Make Food Matter Advocacy & Action Workshops

Session II:
Learning from our Actions

The purpose of the workshop series was to get better at telling food stories, so that more resources and efforts mobilize towards healthy, just and sustainable food systems. The focus of Session II was to reflect on the experiences of teams who had worked on a prototyping project over the summer and draw conclusions and lessons learned about the key elements of effective messaging and prototyping around food security issues.

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www.makefoodmatter.ca

The specific outcomes of the Advocacy & Action Workshops were to:

✤ Build our fluency with food security messages in order to reach communities, policy makers, and governments at all levels.

✤ Explore a prototyping approach (rapid experimental discovery through doing).

✤ Identify projects that grow the conversation about food security.

Session I of the Make Food Matter Advocacy & Action Workshops was held on June 18 and 19, 2015. Over the course of two days, participants built their capacity to communicate effectively using community dialogues, traditional media and social media. Together, participants developed fluency with food security messaging in order to reach communities, policy maker and governments at all levels. Participants were also introduced to the social labs approach and formed teams around five prototype projects that were to run until Session II in the fall. Between the sessions, each group was offered two coaching calls with Leo Artalejo (Public Relations Strategist) and Will Martin (Innovation Strategist).

Session II was held on October 1, 2015 at the beautiful and newly opened Dartmouth North Community Food Centre. The day began with a welcome from Patty Williams, Director of the Food Action Research Centre (FoodARC) at Mount Saint Vincent University. She introduced the new FoodARC Project Coordinator, Aliya Jamal, and the facilitators for the day's session, Sera Thompson and Gabrielle Donnelly. To start, Gabrielle guided the group through a check-in where everyone shared what had happened since Session I of the Advocacy and Action Workshops, and what they were hoping to get out of the day.

Themes from the check-in included:

● Continuing excitement from Session I
● Curiosity about how others' prototyping projects were going
● Frustration that some of their own projects had not moved forward since Session I
● Momentum & willingness to take prototype projects and their own understandings of social labs further

To carry forward some of the content from Session I, Gabrielle and Sera led us through a reminder of the key concepts covered in that session. Participants talked about what they remembered learning and the facilitators emphasized some key points related to the prototyping and social labs approach.

Key Concepts from Session I

1. Effective Communication and Digital Advocacy: Social media is a low-investment form of advocacy, but given how information-saturated the public is, you need to "earn" people's attention with content that is informative, touching, and/or funny.

2. Social Labs: A social lab is a stable ongoing platform for testing and implementing innovative and effective solutions to a complex social challenge.

3. Prototyping: Prototyping is an experimental action-learning approach to testing and refining promising projects "in the real world". It's important to get a rough version of the idea to users early and use their feedback to refine

(or ditch) your model. The key idea is that your loyalty is to what works and what is needed to solve the complex challenge, rather than to your great idea.

4. Lean Canvas: One approach to prototyping we have been using comes from the business start-up world. It is focused on building a functioning business model by iteratively testing an offering with end users.

Prototype Story Sharing

Next, each prototype team had the opportunity to tell the story of their project. Each team shared what they had been up to and what they had learned since Session I. Although most participants had joined a prototype team during Session I, not all had continued to be involved in the prototype, due to limited time or limited resources. As well, not all active teams had been consistently working on their projects between the sessions – some had faced significant roadblocks to action also due to limited time or limited resources, or due to external factors.

Other participants were initially reluctant to share their stories, thinking that they had not been using a prototyping approach. However, as the facilitators encouraged them to reflect on their activities over the summer, these participants realized that they had in fact been quite active. In particular, one other prototype team had been active over the summer but had not been using the specific prototyping structure introduced in Session I (e.g. the Lean Canvas and the Experiment Sheets). Again, after some facilitated reflection, this team realized that they had indeed been using a prototyping philosophy and spirit, even if they had not been using the specific tools.

The following teams shared their prototyping stories:

- School Breakfast Program
- Community Kitchen
- Our Food Social Media Strategy
- Bringing Food Insecure Families Together
- Make Food Matter Social Media Campaign

Participants who were not part of a prototype team were story-listeners. Listeners acted as harvesters to gather key themes they heard in the stories; each listener was given one theme to listen for as the stories unfolded. Once the team had finished telling their story, listeners shared back what they had heard for each theme, which sparked reflective discussion about the projects.

Once all the stories and the key themes had been shared, small groups summarized what listeners had heard under a given theme. Bringing all of the stories together, groups identified what had worked well and where the obstacles were, relative to each theme. Based on these insights, three recommendations were made for each theme area.

See below for the theme summaries.

Risk Taking

What worked?
- A network of support makes it easier to take risks
- Experiment lots! Experiment again!
- Authenticity and conviction can help overcome discomfort and risk

Obstacles?
- Feeling lost and losing confidence with prototyping
- What does success look like?
- Still learning about prototyping
- Scarcity and preciousness of resources
- Our sense of professionalism makes it hard to be ok with failing

Recommendations?
- Find a safety zone, and be honest about what you can risk
- Lean in! Discomfort is OK and necessary in trying it a new way
- Don't do it alone. Find or create a supportive environment

Messaging that Works (in general, or for food security specifically)

What worked?
- Develop messages with audience in mind
- An emotional connection
- Being resourceful about who can deliver the message and adapting it based on results

Obstacles?
- Identifying and understanding the audience
- Bridging the gap between us and our audience
- Understanding online analytics to measure a message's impact
- Getting trapped by assumptions

Recommendations?
- Stay flexible and open to feedback
- Don't be afraid to fail. Just Do It!
- Find what: connects, resonates, evokes emotion

Social Media and New Tools

What worked?
- Using photos and messaging
- Reaching new and a variety of people

Obstacles?
- No position devoted to social media work
- Knowing and understanding your audience

Recommendations?
- Identify the What, Why, and How
- Use a variety of social media
- Use experienced people who can spend more time on and are more active on social media tools

Mindset Shift (Planning to Prototyping) (have we kicked the planning habit?)

What worked?
- Having a teammate
- Short timelines
- Being responsive to feedback
- Not being too attached to knowing the right answer
- Getting fresh eyes
- Doing what you have courage for

Obstacles?
- Trying to get it right before you start
- Sense of failure & self-judgement
- Deeply ingrained project mindset
- Funding and social expectations

Recommendations?
- Talk it out (reflection & coaching)
- Valuing the personal shift required: support, empathy, self-care
- Work with what you have
- Use limitations as opportunities

Measuring Impact (how to tell if our prototype is working)

What worked?
- Access to info, having someone to help you understand what it means
- Clear, defined indicators of impact (lean canvas)
- Developmental evaluation

Obstacles?
- Understanding indicators (that are realistic to access)
- Defining the indicator, having it simple and relatable

Recommendations?
- Keep it Simple! Short term goals + long term vision. Simple measures, easy to understand and access
- Resources to support choosing best indication(s) of impact
- Define overall impact and impact of experiments

After Prototyping

After lunch, Sera discussed what happens after we have completed a cycle of prototyping. Sera suggested that teams ask themselves the questions:

"What has energy now?"
"Where is the risk?"
"Where is the crack? Where is there grief and longing?"

The best energy and resources of the team should be put towards the answers. Sera emphasized again the power of being dedicated to what works, instead of to your great idea.

There are a number of possible moves for a team after a cycle of prototyping:

- Persevere: keep going in the same direction and building on what you have
- Pivot: change your direction (goal), team, or offering
- Replicate: that worked, so let's do another one/more
- Apply the process and learnings to another project
- Stop, and end well

Sera also talked about the paradox between building personal competence and a prototyping approach, which values, learning, impact and agility over perfection, planning and adherence to your idea. She emphasized that mastery is a lifelong journey – you never arrive and there is always more to learn. She also noted that the best way to learn in a prototyping approach is to start now and not to be too precious. Assume that you already have what you need to begin to practice and experiment.

After Action Review

Much of the afternoon was dedicated to prototype teams working together on their projects. Sera introduced us to the structure of the After Action Review, which involves reflecting on what the original intentions of the project were; what the key events throughout the project have been; what lessons have been learned along the way; and based on these learnings, what are the next action steps. Those who were not part of a project supported the teams as note takers.

Teams shared the conclusions of their After Action Reviews, giving the whole group a sense of where each prototype was and what teams had learned from the prototyping process. Given the intent of the Make Food Matter website as an active platform to share strategies that are working around food security messaging, Gabrielle challenged everyone in the group to write a blog post about what they had learned through their prototyping experience.

To close the day, Gabrielle led us through a check-out. In the check-out, we heard people say:

- They were glad for the opportunity to come together as a group, and to reflect with their prototyping team
- Session II was a successful follow-up to Session I
- They would have liked more of a focus on key messaging regarding food security
- It was great to be at the Dartmouth North Community Food Centre
- Prototyping is a very different experience from traditional approaches. It's uncomfortable, but promising.