeps people educated about the work they are doing. In April they distributed over a million pounds of food in one month, double the usual monthly distribution. Sherry noted that some donors make financial contributions and expect a corresponding press release. The Food Depot also sends out a release when there are facing big challenges. She added that they do a lot of social media.
 - Lilly asked what were the most helpful ways that interested folks such as donors, supporters, friends could share info. She wondered if the group noticed an impact when people like or share what they posted on social media. Sherry said she would ask their marketing guru, Jennifer, and would get back to Lilly.¹
- Tsiporah said she found it easy to retweet and repost messages from others. She added that she tries to follow what she thinks are good sources, and retweets and reposts them. When weighing whether or not to send communication to nonprofits she asks herself if this is info they need to know, and how quickly they need to know it. Tsiporah noted that NM Thrives sends out a newsletter. She tries to stay politically neutral and share the facts.
 - Sherry agreed: "We try to stay away from politics as an organization." She has experienced backlash from reposting another organization's information that others interpreted as politically charged.
 - Lilly acknowledged the importance of remaining nonpartisan as an organization when explicitly working on public policy that's consensus-based. Lilly added it was also important to think about

¹ Jennifer at the Food Depot later said, "For social media, commenting, sharing, retweeting, liking. All of that is helpful to our "organic reach" with social media platforms."



different folks with different life experiences, keeping in mind and how they might interpret communications.

Lilly brought up the policy funding priorities one-pager the group was putting together, noting the delicate balance to navigate between timeliness, relevance and responsiveness while making sure to not leave folks off to the side. She wondered how the other organizations were keeping pace with partners who are moving quickly while keeping the rest of the decision-makers in the loop.

- Sherry noted that there was a great deal of information to be shared. She noted that internally, they have a disaster response team that meets 3 times a week, which has helped them stay on top of things. The food banks regularly communicate two times a week. Sherry acknowledged that communication can sometimes be difficult in terms of weeding out what content to share.²
 - Lilly noted that there may be some lessons learned in all of this that can help us if and when the cycle of sheltering in place begins again. Sherry said she hoped there would be a pause before a second wave happens. Lilly thought there was value in reflecting on lessons learned and also thinking in terms of quality improvement around processes a second wave could be less painful and damaging.
- Tsiporah noted that she knew about VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster), but wasn't aware who was on the state preparedness team and what that looks like. She noted that a great many nonprofits had stepped up during the pandemic, and emphasized the importance of being sure all the right players were involved and were on the communication tree. She added that if there was a break it could be good to use that time to work out a formalized communication plan so everyone in every corner of the state is reached with critical information.
 - Lilly acknowledged that NGOs have played a part in getting messages out. She replied that there are many teams, including one assigned to food, water and PPE. She added that each team had different names and numbers and has evolved since starting in March.
 - Sherry noted that the EOCs got started a little late and reckoned that Homeland Security might have been behind that. She added that people from all over state government were placed into the EOCs, which was not their job, nor were there job descriptions and contacts in place. Sherry commented that there were emergency managers for each county. She added that there wasn't much interaction between the food banks and Homeland Security in non-crisis times. **She thought it would be good to force a meeting to talk about how to do things differently** and have things in place, rather than having to bring people up to speed during times of crisis.
 - Lilly noted that **perhaps protocols needed to be developed**. She gave an example of the evolving functions of the EOCs and added there could be protocols around needs assessment containing actionable information. Lilly added that there are also communication and coordination needs, and that some in the group would keep asking questions and supporting asking them systematically.
 - Tsiporah wondered if the **group could help create the** protocols, and who would the group need to work with to set that up. Lilly replied that people were thick in relief efforts, and then would be deep in the recovery efforts. She wondered lessons learned could be gathered into tip sheets that could be used to work more effectively with our government partners. "I don't think there's anything stopping us from working on that together and kicking it off." **Lilly suggested between this and the next**

² Sherry communicated later that each food bank has its own email distribution list for those purposes.

meeting, the group could brainstorm via email about the areas in which it would be helpful to have tips or protocols. Each person could take something on and then loop in Patty, Mariana, Jeremy, Sec. Trujillo and Amy. She added that perhaps someone in the General Action Team would be interested in being in that workgroup. Sherry replied that one of the silver linings from the crisis could be an opportunity to start identifying the challenges. Tsiporah concurred and added that not taking the opportunity would be a huge loss if not malfeasance, adding that it would be irresponsible not to map out where we see what worked out well and what didn't.

Lilly noted that she had been heartened by philanthropy's ability to come together, meet and do concrete problem-solving. She added that at times relief could happen faster through philanthropy than through government. She added that one of the things that came up in the Funding & Philanthropy calls was that there were a couple funders with broad portfolios who haven't had a ton of requests. Lilly commented that part of it is for food banks, and although the funding is at a different scale it might be worth the application process for some of the pantries. Lilly added that perhaps there are little financial infusions that could make a difference. A few other such funding opportunities included the Albuquerque Community Foundation, which has partnered with United Way of Central NM. They have grants up to \$5000. Lilly noted that they've done a particularly good job of simplifying the process – plus, the application was short and sweet. Also, the New Mexico Foundation had available funds through the Vecino Fund and Native American Relief fund.

- The group noted that several entities, including NMAG and Grants Collective as well as the community foundations are granting funds outside their normal service area. They agreed that that would be good information to share. Sherry said she would get that information out to their partners. She added that assistance in grant writing would be helpful for some entities. Lilly replied that Roanhorse Consulting had put together a list of folks who were willing to help with grant writing pro bono.
- Sherry said that they try and will continue providing grant writing training for partner agencies. She also shared that when the Santa Fe Community Foundation had funds available, she had received a call after they noticed The Food Depot hadn't yet applied. She was thrilled that they have simplified the grants.
- Sherry added that many of their partner agencies are volunteer driven, and that one of the things that worries her is that there is often only one person who knows everything at a given location.
- Lilly noted that Wendy had shared the distribution lists from the SHARE NM directory and wondered if there was a faster way to get communication out, or amplify communication from a funder. Lilly then asked the group to think about strategies to work together better.

Lilly noted that she saw overlapping interest, capacities and abilities between NM Thrives and NM First in terms of food banks. She wondered if they could assist in capacity building for folks in our network around grant writing and volunteer management, telling their stories in ways that would help maintain the steady inflow of donations and supports. She added that there were other folks who have been part of the calls and want to help, such as providing technical assistance and volunteer management. Perhaps there could be a way of not only sharing information, but also getting stuff done together. "How do we come through this more resilient and more able to weather the next storm?" Tsiporah noted that the fact that funders realized that they could streamline their grant application process meant they could also streamline it after the crisis is over. "We really need to push them to look at what they're asking nonprofits to do." She added that the group should build the database of people who have expertise in various things, as many people wanted to help during the crisis and didn't know how or where to use their skills. She



added that as this relief funding comes, nonprofits would need to write federal grants and would need help writing them. Tsiporah noted that funders were in the process of creating initiatives to assist with that.

Lilly asked if there was some kind of activity the NM Food Banks Association, NM Thrives, and NM First could do in partnership to provide TA to food pantries on resource development, communication, and decision-making support/board/advisory team development

- Sherry noted that she was joined the larger group late and asked if it had a charter or description.³ Lilly said it did not, and that perhaps having something a little more formal in place could keep the group focused. She added that it is not the time to be rigid in the middle of a crisis and that the group would need to figure out how to move forward together in a way that is cohesive.

³ Sherry added in a follow-up email that she would meet with the food banks on May 22 and would mention this idea.

