ASPHN Mini CoIIN Learning Session Partnership Panel: June 11-12, 2019

Panelists: *Ashley Schimke, Program Specialist, Arizona Department of Education; Katie Poirier, Executive Director, Mollen Foundation; Melissa Lonsberry, Consultant, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Michigan Department of Education; Susan Levy, Communications & Community Relations Director, Native Health*
Questions: Each panelist reflected on their experiences with partnerships and answered ASPHN's questions below. They will each share some of their answers orally at the Learning Session, along with more examples from their experiences, but their responses to all the questions are below.

Panelist: Ashley Schimke (AS), Program Specialist, Arizona Department of Education
ASPHN: What characterizes a strong, effective partnership from your experience? How do you cultivate that?
AS*: Consistently showing up. In my experience, developing shared goals upfront, help a new group to focus. This helps dissolve the competing agendas that naturally exist when different organizations and come together. In Arizona, this work began with small project-based grant planning/writing to support Farm to ECE development in AZ. Over time, group development is supported by simply showing up and being accountable for moving discussions or actions forward.*

ASPHN: Can you describe or share examples of how you show accountability?
AS: *Accountability is informally seen through commitments to follow-up on research, connect a stakeholder to the next meeting, or follow through on a side-project that helps lead to the overall goal. For example, in the Arizona Farm to School Network, Leadership Chairs are held responsible for various tasks that help accomplish goals within each quarter. Responsible tasks include collecting and sending out notes from the previous quarter meeting, initiating work groups relative to the Network goals (education, procurement or school gardens), researching funding opportunities, speaking on behalf of the Network at local food functions etc.*

ASPHN: What techniques, tools or processes help you ensure everyone has a voice and has equal power?
AS: *This can be difficult to manage. Of course, being mindful of equal participation and encouraging space for everyone's voice takes active consideration from the group. Community agreements (so community agreements is another way to say meeting rules. This was introduced to me when helping plan for the NFSN Annual Gathering. They are terms everyone in the group can agree with. Often, this includes understanding room dynamics (speaking up if you tend to be quiet and active listening if you tend to speak up and also it was nice at Annual Gathering, to share that power dynamics can play a role in how someone responds or shows up in the room.), encouraging alternative opportunities to offer suggestion or share thoughts through surveys, facilitated discussions, small group work and large group sharing etc. can help. I have seen alternating co-facilitated meetings also help encourage everyone in the group have an opportunity to lead discussions, which helps keep the group reminded of collective impact and shared responsibility.*

NATIONAL FARM to SCHOOL NETWORK

NFSN Annual Meeting Community Agreements

To facilitate a community and culture of respect, openness and learning, we ask all attendees to subscribe to these agreements. Thank you to the NFSN Program Planning Committee for developing these agreements.

In every chair, a leader
Notice power dynamics in the room
Create space for multiple truths and norms
Be kind and brave
Take space / Make space
Practice examining racially biased systems and processes
Look for learning
Take care of yourself, take care of each other
Put relationships first
Children are always welcome
Keep focused on our common goals

*Agreements adapted from First Alaskans Institute, Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, and Color Brave Space.

ASPHN: These are great ideas. Can you give an example of an "agreement" and how you would roll that out?
AS*: In the launch of the Arizona Farm to School Network back in March, we discussed light agreements, called "permission slips" outlined by Dr. Brene Brown's, Dare to Lead Read Along Guide. I've also attached NFSN's community agreements from the 2019 Annual Gathering. This is something we will continue to talk about and bring up as we onboard together to help build confidence.*

ASPHN: How do you find out the motivation and passion that compels people to participate?
AS: *I tend to find this out through friendship. Not in the meeting, but in the conversations that happen after the meeting or when someone is willing to share some of their personal life with you. Like, if someone's having a bad day, I'll stick around (if I can) and listen or I'll make sure to follow up after a meeting with someone to say how much I enjoyed their company or if there's an opportunity to meet outside of my office or on neutral turf (like a coffee shop or for lunch) then I prefer that. These are simple and small things that*

help build any relationship with someone. For me, relationships bridge this work together. It's easier to stay committed when you have known someone is counting on you. Sometimes it's preference for communication and work style and other times its stemmed from lived experience.
ASPHN: Do you do this through intentional one-on-one meetings?
AS*: Yes, this is usually 1:1 but sometimes it can happen with a smaller group where trust is already formed.*

ASPHN: Share one lesson learned from a difficult partnership experience. What would you do differently?
AS: *In 2016, my office wrote a collaborative USDA Farm to School Grant to support a pilot project that would supply and encourage a local fruit and vegetable taste-based program for preschool students in 4 counties. Our partnering agency for the match requirement prioritized certain low resource communities where agriculture was also a top industry (within these 4 counties). One of these counties included a particular community that leveraged a farmer and community advocate to help write the proposal (this was not clear to me). The conversations in preparing the proposal spanned about 6 weeks and for 3-4 weeks the proposal continued to be written with limited communication from this particular community partner. I personally tend to take on a lot of projects at once and sometimes that means that certain communications or efforts to keep the communication loop strong falls through the cracks. With the deadline for the grant approaching, I continued to spend time revising the grant proposal with the approval of my leadership staff. Ahead of schedule, the proposal was ready well before the deadline (not usual for me). Unknowingly, the community partner reached out to see a copy of the proposal to ensure that they were written into the approved proposal. This meant a lot of last-minute re-writing and another approval process. Not ideal. After it all, the proposal couldn't be formally submitted through grants.gov because my AOR -Authorized Office Representative, it means I have permission to submit for funding on behalf of my agency. There's an annual approval process for this and I can only confirm part of this process until I try to submit for a grant.) wasn't formalized in my procurement office and it was past normal work hours to get the authorized person to correct the issue by the deadline. Thinking back, if I could have prioritized stronger deadlines leading up to grant to check in with everyone involved at the beginning of the conversation to the week before the grant was due, (or possibly sharing responsibilities, where appropriate) might have helped keep everything on track. In the end, this break still sits with this community. Just last December, I had reached out to a farmer from this community who had wanted to attend one of our business meeting for schools and preschools and this conflict came up as a source of distrust.*
ASPHN: How you would do it differently if you had to do the same thing this year?
AS: *Prevention strategies: 1) Be realistic with your timelines (I constantly struggle with this), It means if you think it will take one week to get approval from your supervisors, give them at least 1.5 weeks. Know that you will likely need them to review it at least three times before you can submit, so plan extra time for revisions too. 2) Most federal grants offer you 4-6 weeks from the time the RFA drops, that means you have about two weeks to understand the RFA, get your plan and partners in place and have a rough draft ready. Having an outline when you meet with partners or your supervisors initially is helpful to make sure everyone is clear from the get-go. When it comes to my experience, mentioned above, I should have firmed the plan much sooner and submitted an outline to everyone from the initial meetings then. I think this might have clarified where I had support earlier so that I didn't have to re-write in the final hours. 3) With letters of support or commitment, write these for your supporters ahead of time, and follow up with them for their signature weekly (this sounds obnoxious, but they its necessary) and try to have these two weeks before the deadline. 4) As much as I hate saying this, narrowing your scope is also helpful. Take on projects that align with work you are already doing or that you have already slatted time for. If you need more time or more assistance, seek this upfront. We all have limited capacity, but together can we accomplish remarkable things. ß This is literally my mantra for 2019 and beyond*.

ASPHN: If you had to distill partnership successfulness and strength down to 1 thing, what would it be?
AS: *Trust. A recent report hosted by the Maricopa County Food Coalition found that across food system stakeholders trust or the lack of trust is the most common barrier to our local food system strength. Trust is the risk we take when we build relationships through projects and partnerships and it's also something we rely on when those relationships are developed and we are in need to help. The absence of trust slows progress and limits community impact.*
ASPHN: How do you go about building trust?
AS: 1*) Trust building requires risk taking. Let others make mistakes and offer grace throughout he process. ALSO, allow yourself to make mistakes and offer grace. 2) Be clear about your needs and/or your expectations. No one can be a mind reader. 3) Address conflict as it comes up as gracefully as you can. This means making time for reconciliation. This is so important. In a world where conflict is easier and easier to avoid, it's important to take the time and energy to sit with another human being and hash out the problem. It will be uncomfortable and it's important that it is. It's a clear sign that*

something important is happening. 4) I think self-awareness is important too. That means shouldering your mistakes and asking for feedback where possible. Sometimes we have to invite criticism to improve a relationship or a process. This is also uncomfortable. Be brave. 5) (This might be the same as #4) Knowing your personal values and respecting that others will differ from you. I think sometimes we get frustrated when someone doesn't agree with us or they say something out of alignment with our values. This quickly becomes evidence that we can't trust someone. This is hard to swallow because we have to try so hard to fight the innate response we to protect ourselves. Everyone has a different lived experience than we do, it's important to honor that. Also, here's a video from Dr. Brene Brown https://brenebrown.com/videos/anatomy-trust-video/

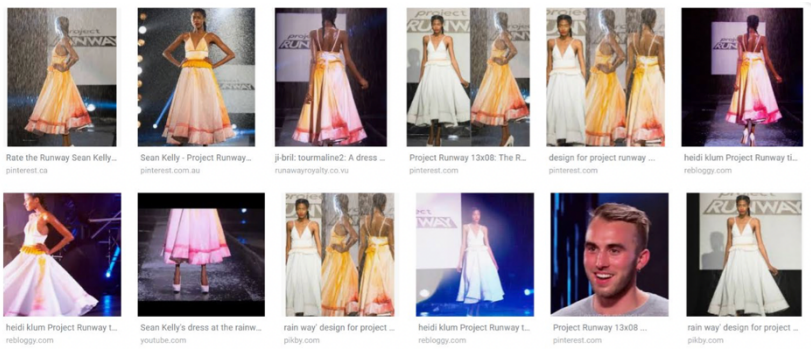
ASPHN: What outcomes could be measured to evaluate the quality and sustainability of these partnerships?
AS: *Formally, this could be measured through collect reporting. Informally this can be measured by longevity of partnerships and/or the depth of collective projects of long-term work plans*.

Panelist: Katie Poirier (KP), Executive Director, Mollen Foundation
ASPHN: What characterizes a strong, effective partnership from your experience? How do you cultivate that?
KP: *What characterizes a strong, effective coalition or partnerships from your experience? How do you cultivate that? Strong partnerships and coalitions encourage clear communication channels, take risks and challenge ideas, and gather diverse action-oriented team members. Groups that are adaptable, accountable, and have results oriented evaluations facilitate effectiveness. Cultivation of genuine work happens through relationship building, which requires trust and understanding.*

ASPHN: What techniques, tools or processes help you ensure everyone has a voice and has equal power?
KP: *To help ensure that everyone has a voice and equal power, I first acknowledge and accept the environment. I work to communicate an awareness of the needs, budget, and income available to the group and anticipate their feedback to be incorporated. Tools such as bi-directional communications like in person meetings, group email updates, shared hashtags, group text messages, and networking events aid in relationship building, trust, and communications.*

ASPHN: How do you create the space to find out the motivation and passion that compels people to participate?

KP: *Creating the space for people to be motivated and passionate, moving them to take action and participate in a greater cause begins with an approach based on previous knowledge and expectations. Take for example the above photographs from the TV series Project Runway. In this particular episode, amateur designers were challenged to make a dress for a "rainway", a runway with rain. There are 2 designers that took different approaches in addressing the environment of the rain. The designer on the left thought to protect the model from the rain and to present a dress of the same accord, a dress that is a beautiful nod to an umbrella- a tool that shields and protects us from our environment, the rain. The dress on the right approaches the environment from another perspective. This designer applies previous knowledge that rain is wet and we expect that when walking in rain, one gets rained on- regardless of if you have an umbrella or not- and completely accepts this. In applying the comparison of these two dresses to the question, it is this. Whatever you are designing, if you approach your environment with an accessible model equipped with proper tools such as knowledge of resources and*



scaled impact, then your environment will do the work, will make the change, will become something you intended and never imagined could be so beautiful and effective. Both of the mentioned designer's perspectives share awareness of the environment's key traits and expectation that the model will get rained on. One designer anticipated change and prepared for it. So, if you know you need a data analyst or a videographer, provide an opportunity for this skill set, this tool, this need, in your design. There is strength in vulnerability within the approach to completely accept your environment. Let's again look at the photos to understand more. As the model in the Rainbow Dress walks out, she is unsure what her environment, the rain, will do to her dress. She is unsure if the design will work- (as was the designer). As she moves, the environment takes to the tools and produces change. In this case, the tools were pockets of ty-dye sown into the fabric, from head to toe. Notice how confident and powerful her pose becomes as the dress transforms itself.

ASPHN: Share one lesson learned from a difficult partnership experience. What would you do differently?
KP: *When experiencing a difficulty in a partnership, it is important to communicate clearly and listen closely. Both partners must be interested in solving the problem and willing to find a solution. In person meetings in a neutral space, as soon as possible, are the best way to address these issues*.

ASPHN: If you could distill partnership successfulness and strength down to one key aspect, what would that be?
KP: *Successfulness and strength of partnerships greatly depend on achieving results and an intended result must be something measurable. Work to understand how the result will be reached, and what is needed to achieve the result. Collect and analyze baseline and final data sets to evaluate any progress or changes.*

ASPHN: What outcomes could be measured to evaluate the quality and sustainability of these partnerships?
KP: *Partnership can be measurable evaluated by the frequency of work done together and the progress toward any shared formal or informal goals established. The number of shared projects such as policy changes lead by committee/members of a group, events hosted or attended together, funding sourced collaboratively, etc. can be measured and tracked progressively. The number of shared goals reached within the timeline and/or budget can estimate the sustainability of the partnerships, project an impact, and anticipate needs.*

<u>Panelist:</u> *Melissa Lonsberry (ML), Consultant, Michigan Department of Education*
ASPHN: What characterizes a strong, effective coalition or partnerships from your experience?
ML: *Buy-in (invested in the goal) How do you cultivate that? Like a garden, a strong coalition or partnership takes teamwork towards a shared goal towards the result of bountiful harvest. It takes having a vision of what the garden will be and produce, planning the who, what, where and whys, fertilizing the ideas, getting the actual work done and distributing the bounty. Then when all said in done, figuring out what worked, what can be done better and who else could help/fund.*

ASPHN: What techniques, tools or processes help you ensure everyone has a voice and has equal power?
ML: *I am not the lead role in the process for building our network, but I see the challenges of identifying key players and bringing all those involved to a common place. Electronic surveys are utilized to solicit input and identify key drivers. Our network has had series of small meetings with sharing opportunities to promote understanding among partners and to share. The larger group then has self-selected focus groups to work within to break down the work into smaller sections. These self-selected groups are focused on areas such as policy, outreach/engagement and share together their vision and outcomes. Having the smaller subgroups increases understanding between related sections and helps broaden the viewpoint beyond their own. Each subgroup shares out their discussion to the larger group for further integration of different perspectives.*

ASPHN: How do you create the space to find out the motivation that compels people to participate?
ML: *This is a personal reflection for each person participating. Often, it could be they are there because of their position or role. Each person's why is uniquely their own. Often, having a short time during introductions to share their experience*

with farms, food, children, education brings out a lot of shared experiences and passion for one or all the components of farm to ECE. Have a brief share and tell at the beginning of the meeting or build into a smaller workgroup task helps build a common ground position for group members and increases buy in.

ASPHN: Share one lesson learned from a difficult partnership experience. What would you do differently?
ML: *As a state agency person, I have found it hard to overcome being the regulator/auditor kill joy. There is a lack of trust built into the system in that if they do something that is outside of the "food program" and/or procurement regulations, they could lose meal reimbursement. I try to promote MI Department of Education's role as an advocate and a resource to help facilitate a better local food system that feeds persons from the cradle to the grave healthier (local) food they may not be able to obtain themselves.*

ASPHN: If you could distill partnership successfulness and strength down to 1 key aspect, what would that be?
ML: *Transparent leadership. To me, a successful partnership is a symbiotic relationship with a shared end goal. A symbiotic relationship where individual needs are primarily being met for all involved with some compromise thrown in to keep things interesting. To have needs met, however, the partners involved must be transparent in what is important to them and find common ground to launch from and come back. If partners are not transparent on what they need to continue, you lose buy-in and it dissolves into a shared waste of time where people fall off to find what they need elsewhere.*

Due to the nature of our work and/or funding sources, we all have our own unique lens we look through and everyone's different perspectives can skew achieving the end goal as defined by the coalition at the start. While in theory all the partners at the table may be promoting Farm to ECE initiatives, our different funders want us to measure different things. How do you collectively move towards the goal and measure all these differing attributes? For instance, my perspective is different than Meagan's from CFRSS at MSU or from a day care center. Everyone at the table views outcomes differently, because the CACFP is funded by the USDA, we look at meal pattern compliance. Are the meal patterns being met with the foods served? Were the foods procured equitably and fairly? Another partner at the table is interested in nutrition ed curricula, another food safety issues, another the impact of local purchasing on the local economy/small producer and the day care center just wants to serve food the children will eat at a price they can afford....

Understanding where another team member comes from, what drives them, what outcomes they need to measure and identifying how it all works together is key to building a successful lattice work that can be sustained because we all know, people can leave. They can change jobs, die, retire, whatever. What if the person driving the work is no longer there?? If the success of the network or coalition in largely dependent on one person, and all others do know what drives the process, the team can lose steam.

ASPHN: What outcomes could be measured to evaluate the quality and sustainability of these partnerships?
ML: *This can be measured based on what the team needs. For me, outcomes relate to CACFP. Outcomes CACFP could track include examples such as: more centers and Sponsors conducting local procurement correctly; including more locally sourced foods in their purchases; including and identifying local foods on their menus; increased variety in local fruits and vegetables served with decreased reliance on processed food. Other outcomes also include less findings on administrative reviews requiring corrective action pertaining to procurement and menus.*

Panelist: *Susan Levy (SL), Communications & Community Relations Director, Native Health*
ASPHN: What characterizes a strong, effective coalition or partnership from your experience?
SL: *Relationships and trust. I think that relationships and trust are the backbone to any strong, effective partnership. Each person and organization comes to the partnership with different hopes, dreams, goals, agendas and baggage. I believe before starting any partnership you must build a relationship and trust. This means many things to many people but trust involves responsiveness, communication (and communications styles), and dedication.*
ASPHN: Are there methods you apply during meetings or outside meetings to achieve this?
SL: *I believe in finding common ground, friendship and really caring about people and their lives. It makes the collaboration much more fun, interesting, and engaging. I enjoy meeting people on neutral turf after I get to know them. Breakfast is not too long, easy, not too expensive, and works well. Most people have a lot of energy in the morning! Patience is also important. I also believe that things always work out the way they are supposed to. It just takes time to see that, just like the saying "when one door closes, another one opens!" You just have to look.*

ASPHN: What techniques, tools or processes help ensure everyone has a voice and equal power?
SL: *This is difficult to answer because again it boils down to trust and a relationship. I find that when people have good relationships and communication styles this is easier to achieve. As you know, people communicate differently and you need to find a way for the partners to work together. Once that "gels" it is easier to move forward and make sure everyone has a voice and is able to express their opinion.*
ASPHN: Are there methods you apply during meetings, or outside of meetings, that are specific to this?
SL: *I think that having good emotional intelligence is key. It is important to be able to read people and pick up nonverbal cues. Paying attention is critical.*

ASPHN: How do you create the space to find out the motivation that compels people to participate?
SL: *This again goes back to relationships and trust and finding out who they "key players" are. People with similar goals, passion, and energy often gravitate towards one another and projects. If people and organizations are not committed to partnerships and projects the programs often "fizzle" out. This sometimes happen when people leave their positions or leadership changes, which can often create challenging situations. It takes a large amount of energy and time to keep projects and partnerships moving along. It is somewhat like tending a garden. You must keep vigilantly working on your garden and nurture it so that eventually you can harvest the crops. This takes sunshine, watering, weeding and it takes persistence and hard work but the rewards are significant. Recognizing and appreciating partners are key*!
ASPHN: Can you describe the ways you recognize and appreciate different partners for different things?
SL: I *think that always recognizing partners is important. It takes a partnership to make a collaboration and this makes both partners look better, act better and appreciate the partnership. We use tours, newsletters, website, speaking engagements, power points and every chance we get to recognize our partners. I think we always try to appreciate our partners and find new ways to let them know how much they are appreciated and needed.*

ASPHN: Share one lesson learned from a difficult partnership experience. What would you do differently?
SL: *We had one difficult employee who represented a partner organization and was incredibly difficult to work with. This is tough for me to answer because I had to work around her because she was incredibly negative and toxic and our other staff and volunteers did not want to work with her. In the end, she left that organization but not before damage was done to both parties. I am probably not the best person to answer this question.*
ASPHN: How did you navigate around and protect your work?
SL: *I am not sure I did a good job with this one. I just didn't communicate with her and we worked around her. Not my best moment but I needed to get the project done. I believe she ended up leaving that organization because others found her difficult to work with.*

ASPHN: If you could distill partnership successfulness and strength down to 1 key aspect, what would that be?
SL: *Giving credit to your partners and showing that appreciation. It takes more than one person/agency/group to be successful. Giving credit where credit is due, is key. This builds stronger partnerships and more collaborations and promotes partnerships within the community as a whole.*
ASPHN: Giving credit where credit is due, is key. Can you give an example of how you do this?
SL: *We always put things in our newsletter, which is distributed to 38,000. We provide their names and information during tours and presentations and we often recognize the partners during our Annual Meeting, fundraiser and holiday party. I often send emails, small cards and gifts when appropriate. This builds stronger partnerships and more collaborations and promotes partnerships within the community as a whole.*

ASPHN: What outcomes could be measured to evaluate the quality and sustainability of these partnerships?
SL: *Each of our collaborations using different metrics. We do gather metrics and look at areas of improvement, performance, and value to both organizations.*