

Community Agriculture Alliance: Achieving goals is better together

By Meg Tully/For the Steamboat Today Thursday, September 8, 2011

Steamboat Springs — I'm a big fan of partnerships — when they work. We've all had those experiences with partnerships that didn't quite work. They leave you with that crummy, let's-not-do-that-again kind of feeling. In fact, one of every two partnerships fail, according to a study of more than 1,000 partnerships entitled "When to Ally and When to Acquire," published in the Harvard Business Review (July/August 2004).

But I was just part of a partnership between Historic Routt County and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps that worked really well. With more than 200 nonprofit organizations in Routt County that could use more resources, I thought there might be some helpful tips I could share based on my experiences.

When considering a partnership, a good read is "The Power of Partnership" by Plexus Consulting Group LLC, published by the American Society of Association Executives and the Center for Association Leadership and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (2008).

The book defines a partnership as "a cooperative agreement between two or more organizations where, without subsuming their individual identities, the involved parties share the profits and/or losses of the activities they undertake together."

The book continues to explain that there are six points for successful partnerships:

- Partnership is based on strategic reasons
- Partners complement each entity allowing it to accomplish something it could not do alone
- Negotiating team consists of top staff, volunteers and legal counsel
- Agreement has one-year term and provision for withdrawal
- All parties have equal status, and decision-making is based on consensus
- Key stakeholders are informed through a timely, concise document

The Historic Routt County and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps partnership enabled the organizations to bring their strengths to the table to accomplish historic preservation education and restoration work. The cornerstone of the partnership is what is called the Historic Preservation Corps. Debuting last summer from the vision of former Historic Routt County Executive Director Towny Anderson, the Historic Preservation Corps aims to place four to eight local youths, ages 18 to 24, on site to restore, rehabilitate, reconstruct and/or preserve historic structures under the supervision of a qualified contractor.

Programmatically, the Historic Preservation Corps directly supports Historic Routt County's long-range plan's first goal: "Preserve the elements and promote the protection and continued use of our built environments that reflect the heritage and diversity of Routt County."

Historic Routt County and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps' respective roles in the partnership complemented each other. Historic Routt County essentially served as the "general contractor" and selected the project, outlined the scope of work and budget, hired the contractor, developed the educational pieces to be taught to the youths throughout the session and took the lead on fundraising.

The Youth Corps used its expertise and infrastructure to recruit and retain outstanding, hard-working youths who comprised the Historic Preservation Corps and to develop proven leadership skills in both its crew leaders and its employees. Rocky Mountain Youth Corps also assisted with project fundraising efforts and leads. The organizations supported each other to establish program objectives and timelines and to create an overall exceptional experience for everyone involved.

Consistent communication and making expectations clear were two of the main reasons for the partnership's success. Mutual goals were established, compromise and creative solutions occurred when necessary, plenty of patience was sprinkled into the recipe, and everyone was OK with the fact that things needed to be fluid and dynamic based on ever-evolving conditions throughout the program's development.

Through our collaboration, we were able to successfully restore the Yock Homestead Cabin, part of the city-owned More Barn Park on Pine Grove Road. Neither of our groups could have done this alone, but by working together, an important Routt County landmark was saved.

Congratulations to Historic Routt County, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps and the 2011 Historic Preservation Corps: Andrew Lescht, crew leader; Eva Lambek, Steamboat Springs High School; Willow Fitzgerald, graduate of The Lowell Whiteman School and student at Bard College in New York; Joshua Hines, Hayden High School; Mary Ellis Fort, The Lowell Whiteman School; and Rick Pighini, contractor and co-owner of Minglewood Timbers.

What does your organization need to accomplish and who can help you? Answering these two very basic questions will get you on your way to partnerships that leave you with that "life is good" feeling of accomplishment.

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