

OUTCOME SUMMARY: EAST BAY ALLIANCE FOR A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

“We are ending MAP in the strongest possible place we could be in. We have this whole package about how to be a strong organization. It is about your program, your finances, and staff development. It is about seeing the organization and all of its components as being interconnected...We are set up now to be a highly functioning organization.”

— Nikki Fortunato Bas, Executive Director

Budget: \$42,000 MAP; \$5,000 EBASE funds

Duration of the Consultancy: July 1, 2009 – March 1, 2011

MAP Consultants Utilized: Carol Cantwell, Margi Clarke, Emily Goldfarb, Belma Gonzalez, Helen Kim

Organization Overview: East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE) advances economic, racial and social justice by building a just economy in California’s East Bay. It develops strategic alliances among community-based organizations, faith communities and labor to secure good jobs for low-income workers. Its mission includes strengthening the communities of color in which workers live. EBASE supports its comprehensive, long-term campaigns with its own research into the issues. It originally formed in 1999 out of efforts to secure living-wage ordinances in Oakland, Berkeley and other communities. Now, it targets entire industries.

Goals: EBASE focused its MAP engagement on more firmly grounding its efforts to advance its mission, following an Executive Director transition. The primary goals were as follows:

- **To support the Executive Director** and provide organizational development assistance.
- **To develop staff** on the management and secondary leadership levels.
- **To strengthen financial and administrative systems**, including board and staff training.
- **To develop the board** and cultivate board/staff relationships.
- **To create a 5-year strategic plan**, through a board/staff planning process.

OUTCOME SUMMARY

EBASE used its capacity building assistance from MAP in several areas that Nikki Fortunato Bas identified when she became Executive Director of EBASE in 2009. “After 10 years of work, we needed to sharpen our programmatic focus,” Nikki recalls. In addition, guiding the organization to be explicit around racial justice was a high priority.

“There were gray areas,” she reflects. “We were lucky. I was able to point to a number of needs I saw when I started as Executive Director, and we were able to fill them with MAP.” EBASE engaged in extensive coaching and training with five MAP consultants and through a FACT Fundraising Assistance Project grant. A MAP-facilitated strategic planning process that integrated many programmatic and administrative changes concluded in February 2011. “We got rid of a lot of those gray areas,” Nikki says. “We are clear now. We are united.”

EBASE takes a movement-building approach to its alliances with labor unions, community-based organizations and faith communities. It has formed strategic, long-term partnerships with over 100 organizations. It views these organizations and their leaders as its constituency. The organization's economic impact comes through fostering the availability of good jobs—safe and accessible jobs with living wages, benefits, worker rights and opportunities for advancement. Its economic vision includes healthy, affordable communities sustained by good jobs. EBASE advances racial justice by addressing issues affecting immigrant workers, formerly incarcerated adults and 'at risk' youth, and through partnerships with organizations in communities of color.

FINDINGS

Executive Director Support Strengthened the Overall Organization

Nikki came to EBASE as its Associate Director in 2006, bringing experience in immigrant and worker rights. When the founding Executive Director left two years later, the search for an organization leader required substantial time and energy. Nikki served as Interim Executive Director for several months before becoming Executive Director.

The beginning of Nikki's tenure in 2009 coincided with an economic downturn, and marked a period of transition. As staff members moved on, EBASE was unable to re-hire for those positions. The following year, as EBASE faced key questions in strategic planning, several members of the close-knit staff left, prolonging the feeling of transition. EBASE took the long view. It stayed on course, taking full advantage of everything MAP had to offer.

"I think they needed to feel like the transition was over and they were landing," Emily Goldfarb, the primary MAP consultant suggests. Emily and several of the MAP consultants already had close relationships with key people in the organization. They were able to work cohesively with one another, as well as with other outside consultants Nikki brought in to support EBASE on specific projects. Emily coached Nikki, guided the strategic planning process and oversaw the MAP engagement. "Emily could see trends and help in a way that was very nuanced," Nikki points out. "She brought it back to me and to the strategic planning process."

Nikki embraced the opportunity to have six other staff members also receive coaching from MAP consultants. This was an "unprecedented" degree of coaching for MAP, according to Emily. "When I first started I had multiple responsibilities and not enough staff capacity," Nikki explains. Several staff members had taken on new responsibilities as well, in areas such as fundraising, communications and operations.

Coaching maximized Nikki's supervision time with staff and helped her to achieve her staff development goals. MAP's 'firewall' that ensures confidentiality in coaching relationships allowed individual staff members to get what they needed. "It was tremendous," Nikki says. "Everyone had a go-to person to work with on areas of professional and personal development."

This intensive approach of linking her own coaching and development with the other goals of the MAP engagement helped lead to a sense of "finding satisfaction in what we are doing," Nikki asserts. "Today versus two years ago, I am much more excited about our work. We are more clear and strategic. That gives all of us a sense of impact and purpose."

Nikki and the board also effectively built on the MAP-funded work, drawing from EBASE funds to engage MAP consultant Margi Clarke to assist in revising and updating personnel policies and staff benefits, and to support the Executive Director evaluation and the hiring for various positions, once the hiring process re-opened.

As EBASE completed its strategic plan in 2011, it was able to hire new staff. It now has more adequate staffing and funding to pursue its goals. It also has a plan for continuing to grow and diversify its funding base and a long-term goal to strike a balance among funding, staffing and program to make its work more effective and sustainable.



Staff Coaching Developed Leadership

Sadiyah Seraaj came on staff as Office Manager in 2008, after working with another East Bay organization. “I had heard about EBASE.” Sadiyah recalls, “I leaned on Nikki a lot to get in here.” Sadiyah became Development Director at the end of 2010. Her growth offers one example of the staff development process that MAP supported.

Carol Cantwell, the MAP consultant who also worked with EBASE to strengthen its finances, coached Sadiyah. “Half of the time was running my mouth and getting it all out there. The other half was ‘where do you see yourself going?’” Sadiyah says. As Sadiyah grew in her office manager position, she was on a search team hiring a development director for EBASE. “I started having anxiety about ‘who it is going to be?’” she recalls, realizing she was interested in the job herself. “I started thinking ‘I want to do this.’ Then I thought, ‘Who should I tell?’”

Sadiyah decided to approach Carol and Emily when they were all together at a conference. “There was a month of pretty sleepless nights on my part,” she says. “I felt like I was losing my mind, like I was falling off the deep end!” Carol and Emily responded with enthusiasm. “Did they know I wanted to go on and do more, take on more?” Sadiyah considers. “Yes. That has been my story here and how I see myself.”

Nikki and Sadiyah established benchmarks for Sadiyah’s new role. “We never had a development director,” Sadiyah points out. “So, what does a development director for EBASE do? And for me, my work has been very tactical. I was going to have to call up another side of thinking and planning.” EBASE did not replace Sadiyah’s former position, “So I have to be intentional about not being taken-up by smaller, easier tasks. I am more focused on pushing a bigger boulder.”

We did an exercise where Carol [the MAP coach] asked, ‘If you could craft your perfect job, what would it be? What country? What would you do all day? Would you be on the phone? Driving?’ That really got to me. It got me thinking beyond myself. It really was the coaching that helped me to see that I could do things that seemed scary and that I would be fine.”

– Sadiyah Seraaj, Development Director

Belma Gonzalez provided coaching for two other EBASE staff members. “In coaching in general, we always start with the goals people bring, which usually relate to both work and personal issues,” Belma explains. She could trust that other MAP colleagues were handling the management issues her clients were facing. “We did not have to take on those things in our time. My clients and I could focus on their specific leadership development.”

Strengthening Financial Systems Led to Sound Management

Carol walked Nikki and a 3-member board finance committee through the financial systems. In doing so, they realized that while they were not experiencing a deficit, “We had to spend more slowly,” Nikki recalls. This meant that EBASE could not hire for open and newly created positions, as Nikki had foreseen being able to do when she began as Executive Director. “I went through a lot,” Nikki recalls. “But Carol brings so much experience, and has a calming presence. She helped our board understand financial statements. She showed us how to set up an unrestricted reserve. She did it in a way that the entire staff and board could understand.” In addition to the continuing stewardship of the finance committee, Nikki notes the high level of understanding of finances at EBASE. “We are managing the organization on sound financial terms. I am proud of a lot of what we did with MAP, but this work on our finances stands out.”

Sadiyah worked with Carol and with Rona Fernandez through FACT’s Fundraising Assistance Project, to build her finance and fundraising knowledge. “In social justice, the program work is considered the power of the organization,” Sadiyah describes. “Carol has helped me feel empowered about what is happening internally and at the back of the house. If these things are not tight, program folks cannot do anything.” In her development director role, grassroots fundraising is Sadiyah’s first year priority. “People give to things they believe in,” she asserts. “I have seen Port of Oakland truck drivers, housekeepers and others who have a lot of difficulties. I have seen people reach into their pockets for 5 dollars and give it. It means the world to them and they are down with giving it to you. I want to continue to spread that here at EBASE. We don’t just ask for money. We do good work. We can secure victories for workers.”

Board Development Yielded Strengthened Planning

Strengthening the board and cultivating board/staff relationships were integrated into the work on finances and strategic planning. In both cases, board and staff received training and support from MAP consultants to take on tasks and to work together.

Strategic Planning Secured Program Priorities, Focus and Sustainability

A board and staff committee worked with Emily for 18 months to develop its 2011-2015 strategic plan. “This was the closest our board and staff ever worked together,” Nikki says. “We went through an intense process and came to consensus.”

When strategic planning began, the role of labor and faith communities and their leadership in EBASE’s work was clear. On the other hand, the role of base-building and community-based organizations was a core question. “We grew out of labor campaigns, so we asked, ‘what is the role of community in our work? Is it just a tactical component?’ Nikki explains. “The answer was no. We want all our campaigns to value both community and labor.”

In implementing its strategic plan EBASE will “make sure there are opportunities for base building in our work,” Nikki describes. EBASE itself will not build a base, but it could fundraise with its base building partners, loan staff to support others’ base building efforts or train community members to participate in EBASE campaigns. “We value their members, who are low-wage workers, and their leadership development of members,” Nikki says.

EBASE once ran numerous campaigns and managed multiple projects. “One of the things we realized was that our campaigns are multi-year campaigns. We were diving in and saying it would take a year. We were not looking at what it would take to change a whole industry. And how to staff the campaigns and make them sustainable over 5-10 years,” Nikki explains. Now EBASE runs two complex yet focused campaigns. “We recognize that we need strong partnerships, the funding up-front and a minimum staffing structure for each campaign.”

One campaign is securing clean and safe jobs for the mostly immigrant truck drivers in the Port of Oakland. The other is influencing the largest redevelopment project in Oakland in decades, at the former Oakland Army Base. “It is an area the size of 200 football fields. It will create 6,000 jobs,” Nikki says. “When we first started that campaign, the director was running 5 projects, and the organizer and researcher were also working on multiple projects,” Nikki explains. “Now we have the structure we need. We can focus people’s time.” In addition to being more sustainable for staff, the results are “showing up in the quality of the work,” she says. “The labor and community partners are coming together with shared interests, a commitment to each other.”

Further honing its focus, EBASE identified its criteria for selecting new issue campaigns in the next 5 years. It replaced a longer, more general list of criteria with strategic guidelines about what it will do with whom, and why, based on looking at the potential long term impact.

With support from the Akonadi Foundation, independent consultant Linda Burnham played a critical role in guiding EBASE to integrate racial justice into its strategic planning and day-to-day work. EBASE “developed strong values, a framework, language and some benchmarks for defining how our work moved toward racial justice,” Nikki says. EBASE’s mission statement now includes its racial justice goals. It is explicit about how racial justice connects with its base building priorities. “People who are impacted by our work are involved in decision making, not just lifting up conditions. They can be involved in strategy and representing the campaign publicly,” Nikki says. “We have been operating this way, but we are making it more sustainable and intentional in our work with communities of color.”



CONCLUSION

Nikki reflects on the culmination of EBASE's capacity building efforts at the final strategic planning retreat. "It occurred to me at the retreat how deep the work had been and how much unity there was. I never really took for granted that we could incorporate some things, like racial justice, into our work. But the staff was deeply engaged and the board was very supportive. People did their homework and understood the decisions they were making."

In implementing the plan, "We have benchmarks we can evaluate against. We have the right tools, the right framework. We have this whole package we were able to develop about how to be a strong organization," Nikki maintains.

Sadiyah considers the intensive approach, and the concrete clarity it brought. "When you are trying to shape something, to create something new, like a development team, a strategic plan, you have to ask the hard questions. You have to lay down in it. We did that. So when we got up off it, it was really done."

METHODOLOGY This case example describes the impact of MAP's capacity building assistance on MUA, a FACT grantee. The author conducted interviews via telephone and e-mail with MUA's co-directors and the primary MAP consultant for the project. The goal of these interviews was to assess how the organization views the strength of its capacity now in comparison to its capacity prior to MAP, and how it believes MAP contributed to its current capacity. The author conducted the survey from January-February 2011 and concluded the findings in March.