



ACRE CASE STUDY

Strategic Planning for the New Jersey Food Democracy Collaborative (NJFDC)

Introduction:

ACRE is a professionally-facilitated strategic planning process to help place-based food & ag groups work together to plan collective action projects. In this case, ACRE was employed for strategic planning with a statewide food policy council inclusive of many stakeholder groups.

Outreach to Facilitator:

In Jan 2023, Kim Hines of NAFSN met Jeanine Cava of NJFDC at a NOFA NJ Conference.

Relationship Building:

In Mar-Sep 2023, Kim spoke with Jeanine multiple times to discuss possible uses and funding for implementing ACRE at a statewide level in NJ. In that time period, Jeanine promoted ACRE widely as a training opportunity to NJ advocates through NJFDC.

Meeting with Catalysts:

In Oct 2023, Kim met with Jeanine and Marissa Barron, a member of NJFDC, to discuss the possibility of Kim facilitating an ACRE Workshop for NJFDC strategic planning. Kim agreed.

Core Group Formation:

NJFDC drew active members from throughout the state to form a Core Group of 12 members.

Introductory Meeting with Core Group:

On Nov 2, 2023, Kim met with 10 Core Group members of NJFDC to explain the ACRE Process. The group discussed using most ACRE exercises, but also some modifications to meet the group's needs. They agreed by consent to use the ACRE Process for strategic planning.

Triggering Event:

The Core Group agreed to this statement as their triggering event:

For the first time since its founding in 2020, NJFDC has funding to hire one full-time staff to implement priorities set forth by its members.

Modification of the ACRE Process:

Given the unique nature of NJFDC's existing membership, composed of representatives of dozens of food/ag groups from throughout NJ, Kim agreed to conduct one-on-one discovery interviews with all Core Group members and some additional key stakeholders.

Reporter:

In Nov 2023, grad student Katie Kennedy at Montclair State University joined the effort. Katie took the ACRE course to prepare for the Reporter role with agreement from Core Group.

Core Group Discovery Interviews:

In Dec 2023-Jan 2024, Katie coordinated and Kim conducted one-on-one interviews with 11 Core Group members and 7 other stakeholders to compile unattributed notes into an *Insights Document* detailing the organization's strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities.

Core Group Meeting, Insights & Stakeholder Analysis:

On Jan 27, 2024, Kim met with the Core Group. To start, they used the *Insights Document* to "boil and cluster" priority areas for their ACRE workshop. This replaced the Opportunity Generating Exercise for NJFDC. Once no critical concerns were expressed, the group proceeded with the Core Group Planning Meeting, including an extensive stakeholder analysis.

Workshop Planning:

In Jan-Feb, NJFDC Core Groups members assumed Workshop planning responsibilities.

Workshop:

On Feb 23, 2024, the NJFDC ACRE Workshop was held from 8am-4pm ET at Mercer County Extension, in Ewing NJ. Twenty-two attendees participated, representing organizations in farming and farmer support, food access, public health, farmworker rights, NJ higher ed and ag extension, markets, environmental orgs, healthcare, and NJ state gov leadership. The workshop included these ACRE exercises: (1) Shared History Exercise, (2) Review and Affirmation of Existing Shared Values, Shared Vision and Shared Mission, (3) Initiative Build Out Exercise, (4) Lunch, (5) Small Group Presentations, (6) Prefeasibility Analysis, (7) Plan for Drafting the Strategic Plan (8) Workshop Evaluation.

Workshop Evaluation:

[Evaluation results](#) were compiled and shared with the Co-Chairs.

The ACRE Notebook & Strategic Plan Draft:

In Mar 2024, Katie finalized notes in the ACRE Notebook. Using these notes, Jeanine and Kim drafted a strategic plan that they shared with Core Group members for review in Apr 2024.

ACRE Summit:

On May 2, 2024, NJFDC held a virtual ACRE Summit to review, edit, and assign leadership to action steps.

The Core Group agreed by consent to accept the strategic plan on June 3, 2024.

Unique Learning from Engagement with this Specific Group:

Throughout the process, it was very helpful that six people in the Core Group had trained in ACRE Facilitation. In this way, instead of asking people to "trust the process" we invited them to "know the process." Furthermore, this group seemed ready to make good use of the ACRE Process because of their own experiences as facilitators for food/ag groups in NJ. It often felt like a train-the-trainers opportunity for ACRE/NJFDC. Modification of the ACRE Process was necessary given NJFDC's status as an existing entity, rather than a new entity.



We thank NJFDC for granting NAFSN permission to publish this case study for educational purposes.