

# Outreach for New Farmer Programs

## A Brief Overview

### History and Context

New Entry's outreach methods have shifted over the years and continue to do so in a few ways, both in terms of program-specific outreach/recruitment and broader organizational outreach. The core pieces of New Entry's larger organizational outreach have generally been our website and a regular e-newsletter. In recent years, this also includes some social media activity (a blog, Facebook and Twitter accounts). Organizational outreach is also accomplished through tabling at regional conferences. All of these efforts aim to make more people aware of New Entry's programs, spurring further word-of-mouth outreach and casting a wide net to bring in new program participants and funders.

Despite the wide reach of these efforts, targeted outreach is essential in order to recruit participants for specific programs. This is particularly important for finding limited-resource participants for our Farm Business Planning Course and other core programs. Targeted, on-the-ground outreach was once the primary means of recruiting immigrant and refugee participants for the Farm Business Planning Course. This requires a lot of time, often with little immediate concrete payoff, and it fell by the wayside over the past several years due to a combination of time constraints, redefinition of the Outreach Coordinator position, and the much increased number of Farm Business Planning applicants brought in through other outreach methods. There is now a renewed focus on this sort of targeted outreach in order to connect with limited-resource participants.

The current Outreach Coordinator position also includes intake for the Farm Business Planning Course and *Explore Farming!*, as well as coordinating and teaching *Explore Farming!*

### Staffing

Several work-study students or interns served as temporary Outreach Coordinators before the position became permanent (combined with the Livestock Program Coordinator position). Before that, on-the-ground outreach was shared between the Project Director and other program staff members. The current Outreach Coordinator position averages 10-15 hours per week, with high variability between weeks. The weeks leading up the start of the Farm Business Planning Course are particularly busy, since this position is responsible for intake and registration for that course.

In order to accomplish all of the elements of this position, the current 10-15 hours per week is probably a minimum time commitment. Ideally, the position would be at least 20 hours per week, especially in order to conduct serious on-the-ground outreach and recruitment for core courses.

## Resources

Aside from staff time, outreach costs are relatively small, limited mainly to a portion of online service costs (e.g. maintaining a Constant Contact account); occasional printing costs for brochures, flyers, and other outreach materials; registration fees for conferences; and mileage costs.

## Key Activities

**Recruitment for core courses:** Done electronically through e-lists, announcements sent to partner organizations and calendars. Targeted outreach conducted at events, small-group meetings with specific audiences, and collaboration with partner organizations whose constituents may be interested in New Entry's programs. Also: gather contact information of potential participants and track their status.

**Intake and registration for core courses:** Serve as first point of contact for anyone interested in Farm Business Planning Course and *Explore Farming!*, and liaison throughout the registration process; explain program details and expectations to potential participants; track registration status of all potential participants. Also under this umbrella: respond to any general inquiries (email, phone or occasionally office drop-ins) about New Entry's programs.

**Run *Explore Farming!*:** In addition to the recruitment and intake for this two-hour discussion/workshop, schedule and teach each session of *Explore Farming!*, an introductory 3-hour class that discusses the fundamental components and requirements of running a small farm business.

**Create monthly e-newsletter:** This includes gathering input from program staff about upcoming events and the past month's news and accomplishments in different program areas; writing and/or editing all content; locating and inserting pictures; and scheduling the mailing.

**Web updates:** Maintain and regularly update Facebook and Twitter accounts, and the New Entry blog.

## Goals/Strategies

**Increased participation of limited-resource individuals in core courses:** Since New Entry's focus is on helping limited-resource farmers, this is a key goal. This requires targeted outreach and recruitment, especially in and around Lowell.

**Maintain high levels of participation in core courses:** Continued persistent outreach through diverse channels.

## Lessons Learned

Web-based communications are increasingly at the center of organizational outreach for all manner of nonprofits, and are certainly very important in many ways. However, it is also a form of communication that can have the effect of filtering the same underserved populations that a program such as New Entry may most want to reach. Connecting with these target participants requires legwork and personal attention. In the intake phases alone, New Entry spends about four times as much time corresponding with target limited-resource participants compared to those who sought us out on their own.

There is another side to the coin, though. While getting a limited-resource individual to participate in programs may require individual attention every step of the way, there is a point at which you may feel that you are dragging someone into participating. Getting that person to register and show up may be nice for grant reporting, but if they do not show much personal interest or initiative from the start, you are probably not working with someone who will be a long-term participant—or, more importantly, a successful farmer.