

Business Plan

Project: Write a business plan to build and launch a children’s day camp to be hosted in the Troy Kids’ Garden.

Collaborator: Ginny Hughs, Education Director at Community GroundWorks.

Goals of Writing Business Plan:

- Explore viability of starting a new camp.
- Launch camp as soon as possible – if not the summer of 2017, then the next year.

Goals of Launching Day Camp:

- Make a profit, which could support their educational programming, to buffer unpredictable and scarce grant funding.
- Include more kids in the Kids’ Garden – whether those children were new to Community GroundWorks, or whether their families subscribed to the farm CSA or community garden plots, but never played in the Kid’s Garden.

Project Background:

I introduced myself to Community GroundWorks, sharing my background in environmental education, and my desire to support their work. A few staff that I connected with pointed me to Ginny. I asked her about projects that I might support.

I learned that Community GroundWorks runs after-school and summer programming in Troy Kids’ Garden. Nearby community centers and schools pay a nominal fee to send their students to plant, play, and prepare food with Community GroundWorks.

For years, Community GroundWorks staff has played with the idea of starting a day camp.

After a couple of meetings together, she decided that I could best help out by developing a business plan for a day camp. She asked if I was interested. I explained I had little experience in this type of task, but I would be happy to give it a try.

Project Timeline:

September 2016 – November 2016:

- I volunteered at the Kid’s Garden after-school programs every week, at Ginny’s suggestion. Even before we decided to pursue the business plan, she thought this would give me a thorough introduction to their work.

October 2016:

- As we began work, Ginny asked me to find models or examples of farm camp business plans. I reached out to different programs across the country, including some that I had worked for. They generously responded with business plans or the story of their development.

Ginny and I decided to follow the **American Camp Association** template for a camp business plan. We planned to finish the writing process by the end of December.

October 2016 – December 2016:

- We met about twice a month. I conducted research on educational models that Ginny was interested, including child-directed learning models like ANJI-play and Forest Kindergartens. We met with other educators in the community who were interested in these models.
- I also researched licensing options, and how other camps in the area were structuring and pricing their programs, as well as what financial aid they offered. Ginny asked me to start exploring grant opportunities for seed money, and to develop a one-page advertisement for the camp to present to potential donors and partners.

January 2017 – February 2017:

- I explored grant opportunities by contacting regional and national foundations, non-profits, and grant administrators. I confirmed their missions, their availability of funds, and their requirements for obtaining a grant. In February, I shared this information with Ginny.
- Ginny shared what her next steps were, and asked which ones, if any, I wanted to support. I told her I would be interesting in developing educational content.
- We compiled the materials I had developed over the last several months into a business plan. Ginny then used this document to input further plans and resources.

March 2017:

- Ginny asked me to draft some titles and descriptions for different weeks of camp, and the programming they would entail. We added these materials to the business plan.
- Ginny also asked that I draft an online survey to gather opinions on what the name of the camp would be.
- Ginny asked if I would be available to work at the camp. After much deliberation, I decided that my summer schedule could not fit this commitment. She invited me to volunteer at the camp anytime I liked.

June 2017 – August 2017:

- The camp was launched at the end of June, and I volunteered during their final week in August.
- I asked Ginny if she was comfortable with me sharing the materials we had created for the public to see and use. She was happy to share.

Success Stories:

- The camp was launched. According to Ginny, the camp “almost broke even.”
- A grant was obtained, and sponsored a week of camp for the children of families that requested financial assistance. The donor stipulated that the money fund

arts-related programming, so the camp hosted a week of Art in the Garden camp.

- Families that had never interacted with Troy Gardens sent their kids to camp. One child brought a flyer home from school. Her mother told us, “This is the first time she’s brought something home from school and said, ‘I want to do this.’ Usually it’s hard to get her ready in the morning – getting up, brushing her hair – but not this week!”
- The camp will continue next year, and evolve to fit the needs and resources of camp families and Community GroundWorks.

Lessons Learned:

- **I contributed to their work by prioritizing my own flexibility.** At the end of the process, I asked Ginny how our collaboration was similar or different to past collaborations. She responded, “You came and asked what we needed. That had never happened before. People come and tell us what we need, what they want to do. You asked!...We would talk about starting the camp but it never went any where.” They didn’t have the capacity. But my capacity was flexible, so they plugged me in. She said, “I didn’t believe you didn’t have an agenda...you came through.”
- **We embraced vulnerability and uncertainty.** When I asked what was valuable about our partnership, Ginny said: “We started a business!” She didn’t anticipate how back and forth it would be. It felt vulnerable for her. She said, “I had no idea what I was doing.” Neither of us did.
- **I underestimated the role of my work.** I remarked that I wasn’t even sure if she ever put the business plan to concrete use. With shock, she said, “I use it all the time!” She edited it throughout the spring and summer in response to the camp’s progress. “It’s a dynamic, living document.” I asked if she used the one-page advertisement that I created, and she shared that through that document, she was able to procure financial assistance to sponsor campers. During and after our collaboration, I decided that my role was more process-based than product-based – which I loved!