



## SPF Report #112 - Kick starting the JAM

**Project Title:** *Kickstarting the JAM (Justice Alimentaire pour Montréal)*

**Budget Requested:** \$7000

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Role (Undergraduate, Post-Graduate, Staff, Academic): Alumni

Faculty/Unit: Arts

### *What we set out to accomplish*

#### Cultivating the JAM

The JAM is a successful and growing volunteer movement which has reached a vital stage in its growth. Like a sapling needing support and tether during early growth, the JAM has reached a point where certain structural support is needed to fully cultivate the potential. This structural work is anticipated to be short term (or to lead in new resource directions), and includes outreach (connecting people to strengthen our relationships across the food system), administration (establishing resources and protocols), and facilitations (planning and guiding meetings and events).

### *What we accomplished*

Jam provisional steering committee was convened. The committee met over the course of 2 months and defined the process, vision, mission, and values of the JAM. The committee dissolved in September at the successful conclusion of the process.

The JAM General Meeting will be the governing body of the JAM. The general meeting takes place twice a month, working groups, projects, members of the JAM & the network, and interested members of the public convene to share and plan. Specific administrative tasks are handled by committees of the General Meeting.

Dynamic  
Report (3  
components)

1. A text based resource guide providing a thematic breakdown of Montreal food systems actors. This guide will cross reference thematic references with projects and people working on that issue- providing a vital entry point for engagement with the Montreal food systems for new actors, and a great resource for those already engaged.

2. Digital/Website: to make this information activity and facilitate linkages, we will provide a web based platform hosting the text based resource, and more active elements such as a community calendar and other aggregated resources.

3. Video Element: to promote Montreal food systems actors and provide an engaging platform for accountability and best practices, we will produce 2 video capsules, about 15 minutes in length, 15 minutes in length, involving 10 engaged participants representing a variety of organizations and social locations. These videos will help to document to the food systems movement in Montreal, and provide an engaging access point for those just entering the conversation.

A text report on the convergence gives a summary overview of the day, the issues discussed, the work currently being done in Montreal, and a list of relevant resources and participants.

We created a webpage where we aggregated the resources/guides that we had found. We integrated an open google calendar in to the page to create an interactive space reflecting current work/events/and opportunities within the Montreal food movement. Events are posted to the calendar by participants, and JAM members take responsibility for a monthly update of the calendar. Alongside this, we have created a digital collaborative working space where members can access the documents of the JAM (meeting minutes, work in progress, report, ect.) and work together. An unexpected outcome of these activities was the creation of the [alimentationdurable-sustainablefood.wildapricot.org](http://alimentationdurable-sustainablefood.wildapricot.org) website, an interactive regional platform for individuals interesting in sharing on how to build sustainable food systems

Two videos were produced, with one more in process. Video #1 is an introduction to the JAM and to Montreal food systems issues and actors Video #2 is a summary of the JAM convergence hosted on Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>. The third video, in process, is a summary of our work so far, and features more in depth coverage of food systems issues and the interviews conducted for Video's 1 & 2.

Video 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXfQVv3dB58>

Video 2: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Exr8\\_gtURTI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Exr8_gtURTI)

Fall  
Convergence

The Convergence will bring together approximately 150-200 participants for an engaging conversation around Montreal food systems. This will be a chance to share and celebrate the work being done, discussion challenges, and build personal relationships towards collaboration and durable responses to our communities needs.

We hosted a convergence on Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>, about 130 people attended representing students, universities, farmers, and interested citizens. The outcomes of the day are reflected in the convergence report.

# Lessons, Challenges & Failures and Recommendations

## 1. Cultivating the JAM:

### a. What we learned

- To create the paradigm shift that we envision (with the food system and our wider world) we must shift our thinking on the nature and structure of organizations to ensure coherence between the nature of our organization and our shared vision of the future, as well as how individuals, groups and already existing projects and resources can be matched to collaborate efficiently.
- A holistic approach to structure and network building is not a individual endeavor. Partnership and relationship building with other organizations will allow us to maximize the strength and capacity of our organization, and will holistically reflect our grounding ethics. For example, while we had initially discussed incorporating the JAM (or some part thereof) after discussion and deliberation (and based on the experience of members) we have decided to pursue a partnership or stewardship relationship with an established and reputable organization. This will allow us to conduct our business effectively while remaining decentralized.

### b. Challenges/Failures

- It was difficult to determine an effective structure for the JAM because we were (and are) in process. The parallel process of determining the role that JAM can play in the food system, our capacity, and our activities alongside decision making about structure and process proved challenging.
- Planning the convergence while simultaneously balancing the process of cultivating the JAM was difficult as we are largely volunteers and the convergence was very time intensive. However, the process of planning and hosting the convergence was essential for determining the capacity and nature of the JAM.
- We struggle with issue of inclusivity.

### c. Recommendations

- Accessing information: there are multiple opportunities already lying in the food movement, but the limited capacity in communication and marketing for many groups makes it difficult to have a full picture of what is going on. Personal relationships appear an important way to communicate, and informal 'mentorships' or collective brainstorming are interesting ways for individuals or groups who are looking for feedback.
- Communication and collaboration: When a collaborative project begins between a group of people from different networks, it is strongly suggested to develop a common understanding of how to share information and communicate effectively. Multiple activities and projects in JAM, bring transparency. For many technologies offer an opportunity to work from distance, but meeting face to face is key to build relationships. Example: several members of the JAM are working with engineers and farmers to organize a Farm Hack, an open source event to share technological know-how in the food system.
- Time management is key to effective organizing; it is right there in the very term *organizing*! Meetings should be scheduled well in advance, and if possible a routine schedule should be established early on. Agenda's for meetings should be created and adhered to. A norm of timeliness (being on

time, concluding meetings on time) should be cultivated to ensure efficiency and maximum participation. For example, if meetings routinely run over time or take place in the late evening, we are effectively precluding the participation of certain demographics (people with children, for example).

- Decentralized decision making is a difficult process to establish, it requires careful research, time and thought. Discuss the process with organizations and groups who have faced and overcome this challenge through different approaches, be prepared to change and adjust your approach based on new information. Research past social movements, organizations, ect that have effectively achieved their goals; adopt & adapt their processes where applicable. Be mindful of the commonalities and divergences between your work and the work of other organizations to ensure that the process/structure is applicable and adapted appropriately. Do not look for a “one size fits all” solution to the issue of innovative organizing.
- Anti-oppression and inclusion must remain at the forefront of decision making, discussion, and action. The active personal engagement of all members in personal and collective processes of self-evaluation is necessary to ensure safe, open, and inclusive space where all members’ contributions are valued and encouraged. Focusing on this encourages greater accountability and the full participation and enjoyment of all members, resulting in better outcomes individually and collectively.

## 2. **Dynamic Report:**

### a. **Text Based Report and Online component**

#### i. What we learned:

- The dynamic report: during our first stage of research for the dynamic report we realized that the project had been undertaken several times, by different groups and with different purposes. We noticed that inventories quickly become obsolete, and require maintenance and updating which is often outside of the capacity of any one group/person/organization. We noted that many of the inventories (resource guides) were not being used or updated.
- Online resources are only as effective as their userbase, providing platforms for collaboration requires training to promote engagement. Members must see a benefit to participating
- A resource is only useful if it is used.
- A static inventory of actors, projects, ect can provide a snapshot but lacks dynamism unless it is participatory. While it is tempting to create a definitive guide, the cost of doing so (time wise) outweighs the benefit when the issue of obsolescence is taken in to account.
- Cultivating online communities is a process, a holistic approach to this process should work from the capacity and desire of participants instead of towards and ideal or pre-formulated goal.

#### ii. Challenges/Failures

- User participation in online platforms was a challenge. We found that using existing/familiar formats (such as google drive) was preferable to creating new processes; unfamiliarity with online tools appeared to negatively affect user participation.
- In the creation of our online components we used several approaches, which was valuable to understanding user needs and our capacity, however this also produced confusion and redundancy which may have negatively affected user engagement.

- We failed to produce a cross-referenced guide because we learned in our initial resource that this would not be an effective tool, it would quickly become obsolete and we were aware of our own limitation in maintaining such a guide.
- The survey conducted at the convergence was to be compiled into a summary by a volunteer; the volunteer lost the surveys.

### iii. Recommendations

- Avoid redundancy. Where possible, amalgamate existing resources and avoid “re-inventing the wheel”.
- Be aware of user adherence factors (design, ease of use, intention, ect.). The creation of a collaborative online space should flow organically from existing processes. The aims and benefits of participation need to be clear.
- Resource guides, inventories, and dynamic online spaces require upkeep, plan for maintenance and be realistic about your capacity.
- The creation of (and goals of) the convergence report should have been a guiding influence in the planning of the activities of the day. To avoid editorializing and to effectively reflect the participatory nature of the day (and our work) engagement of discussion group leaders and other participants in the creation of the report proved vital; it is essential to communicate these sorts of expectations to participants in advance.

## **b. Video component of the Dynamic report**

### i. What we learned

- There are many networks and resources for media/video production in Montreal.
- Interviews are an excellent networking tool. An interview is an excellent strategy for approaching organizations and actors who might otherwise be inaccessible; it provides a reciprocal format through which to approach and learn more about organizations and actors.
- Translation takes a lot of time.
- There is a need to balance flexibility and openness against the realities and time constraints of the editing process in the planning and conduct of interviews.
- Partnering/working with skilled people and organizations is essential (we thank CUTV, and Marc Souci for their invaluable contribution to this work).

### ii. Challenges:

- We failed to adhere to established timelines.
- We underestimated the amount of time translation would require.
- We conducted relatively unstructured interviews. This allowed us to collect a lot of very interesting material and to allow interview participants to freely share their knowledge and experience. However, this posed challenges to the timely conduct of the editing process.

### iii. Recommendations:

- Planning is essential, work with qualified people to establish realistic timelines, take in to account the editing process and translation.
- Partner! Partner! Partner! Take advantage of the resources and skills available in Montreal for social justice media projects.

- Establish interview questions that allow for flexibility but account for the editing process. Note and track questions on a time sheet (during the interview if possible) to facilitate the editing process

### 3. Convergence:

#### a. What we learned

- We learned a lot about the difficulties of co-ordination and communication that arise from working across diverse actors and (primarily) with volunteers. Working as/with volunteers poses special demands, as time and commitment can be challenges. Participation in meetings was strong, but there was often a lack of continuity (outside of a core group) in meeting participation. This posed challenges, as decisions were often revisited and revised depending on who was participating in a meeting.
- We learned a lot about decentralized decision making and open participation. The core lessons we took away from this are: to assign responsibility by committee early in the process; to respect (not revisit) previously made decisions; to be on time; to make time to pay attention to and appreciate work that takes place outside of the meeting space.
- Opening meeting spaces which are facilitated, provide whisper translation, effective note taking and delegating responsibilities are key to enhance ability to participate.

#### b. Challenges/Failures

- We failed to follow the event schedule/itinerary for the day, as such, some of our outcomes (process and concrete) were not met.
- Positions of responsibility should have been established earlier, and a communication strategy for decision making during the event would have facilitated better outcomes.
- Volunteer participation was not maximized because the event schedule was not clearly communicated and followed.
- Lateness at meetings was a problem, which contributed to the aforementioned issue of concrete decision making. We often spent time updating meeting participants (on the JAM and on the convergence) which made us less productive. Because meetings would often include new or irregular participants, people were not always familiar with work that had been done previously.
- Amalgamating the information and notes collected at the convergence in to a concise summary proved to be challenging. Because the outcomes of the day were recorded by participants in conversation groups, ideas/notes that made sense in the context of discussion did not always translate clearly to us because we had not participated in the conversations and lacked context. As we began to compile the report, the need to engage key actors in the production of the report became clear, however, we had not anticipated this need; as such, this requirement had not been communicated to key participants in advance and this required follow-up and created delay in the production of the report.
- We did not adequately plan for the time requirements of follow-up and producing the report; also, because the event required so much time and energy, we had exhausted our human resources and follow up was delayed.

#### c. Recommendations

- There were multiple food-related events in Montreal during the Fall 2013. When organizing an event around food, it is important to know what other activities are planned by other players in the envisioned time period.-communication issues should be addressed as early on. In time sensitive

situations (especially in decentralized and non-hierarchical organizing) there are many pressures towards conflict avoidance. However, un-addressed communication and personality conflicts negatively affect group cohesion and result in frustration; this affects the outcome of the work and the experience of participants.

- Anti-oppression and inclusion must remain at the forefront of decision making, discussion, and action. The active personal engagement of all members in personal and collective processes of self-evaluation is necessary to ensure safe, open, and inclusive space where all members' contributions are valued and encouraged. Focusing on this encourages greater accountability and the full participation and enjoyment of all members, resulting in better outcomes individually and collectively.
- Time management is key to effective organizing; it is right there in the very term organizing! Meetings should be scheduled well in advance, and if possible a routine schedule should be established early on. Agenda's for meetings should be created and adhered to. A norm of timeliness (being on time, concluding meetings on time) should be cultivated to ensure efficiency and maximum participation.