



# The Blueprint

## A Business Assistance Alliance for Farm and Food Businesses Executive Summary 2019

### **The Blueprint is the right project at the right time for this region.**

Farm and food businesses feed us, help keep our environment healthy, can mitigate climate change, and support our regional economy—so we need them to be viable, thriving businesses. Business technical assistance ensures they can succeed.

### **The Blueprint helps farm and food businesses succeed.**

The Blueprint network will increase the number and economic viability of farm and food businesses by bringing together providers and organizations from across New England and New York's Hudson Valley to address shared challenges, facilitate more uniform high-quality coverage, and more effectively share and expand limited resources.

This project serves business technical assistance providers and organizations that will ultimately support long-term farm and food-enterprise viability in the region. In addition to our economic impact, our work also fosters a more equitable and inclusive sector that engages traditionally underserved communities, and we support and strengthen entrepreneurs who help conserve farmland and mitigate the effects of climate change for generations to come.

### **The Blueprint recognizes local agriculture's role in regional and local economies.**

Farm and food businesses are a critical piece of just about every local economy—urban and rural, state and regional, wealthy or marginalized. Especially in (but not limited to) rural areas, they create jobs, build wealth and capital, drive community development, produce healthy and culturally appropriate food, and offer unique opportunities to new entrants.

### **Without the success of our end beneficiaries—farmers and food entrepreneurs—our world would look very different:**

- Unfarmed land would lie fallow or, more likely, be sold for development, depleting our region's open spaces, destroying the best agricultural soils, and leaving the land irrevocably unfit for future agriculture.
- Local markets, groceries, food hubs, and wholesalers would lack access to healthy, locally grown food—meaning that consumers would fall victim to food insecurity or be forced to purchase food transported from far away.
- The loss of agricultural infrastructure—physical, economic, and knowledge-based—would be nearly impossible to recover once lost, making the return of future generations to this line of work more difficult.

- Farm and food businesses also protect our water supply, build soil, and propagate humane production processes—practices that will disappear if these enterprises do.
- Our region’s distinct agricultural identity would fade, depriving future generations of important historical legacies.

**The success of small farms and food businesses, especially in an era of Big Ag and bigger chains, offers a sense of economic democracy—a chance for anyone to successfully build a thriving business that can do *good* in addition to doing *well*.**

### Our Solution

The status quo offers at best a patchwork of informal networks—meaning providers depend heavily on personal connections, end beneficiaries may not know what individual resources are available or may not be able to access one-on-one coaching locally, and the system as a whole lacks efficiency, unity, and connection. *In short, we can and must do better.*

Led by longtime sector experts, the Blueprint project is distinguished by its collaborative, forward-thinking approach to business viability for farmers and food entrepreneurs—a unique regional purview, a broad collection of stakeholders, and a specific focus on this critical element of farm and food enterprise viability. The Blueprint project will create a singular network of business advisors working for farm and food businesses—resulting in a group better able to share best practices, build a pipeline for the future, and deliver more uniform high-quality services to a larger client pool. The network will also be well equipped to fundraise collectively for sector-wide benefit.

*The Blueprint aims to increase the number and economic viability of farm and food businesses representing the diverse populations of the Hudson Valley and New England.* The project will shift the regional status quo of service provision by networking, elevating, and supporting business technical assistance to farm and food businesses and by constructing a professional network of providers that is representative of the diversity of our farm and food community in our region.

### What are our specific intended outcomes?

Our goal is to establish and sustain a strong, diverse interstate network of business technical assistance providers that facilitates professional development, networking, and advocacy opportunities for members while cultivating a pipeline of future service providers and securing resources to benefit the entire network.

#### 1. Develop a pipeline of new advisors.

It is critical to cultivate a pipeline of new qualified service providers to maintain the workforce in the region, meet the needs of Socially Disadvantaged Populations, and address the expanding needs of stakeholders as demands for services grow in the region. **We will learn from established programs developed to train service providers to work with women and populations facing cultural barriers.**

## 2. Create a Professional Development Network.

Currently farm advisors have very few opportunities to build their skills and create a community of support. The development of a network of business advisors is an essential aspect of The Blueprint and achievement of its three objectives. This is especially true when sharing best practices, identifying opportunities for professional development, and collaborating to meet our clients' needs. Consideration of SDA populations as this structure is developed is key.

## 3. Identify the most critical resource gaps and develop promising funding strategies.

We know that there are opportunities for farm assistance programs to leverage their collective efforts across the region, and significantly increase funding for these essential programs - as well as for direct farmer assistance. Our organizations also know that farmers from SDA populations have consistently been under-funded and under-served. In order to truly serve our farmers, we need to not only identify these gaps in financial assistance we must create innovative ways to fund our collective work.

### How will we measure success?

The Blueprint's mission will succeed when its members can consistently meet demand for high-quality business technical assistance services. In organizational terms, we will succeed when our network is financially sustainable and well used across the region from year to year.

## THE BLUEPRINT ORGANIZATION

### Leadership

#### Executive Committee

**Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation,  
The Carrot Project, and  
Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program**

#### Steering Committee

**Albany Cooperative Extension American Farmland Trust, Grow NYC, Hudson Valley Farmer Training Collaborative, Land for Good, and New Entry Sustainable Farming Project**

### This project has distinct aims for various audiences:

**Practitioners and Programs:** Establish an integrated professional network, with opportunities for training, mentorship, referrals, funding, sharing of resources and best practices, and other benefits

**Allies:** Effectively leverage monetary and other resources to support, elevate, train, and promote business assistance providers throughout the region

**Influencers:** Shift perceptions of farm and food business viability [work] as important and advocate for its role in economic development and in realizing other food system goals around wealth creation, diversified participation, food access, environmental conservation, and climate-change mitigation.

## **Organizational Values**

**Stewardship and Sustainability:** We focus on the long-term health and vitality of our working landscape. We believe farm and food entrepreneurs contribute to food sovereignty and economic security for local and regional communities. The value and benefits of working landscapes and the agricultural economy need to be clearly articulated in and valued by society.

**Equitable Access to Resources:** We recognize that access to land, capital and economic security are integral to food sovereignty and ability to start and grow a business, and we are committed to supporting farmers and food systems entrepreneurs in their pursuit of these resources. We acknowledge that there are certain groups of people that have historically been disadvantaged and we work to ensure equal access to these resources by all.

**Effectiveness and Accountability:** Our partners and programs are results focused, track progress, and adjust accordingly.

**Innovation and Entrepreneurship:** We support farm and food entrepreneurs in pursuing their ability to provide a living for their families, contribute to the economic security of their communities, create good jobs and have a good quality of life. Viable businesses create abundance and contribute to healthy communities.

**Respect and Collaboration:** We bring a humble, thoughtful, respectful and practical approach to working as a collaborative and engage in a collaborative leadership process. We support coordination among and between service providers, consultants, stakeholders and business owners to maximize outcomes, in relationships of mutual reciprocity.

**Equity & Inclusion:** We embed equity & inclusion in our work by prioritizing the redistribution of power, funding, and resources. We are committed to being a transformative, anti-racist organization.

**Systems Approach:** We employ a holistic analysis and use systems thinking in our strategic planning and implementation.

## **How We Accomplish our Vision**

The Alliance's governing structure is comprised of a Steering Committee with an Executive Committee, permanent Working Groups and temporary project Task Forces. In the coming years additional Working Groups will be developed - with a focus on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as a core element of all our decision-making groups.

There are four Working Groups or Task Forces that support the organization: Professional and Workforce Development, Resource Development, Communications, State and Federal Policy. As the host organization, The Carrot Project's Executive Director, Dorothy Suput, is in charge of staff and high level operations. Our Coordinator ensures that all these entities are collaborating, and manages the day to day of the Alliance. The Executive Committee shares leadership on Task Forces with members. The Alliance is a program of TSNE-The Carrot Project.

We anticipate becoming a stand-alone fiscally sponsored organization in 2020 before establishing a stand-alone organization.

**We are in the process of a multi-year implementation plan to become a transformational and inclusive organization in all aspects of our work.** It is critical that we determine the best way for The Blueprint's work to be relevant to, serve, and include socially disadvantaged (SDA) populations. This was identified as a priority topic by participants at the October 2017 Convening. A number of The Blueprint's participating organizations work with SDA populations. We turn to them to help us engage other organizations working with SDA populations, and to ensure that the work of The Blueprint benefits historically disadvantaged groups.

Prior to finalizing our governance structure and decision-making practices we will be embedding equity and inclusion into our communications and future business plans. Additionally, we will ensure that our leadership teams are representative of the Northeast and Hudson Valley region. It is essential that The Alliance not only serve all members of the farm and food community, but that our membership includes organizations with leaders from all of our communities.

*To learn more, visit [thecarrotproject.org/sector\\_development/the\\_blueprint](http://thecarrotproject.org/sector_development/the_blueprint), or contact Johanna de Graffenreid, [johanna@thecarrotproject.org](mailto:johanna@thecarrotproject.org)*