



Problem

The Funders for Sustainable Food Systems (FSFS) is a California-based group of public and private grantmakers whose mission is to promote a sustainable agriculture and food system in California. The group was founded in 1999 as an informal meeting space for exchanging information and advice on funding the sustainable food system field. FSFS quickly evolved into a strong and growing affinity group with the goal of catalyzing significant change in the field by educating the philanthropic community and leveraging key funds. However, FSFS members needed additional staff capacity and strategy development to:

- Raise awareness within the funding community and among decision makers in California of the benefits of sustainable agriculture and food systems
- Increase funding for the field
- Serve as a model for other regions

Solution

CEA took on the role of coordinator of FSFS. Specifically, CEA:

- Drove forward the process of completing and distributing FSFS's groundbreaking report on the state of agriculture in California, Roots of Change
- Assisted in defining the mission and goals
- Defined the governance structure and internal action plan for the group
- Created and managed all organizational processes for the group, including materials and database management
- Developed a strategy for educating foundation officials
- Managed foundation and stakeholder relations and handled all inquiries from the field
- Led FSFS through the process of developing and structuring a new foundation collaborative, the Roots of Change Fund (ROC Fund), that will achieve the goals outlined by the group
- Served as a facilitator, mediator, and organizer at FSFS steering committee meetings and foundation education sessions

Results

FSFS developed a foundation collaborative, the Roots of Change Fund, which brings new funds to the field, beginning with the development of a statewide, long-term action agenda (see ROC Fund case study for more details). FSFS has become a model for funders in other states who are collaborating on sustainable agriculture issues. Achievements of FSFS include:

- Membership growth of 25%
- Distribution of over 1,000 copies of the Roots of Change report to the philanthropic community and the sustainable food systems field
- Three to four open educational sessions held each year since 2000 to educate the philanthropic community