Building Partnerships

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Building partnerships and engaging the community is essential to a successful and sustainable farmers’ market. Developing solid relationships with community partners will strengthen their involvement in your market and contribute to a market’s long-term viability. The following provides an overview of how a farmers’ market can engage the support of its community and municipality to achieve sustainable success.

Potential Community Partners

The amount and type of community partners that can contribute to your market is nearly limitless. Examples include businesses and merchants, local government and municipal councilors, schools and educational institutions, non-profit organizations, small business associations, health and social service organizations, customers, and others. The more people and organizations involved, the more vibrant the market will be. Partners can support farmers’ markets in numerous ways, including:

1. Serving on the market’s board of directors
2. Assisting with market operations (site set-up, parking, signage)
3. Fundraising, organizing special events, and grant writing (see section 1 (c))
4. Collaborating on communications material such as marketing plans and press releases
   • Engaging in advocacy for the farmers’ market
   • Providing financial support for operations or investments

Gaining Community Support

To build a mutually beneficial relationship, find out what it will take for a potential partner to support the market. Ensure you have a mission statement that clearly outlines your market’s purpose. This allows the market to identify and align with partners who have similar mission statements and allows community partners to easily understand how the partnership will benefit the market’s mission. Markets should consider: “Why should the community support our farmers’ market? What are the potential gains to the partner? What are the potential gains for the entire community, which both the market and the partner would be motivated to provide?”
Prove the community value of farmers’ markets to all stakeholders and potential partners by emphasizing the following:

- Farmers’ markets bring people together and support healthy communities.
- Farmers’ markets increase access to fresh, nutritious food and strengthen our community’s food security.
- Markets bring people to central gathering areas, generating spin-off business and an economic ‘spill over’ effect for other downtown or near-by businesses.
- Markets create an environment where local farmers can sell their food at a higher profit margin, which benefits the local economy, preserves agricultural land, and ensures there is an in-tact farming sector available for the next generation to live into.
- Farmers’ markets drive the development of local food systems, educate consumers about the diversity of seasonal, local food products and create a market for local niche and value-added businesses.
- Farmers' markets are great incubators for small businesses and can create entry opportunities for immigrants, new and returning Nova Scotians, youth, and people in need of career transitioning.

Getting Started
It is important to remember that community members and partners may not know the benefits your market provides to the community. Therefore, one of the first things to do is collect data in order to further demonstrate the market’s impact. The following are a few aspects to consider: How many visitors come to your market? What are your customers’ spending habits? How did your customers hear about the market and why do they choose to shop there? How many acres of farmland are represented by the producers at your market? Does your market donate produce to a local food bank?

**Document all of the facts that you collect and publicize them!**
**Emphasize the market’s varied value to the community.** In order to successfully share this information, the following suggestions may be used:

- Create a short fact sheet using the data you collected to outline your impact. This can be a powerful publicity tool for your market.

- Regularly communicate your market’s community impact through press releases to local radio and newspapers, on your market’s printed promotional material, through reports on your website, and through social media updates (Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

- Request a general meeting with local government representatives and other stakeholders. These may include your MLA, municipal councilors,
local chambers of commerce, small business associations, business
development organizations, and others. Prepare a presentation, formal
or informal, to discuss the economic impact of your farmers’ market.
Include your market’s history, a snapshot of your current operations,
plans for the future, and financial realities. Make sure you have printed
materials ready for your audience members to take away. We suggest
sharing the *Cultivating Community Economy* resource (Appendix A) or
the 'Dig In’ postcard (Appendix B).

• Be prepared with answers when community partners ask how they can
support your market. Consider using this as an opportunity to ask for
grants, funding, and partnerships or simply as an opportunity to build a
stronger relationship and start a dialogue. Local businesses can be
asked to book at table at the market, politicians can be invited to
speak on event days, media people can be asked to consider a monthly
'feature' based on your market's personality, and community
organizations can be asked for volunteers.

• Host a 'Community Night' for customers, vendors and the general
public to raise awareness and share information about your market’s
history and economic impact. Combine this community night with other
attractions, such as live music or a community supper featuring local
products from your vendors. Another idea is to host an information
session at a novel location in your community (library, community
center), which may allow you to reach a wider audience. Give out
vendor and customer 'awards' to showcase the talents and
commitments of your vendors and loyal customers.

Building Relationships
Word of mouth can be a farmers’ market’s best promotion strategy for
gaining community partners and building relationships. Look to your board
members, market manager, vendors and regular customers for skills that will
help promote and support your market. The following provides an outline of
how to gain support from specific community partners:

• Gaining support from **local business and for-profit enterprises** will
be different depending on your location. Engage with local businesses
to find out what their goals are and how they view the farmers’ market
(do they view markets as good neighbours or as competition?) Spend
time building goodwill and understanding to create a strong foundation
for ongoing partnerships. Find opportunities to cross-market your
business partners. For example, you could sell a discount booklet
featuring local businesses at the market or provide a table at your
market for local business day. **There are several ways to gain**
support from business partners. Other ideas include inviting a supportive business representative to sit on the market’s board, approaching merchants for seasonal financial support or donations for fundraising gift-baskets, asking merchants to post flyers for market events or asking for advocacy when the need arises.

• A mutual collaboration with community government can lead to more successful markets, especially in terms of market location. Ask your municipal representatives what is needed and think about how the market can help strengthen the community by meeting these needs. For example, could your market help to meet its town’s healthy eating initiative? Co-sponsor a community gardening initiative? Set up seasonal meetings with your community development officer or town manager to discuss how they can help facilitate your farmers’ market. Municipal practices that can foster market success include: supportive and aligned policy; securing location, insurance and facilities; administration operations, infrastructure and logistics support. An excellent resource is Planning for Successful Farmers Markets in Towns and Cities presented by the BC Association of Farmers’ Markets, which can be ordered online (http://www.bcfarmersmarket.org/resources/subpage/best-practices-guide-municipalities-0) or borrowed from FMNS. If using municipal land for your market location, work towards agreeing on a Terms of Use contract to secure long-term access to this location. There are several ways to gain support from community government. Consider inviting a supportive government representative to sit on your board, work with local government to co-apply for grants as they can act as fiscal agents for markets, ask to be included in the municipal newsletter or annual report, and involve town representatives in logistics such as providing green space, parking, in-kind resources, and more.

• Involving young people in the farmers’ market through schools and educational institutions is a great way to establish a positive partnership. If you have a school garden in your region, ask the teacher in charge to provide input to the market board or consider asking the school’s food service director about increasing the amount of local food served. Partner with school programs for projects that meet their curriculum and also benefit the market (food demos and activities, picnic tables, posters, etc.). Create farmers’ market contests in schools to generate interest from students and their families. There are several ways to gain support from partnering with educational institutions. Ask schools for student volunteers to help with customer counts and other operational activities, consider publicizing the market in the school newsletter, consider that schools
may help fundraise for local initiatives such as farmers’ markets, and ask that schools write letters of support for grants.

• Partnering with other non-profit organizations can create exposure and bring new faces to the farmers’ market. Consider allowing one free or low-cost table for environmental or sustainability organizations, on a rotating basis, to promote their mission (which may be compatible with yours). **There are several ways to gain support from non-profit organizations.** A member of a compatible organization could be a great addition to the market board and open up opportunities for funding. Organization members may volunteer at your market, you may ask to be included in the organization's newsletter and ask the organization to speak to the market’s importance when the need arises.

• **Health and social service organizations** can be great allies for farmers’ markets if they focus on healthy eating and healthy lifestyles. These organizations may work with low-income clients, which gives markets an opportunity to demonstrate how their pricing is comparable to grocery store pricing and educate people about the benefits of eating locally. **There are several ways to gain support from health and social service organizations.** Ask a representative to join your board to help the marker better connect with their resources, acquire youth volunteers, work together to apply for grants, and ask to be publicized in their newsletters or on their website. These organizations may be able to provide free health screenings or workshops on healthy habits during the market.

• Last but not least, **customers** are a dedicated group of supporters that you should always engage. Most customers support you by shopping at the market each week, but some may go a step further to donate their time, energy and talents. **There are several ways to gain support from customers.** Dedicated customers may provide a unique and important point of view to your board of directors, they may volunteer on a recurring basis, they can become ‘Friends of the Market’ (see Appendix C on pg. 12), they can ‘tell a friend’ to increase word of mouth advertising, they can post signs for your market at their home or business, and they can provide support by signing petitions, advocating for policy change, etc.

• For more information, please see Appendix D: *Building Community Partnerships*

**Moving Forward**

FMNS hopes to see all farmers’ markets in Nova Scotia building sustainable community partnerships. Moving forward, there are a few more questions to consider when building successful community relationships:

• Does my market have a clear mission statement?
• Does my market have any plans or goals for the future?
• Who are my current community partners?
• What type of community partners do I need and what role will they play?
• How can FMNS help my market achieve one of its community partnership goals?

For a detailed case study on how one of our Nova Scotia markets achieved its goals, we recommend you read: Scaling Up Guide – Argyle Farmers’ & Artisanal Market. Please see Appendix E.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Cultivating Community Economy - Farmers’ Markets of Nova Scotia Economic Impact Study

Appendix B: ‘Dig In’ Postcard

Appendix C: Friends of the Market Program

Appendix D: Building Community Partnerships

Appendix E: Scaling Up Guide – Argyle Farmers’ & Artisanal Market

View all appendices at the following link: 
http://farmersmarketsnovascotia.com/?p=6646

ADDITIONAL READINGS

"New York Farmers’ Market Training Manual"
This reading provides an extensive guide for managing various aspects of a farmers’ market including: market manager roles, budgeting, fundraising, vendor recruitment, building a farmers’ market community, connecting with municipality & business, friends of the market, connecting with customers through media, building systems for sustainable farmers’ markets, special event planning, marketing plans, measuring performance, and more. We suggest that you check it out! Available at: 
http://farmersmarketsnovascotia.ca/readings/
"Growing your Farmers’ Market" and "Promoting your Farmers’ Market"

Increasing revenue involves bringing new customers to the market and this is where advertising, promotion and publicity come into play. ‘Growing your Farmers’ Market’ (see pg. 49) and ‘Promoting your Farmers’ Market (see pg. 9) will provide some insight on the most effective methods for advertising and promoting farmers’ markets. Available at:
http://farmersmarketsnovascotia.ca/readings/