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Background Information

1. Organizational Information

The Food Coalition's (TFC) mission is to "promote access for all Americans to a healthy, equitable and sustainable food system." TFC was founded in 1998 and has been a registered 501(c) (3) since 2001. Since 1998, TFC has conducted food system programming in four topic areas: food production, distribution and infrastructure, health and wellness and food waste recovery. Example projects, by topic area, include:

Food Production: TFC partners with the several regional park systems to set aside land for historic farming operations and provides small business planning services to new and existing farmers, ranchers and food processors. Additionally, TFC has overseen a farm secession program, helping to match new and beginning farmers with existing farmers looking to share their land and expertise.

Distribution and Infrastructure: In 2002, TFC worked with four municipal planning agencies to conduct a local food system assessment. The assessment gathered data on farm land location, crop production, regional food economic indicators, retail outlets and processing facilities. In 2010, TFC partnered with Local University to open a local food hub cooperative, allowing small farm operators a means to reach larger retail markets.

Health and Wellness: Since 2009, TFC has worked with numerous regional partners to help 26 farmers markets install EBT services, allowing residents to use SNAP benefits to purchase fresh regional produce. Also, on an annual basis, TFC publishes a local food guide, which includes links to free nutrition resources, healthy recipes, a farmers' market guide, canning and freezing instructions and more. Finally, TFC has worked with numerous limited-resources neighborhood groups to identify ways (i.e. incentive programs, retail renovations, policy initiatives, etc.) to address limited access to healthy food retail.

Food Waste Recovery: In 2009, TFC lead the planning process and implementation of a new food composting program at the region's largest indoor food market. The program diverts approximately 2,000 pounds/week of food waste from local landfills, is used in youth educational programs and supports several urban gardens.

2. Describe your experience in farm to school initiatives

Through the four TFC program areas, we have worked on farm to school in many ways. Organized by program area, this includes:

Food Production: For the past 5 years, TFC has organized an annual Grower-Buyer meeting, bringing together regional producers and commercial buyers (i.e., K-12 schools, restaurants, hospitals, etc.) to build relationships and discuss new business opportunities. To support the large annual meeting, TFC works with individual school districts to host smaller meetings with regional growers to discuss school needs and to recruit potential vendors. TFC also publishes an annual Buy Local magazine, which includes a list of regional producers, along with regional schools, colleges and hospital involved in local procurement initiatives.

Distribution and Infrastructure: TFC works with the State Department of Agriculture and several grower cooperatives to assess existing regional distribution options and recommend ways to create efficiencies. For example, as a result of TFC's work, three regional growers now partner with a regional distributor to deliver to an urban school district. It was a win-win-win situation for the school district (consistent supply), distributor (new business) and farmers (more time in the fields and continued access to a new market).

Health and Wellness: Starting with one school district in 1998 and expanding to two by 2011, TFC provides in-class and experiential education classes to school children grades K-12. Programs include building and maintaining school gardens, farm visits, classroom farmer presentations and harvest of the month food sample events.

Food Waste Recovery: As one of the newest TFC programs, staff works with six classes (grades 5th – 6th) in two schools to operate food compost and recycling programs. Under TFC and school staff supervision and instruction, students learn about the value of composting, compost safety and home composting techniques.

3. Farm to School Lessons Learned to Date

The Food Coalition has learned many lessons over the years - both about what works well and what does not. The most important overarching lesson we've learned is that "no one size fits all," and this is true across all program areas. At times it has been easy to assume that TFC staff knows what is best for a community partner because of previous successes in similar situations, but this inevitably backfires and slows down or halts a project or partnership. For example, a distribution partnership that works well in one community may not work for another. Likewise, one school district may be most interested in implementing a salad bar program to promote local produce, while another district is most interested in incorporating local protein in a hot dish. Such lessons have reinforced the importance of taking time to build relationships and good communication channels early in any given planning process or partnership.

To help ensure our services and programs meet the needs our school and community partners, TFC focuses its time and energy on farm to school partnerships that have existing support from school administrators and food service staff. This process has worked well for TFC and we hope to build on this success and expand our program reach over the coming years.

With the aim of building stronger farm to school initiatives throughout our region, we see opportunities in two key areas, (1) working more in-depth with individual districts, and (2) providing quality regional networking opportunities for farm to school stakeholders (i.e. schools, farmers, producers, nonprofit partners, etc.) to promote information sharing and relationship building.

A key challenge that TFC has faced over the years has been getting clear and consistent information and support from key administrative partners, particularly food service management companies, State departments of education and the National School Lunch Program. This has improved significantly over the past few years, most likely due to the growth in the number of programs nationwide, and TFC would like to build on this momentum.

The Project

4. Proposed Project

The proposed project will span two years, and enable TFC to (1) expand programming within two existing partner schools, (2) establish two new school partners (one rural/one urban), and (3) expand the reach of the annual grower-buyer meeting and subsequent networking opportunities.

To achieve goal #1, TFC will expand and enrich our partnership with two existing school partners. This will include increasing the number of students who participate in farm visits and increase the total volume of local produce used in school meals. Additionally, TFC will help the schools incorporate local protein items in at least one regular menu item. The school partners include Partners School District #1 (PSD #1) and Partner School District #2. PSD#1 was selected for this project because they have a high rate of students eligible for free and reduced priced meals (81%) and have successfully implemented farm to school programming over the past four years, including a robust school garden program, a farm to school salad bar initiative and the formation of a student-lead health and wellness committee to help oversee farm to school efforts. The district utilizes a self-operating central kitchen and partners with several local producers and distributors to integrate local produce into meal programs. PSD#2 uses a food service management company, which has been very supportive of the District's growing demand for local products. PSD#2 has a high rate of eligible students for free and reduced priced meals (76%) and operates a very successful harvest of the month program.

To achieve goal #2, TFC will partner with two new school districts to help them expand their farm to school efforts. With the assistance of new funding, TFC will provide comprehensive technical support, programming, marketing resources and evaluation assistance. Numerous schools have reached out to TFC over the past several years, and the newest partner will be selected to meet the priorities of the grant program.

To achieve goal #3, TFC will increase marketing and outreach for the annual grower-buyer meeting, and promote the use of similar networking opportunities in other communities and regions. The grower-buyer meeting has helped numerous schools connect with regional suppliers, and TFC will use USDA funds to better promote the meeting to schools, producers and farmers. High priority will be given to recruiting farmers and processors in order to better educate them about school food market opportunities. TFC will also support smaller follow-up meetings between individual districts (or clusters of districts) and local producers. It is at these smaller meetings that schools can explain in detail their procurement needs and regulations.

5. Key Project Partners

Public School District#1: PSD#1 is an urban school district with 14,000 students (K-12). The District has a high rate of students eligible for free and reduced priced meals (81%) and has successfully implemented farm to school programming over the past four years, including a robust school garden program, a farm to school salad bar initiative and the formation of a student-lead health and wellness committee to help oversee farm to school efforts. The district utilizes a self-operating central kitchen and partners with several local producers and distributors to integrate local produce into meal programs. TFC has worked with PSD#1 for the past 3 years on all aspects of their farm to school programming.

Public School District #2: PSD#2 is a rural school district with 2,600 students (K-12) and utilizes a food service management company, which has been very supportive of the district's growing demand for local products. PSD#2 has a high rate of student eligible for free and reduced priced meals (76%) and operates a very successful harvest of the month program. In 2009, PSD#2 hired a part-time F2S coordinator, who is responsible for coordinating day-to-day efforts. TFC has worked with PSD#2 for the past 5 years on all aspects of their farm to school programming.

Department of Agriculture: Since 2008, the Food Coalition has hosted a regional grower-buyer meeting in conjunction with the State Department of Agriculture. The regional event builds on the annual statewide meetings hosted by the Department since 2005. In addition, collaborating on the grower-buyer meeting, TFC works closely with the Department Farm to School Coordinator, sharing resources, best practices and lessons learned. The Department has been a key partner in helping identify and reach out to regional farmers and ranchers, and runs a successful state "buy local" marketing campaign.

Department of Education: The DOE oversees the National School Lunch Program and is highly supportive of farm to school initiatives across the state. Since 2010, DOE established a farm to school point person who provides ongoing technical support to schools/districts, including help with implementing geographic preference in contracts and providing general procurement guidance.

6. Objectives, Activities and Timeline

Objective #1: *By September 30, 2014, host two annual regional grower-buyer meetings so that regional school districts can identify new product options and suppliers.*

Activities:

- *Recruit for the planning committee; encourage widespread participation*
 - *Who: Executive Director (By: November 2013)*
- *Enhance farmer/rancher directory to encourage greater participation*
 - *Who: Project Coordinator (By: November 2014)*

Objective #2: *By August 31, 2013, host at least three different meet and greet events so that partner school districts can discuss business details with local/regional farmers, ranchers, processors and suppliers.*

Activities:

- *Recruit for the planning committee; encourage widespread participation*
 - *Who: Project Director (By: March 2014)*
- *Set meeting locations and agenda*
 - *Who: Planning committee (By: April 2014)*

Objective #3: *By August 31, 2013, recruit two new school district partners to plan and implement farm to school activities.*

Activities:

- *Set meeting schedule with interested school districts.*
 - *Who: Project Coordinator (By: March 2014)*
- *Select school and develop a Farm to School Leadership Team to establish goals that include (1) procurement and (2) education.*
 - *Who: Project Coordinator, (By: May 2014)*
- *Determine local procurement baseline numbers. (By June 2014)*
 - *Who: Project Coordinator and school point of contact*
- *Implement school plan as established by Farm to School Leadership Team.*
 - *Who: School partners and project coordinator. (by June 2015)*

Objective #4: *By February 15, 2014, establish expanded work plan with Partner School District #1 and Partner School District#2.*

Activities:

- *Set two-year timeline and establish expanded F2S education goals and objectives, including farm visit schedule*
 - *Who: District Leadership Team,(By: February 2014)*
- *Query schools regarding which types of products (vegetables, proteins, value added products, etc.) they are most interested in*
 - *Who: Project Coordinator,(By: February 2014)*

Objective #5: *By October 2015, increase total value of local food procurement by 50% of 2013 baseline for PSD#1 and PSD#2.*

Activities:

- *Work with schools to properly utilize geographic preference language in new contacts.*
 - *Who: Project Coordinator,(By: February 2015)*
- *Partner with State Department of Education to ensure geographic preference is properly used.*
 - *Who: Project Coordinator*

7. Evaluation Plan

Process Evaluation: TFC employs an evaluation coordinator, who is be responsible for planning and managing our evaluation efforts and ensuring we collect information to accurately monitor our progress towards achieving the project goals and objectives.

For this project, TFC has established clear process evaluation goals and data collection protocols for each major activity. We will track the total volume and value of the local food procured by our for partner schools (two existing and two new school partners). Because it is often difficult to track local products purchased through distributors, TFC will work closely with these companies to establish a reasonable and effective tracking mechanism. We will also work with our school contacts to collect educational outreach data, including the number of students who receive in-class agriculture and nutrition lessons and/or attend farm field trips.

In addition to collecting program reach data, TFC will also document the lessons learned, challenges and best practices. This information will be collated into a report and shared with the national farm to school community via the TFC website.

Outcome Evaluation: Our organization has never participated in or conducted an outcome evaluation; however, we recognize the dearth of rigorous impact evaluations for farm to school initiatives and TFC would happily join or support such efforts.

Past Experience: TFC has managed several private foundation and local, state and federal agency grants and has successfully collected process evaluation in accordance with the grant requirements. Data are used to fulfill grant reporting requirement, inform our organization's programs, and reported annually in our annual report (see optional attachments).

8. Sustainability

A primary goal of the TFC's work in farm to school is to ensure that district efforts are well integrated into existing programs and operations, thus reducing the need for outside support. By incorporating local procurement into existing contracts, districts can increase local procurement without creating additional administrative burden. Likewise, by aligning farm to school educational activities with existing state education standards, districts can provide new educational opportunities for students while continuing to support district goals, thus reducing the need for outside support.

Additionally, because TFC recognizes the need for long-term sustainability, our work with schools includes long-term planning goals. We work with schools to plan beyond the two year grant period, helping them set two, five and ten year goals and action plans. By doing so, we hope to setup partnering school districts for long-term success that requires minimal financial support from outside organizations.

Quality Assurance & Staffing

9. Project Management & Quality Assurance

To ensure the project activities are completed on time, within budget and with quality results, TFC will establish a F2S Leadership Team to oversee this project. The Team will consist of the TFC Executive Director, Project Manager, Evaluation Coordinator, and Outreach Coordinator, and will meet on a monthly basis to:

- Review program progress;
- Review program budget and expenditures;
- Facilitate quarterly meetings with partner districts; and
- Conduct ongoing meetings with subcontractors.

Johanna Director, Executive Director, will be the primary contact for the project and be responsible for submitting quarterly reports, the final report, and any additional administrative requirements.

To date, TFC has managed several federal grants, including USDA Risk Management Agency (2007), Centers for Disease Control and Invention (2008-09) and USDA Community Foods Project (2010-11).

Coinciding with our federal grant management experience, TFC has received general operating and programming support from two philanthropic foundations, Private Foundation and Family Foundation, for over a decade. We have a strong relationship with our foundation supporters,

based on clear communication and accurate financial reporting. Additionally, TFC publishes an annual report, showcasing our accomplishments, expenditures and future goals. For additional information, our annual report is included as an optional attachment.

10. Staffing

Johanna Director, Executive Director – Ms. Director has served as the Executive Director of The Food Coalition since 2001. She will oversee direction, timeline and implementation planning for the farm to school implementation project. In addition, she will play an active role on the Farm to School Leadership Team and the Oversight Committee. See attached resume.

William Coordinator, Project Coordinator – Mr. Coordinator will oversee the day-to-day farm to school operations, and manage all supporting staff efforts. He will be responsible for coordinating school and community activities, along with ensuring that all grant reporting requirements are met in a timely manner. See attached resume.

11. Financial Management System

As noted in Section 9: Project Management and Quality Assurance, TFC has successfully managed three federal grants: USDA Risk Management Agency (2007), Centers for Disease Control and Invention (2008-09) and USDA Community Foods Project (2010-11). The organization has a financial management department responsible for tracking expenditures and allocating funds according to project guidelines.