

**PANO Member Collaboration Story: Working Together**

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South Central Community Action Programs' mission is to empower families and engage the community to pursue innovative and effective solutions to break the cycle of poverty. That by its very nature speaks to, and requires, collaboration. For us, our core is moving families out of poverty – a monumental task that certainly can't be done by one agency. So as we looked at pieces of our strategies and began to share the stories and experiences of the families we serve, we found that partnering became easier – our focus on our families made collaboration not competition for more funds the priority. From that work with our partners around food access, the [Adams County Food Policy Council](#) was born. This coalition has been really exciting to work with and has been instrumental in broadening our understanding of community work and the interconnected nature of what we do.

What has been exciting about this coalition is it brings together individuals and groups interested in food from at least four different vantage points: food access, buying local fresh produce, nutrition and local producer economic issues. At first it was a bit clunky – these were diverse groups that had not all traditionally worked together, but we found we had far more in common than we knew. We all agreed that eating fresh, local produce was good for everyone in the county and good for the county economically. It gave us a place to start. From there we divided into interest groups: institutional purchasing of local foods, access to local foods, education on nutrition, and looking at policy locally, as well as, at the state and national levels.

What we found was that success in one area frequently spread across other areas and we could be more purposeful in our efforts. For example, increasing access to fresh local produce by low income families necessitated purchasing EBT machines. Those machines allowed vendors at our Framers' Market to make purchases with credit and debit cards as well. It opened up the markets to a new economy – families on SNAP benefits and individuals who did not have cash on hand. It was a win all the way around. Our nutrition group held events at the farmer's markets on how to prepare foods and held a children's fair – increasing access, nutrition and purchasing at the market. Through those relationships, [SCCAP's gleaning initiative](#) has been able to strengthen its relationships with local producers who gave us more than 100,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables to distribute to low income families through 42 partner entities (you have to get ripe produce out quickly!). Our collation has shown films and hosted panels about food issues, raising community awareness, and because we came at them from so many vantage points our reach was tremendous. The results we have seen have been brilliant!

**We have, as a community, been able to do far, far more together than any one of us could have done separately – and the benefits have had a reach that was greater than we could have believed possible.** It took longer to get it started, and we had to check corporate and personal egos at the door. It wasn't about competing for precious funding, it was whose organization is best positioned to further this piece of the work, and how do we support them in pursuit of funding. Working in this kind of coalition helps us at SCCAP see that we are not a single agency working in a silo, but that our work overlaps with others in amazing ways and that together we can do far more!