

Joseph Myers, Cooper's Ferry Partnerships

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Introduction to Joseph Myers and Cooper's Ferry Partnerships

Joe Myers, a graduate of The College of New Jersey's Class of 1998 and a fellow Fels Institute of Government Graduate of the class of 2000, has been dedicated to the city of Camden, New Jersey for almost 20 years. He started as an intern for Cooper's Ferry Partnership (primarily Cooper's Ferry Development Association (CFDA)) while he was in graduate school and was hired as a project manager after he graduated. Within 10 years he became Vice President and COO of Cooper's Ferry Partnership. As a dedicated member of the organization, he understands the intricacies of running a nonprofit through the standpoint of various positions. In February of 2011, Joe and others were involved in the merger between Cooper's Ferry Development Association and the Greater

Camden Partnership. Together, these organizations merged their missions and created the Cooper's Ferry Partnership.

Cooper's Ferry Partnerships strives to make Camden, New Jersey into a better place to live, grow, visit, and invest. They have three main divisions: Development, Neighborhood Initiatives, and Downtown Security & Policy. Joe is involved in all three divisions but has been recognized for his work in the areas of Development and Neighborhood Initiatives. He focuses on the development of the Camden Waterfront and collaborates closely with the private sector. All three divisions typically intersect and collaborate based on a special needs assessment of the specific neighborhood that Cooper's Ferry looks to work with. Joe also serves on the local board of the Salvation Army for the Camden Kroc Center.

For an organization like Cooper's Ferry Partnerships, measuring success cannot be categorized into one area but many areas. For instance, Cooper's Ferry measures success through the financial standing of their organization. Receiving funds from grants and donations is a sure way for their organization to measure success since people want to give money towards causes that matter. The more grants and funding that comes through their doors also provides justification for the mission they are trying to achieve. Along those lines, it is equally important to prudently manage funds both effectively and efficiently as well as leveraging resources to attract

additional and/or new funds.

Another measure of success includes employment and ensuring that colleagues and individuals get challenged individually through their exposure within the organization. Additionally, the mission of the organization provides insight on the measurement of success within a nonprofit organization. Joe mentioned that success can be measured through the strength of the mission. Since the mission of Cooper's Ferry involves improving quality of life and community, there are two ways that you can measure the success of the mission. A qualitative approach can be used to measure the success of improving the quality of life and community by asking the community members through a survey, for their thoughts on the changes that have happened and that will happen. Another method involves the programs and programmatic attendance that Cooper's Ferry organizes. Additionally, by just comparing pictures of Camden, NJ 10 years ago as compared to Camden, NJ now, the differences are remarkable. It almost feels as if the newly constructed buildings were built over night (but the reality is that community and economic development takes years of planning, engagement, and leadership, among other things). With generous funds from public and private partners, neighborhood planned events are attracting residents into the various rehabbed and/or newly programmed parks while focusing on local arts, culture, and healthy initiatives.

When asked what key event led him to want to lead in Cooper's Ferry Partnership, Joe mentioned three motivating factors. First, the mission of Cooper's Ferry Partnership drew him to want to be a part of the organization. 18 years ago, he saw Camden, New Jersey as a place with huge potential and became interested in being part of the revitalization of the city. He acknowledged the history of Camden and how it was a growing city until various setbacks began to challenge its growth. Another reason Joe decided to join Cooper's Ferry was the culture of the organization. At the time, there were only six individuals working at Cooper's Ferry and each one was 110 percent committed to the city and the community. Their dedication and team-oriented collaborative environment made their workforce seem a lot bigger than it was. Additionally, Joe mentioned being drawn in by the leadership and impact of Tom Corcoran, graduate from Wharton and former lecturer at Fels Center.

Joe was very clear and eloquent when he spoke. He was very open to talk about the different nonprofit development theories and leadership methods as well as the challenges that certain nonprofits/leaders tend to face. We talked about the importance of being involved in one's community when striving for urban revitalization. How inserting yourself into a community can lead to negative impact especially if the intentions of your involvement remain unclear and also how it is always best to explain and continue to remind a community of your

intentions to avoid misinterpretations.

Currently with a staff of 14 individuals, Cooper's Ferry strives to have a very team-oriented approach to their decision making. CFP practices clear and open communication within their organization. They are clear in what they expect from their team. CFP also recognizes that clear and open communication are dynamics that build over time. Joe mentioned that a portion of working at CFP involves making it out to staff excursions and attending professional development courses to ensure that knowledge in the field is up-to-date for all staff members. CFP takes the time to make sure that their staff is as interested and involved as they can be. With that said, Joe mentioned how a tight knit organization can come with some hardships as well. For instance, with such a focus on organizational dynamics, the onboarding of new staff members can lead to "growing pains" (as Joe called it) because CFP has such a big focus on staff dynamic, there is more pressure in making sure that newer staff members work well with the more established staff members. CFP looks to hire staff members with similar interests in commitment and camaraderie towards the cause.

Considering Joe has been an integral part of Cooper's Ferry for almost 20 years, it felt almost natural to ask him how he would do things differently if he were given a chance to start over in his leadership role today. He responded by noting the organizations firm belief in

incremental progress and how important it is to have long term goals. Long term goals can be accomplished through outlining strategic planning and short-term goals with a monthly, quarterly, or yearly approach. Given the chance to start over, he would try to be clearer regarding the management of expectations for his staff as well as the funders of Cooper's Ferry. This would allow visibility of expectations across the staff and lessen the chance for an element of surprise.

Additionally, he would focus more on a different approach to the world of fundraising. He would have Cooper's Ferry cultivate funder relationships sooner by establishing regular communication through constant updates regarding the organization's progress, volunteer opportunities within the city, or even invites to special events held by Cooper's Ferry and Camden. He would also promote funders to communicate with Cooper's Ferry on a more regular basis.

There is no doubt that Cooper's Ferry Partnership will continue to impact the city of Camden in a positive way. With strong leadership, passionate staff members, and a collaborative healthy dynamic within the organizations work style -- Cooper's Ferry Partnership will continue to strive and grow in a progressive direction, both for the benefit of the city, and the community. The story of Camden and its revitalization is still in its early chapters, but Joe said it is very exciting to be a part of a collaborative environment with the public and private

sectors working together with neighborhoods and community leaders.