
SPARC Tank:

competition as a driver of interdisciplinary collaboration

— Ben Christ, Elizabeth Guthrie, Katelyn Cucinotta —

Presentation Outline

Setting the Stage

- Description of the issue & our journey as co-facilitators

SPARC Tank

- Broad overview of event outline & objectives

Stakeholder Overview

- Their roles during the event

Strategies Implemented

- during planning and the event itself

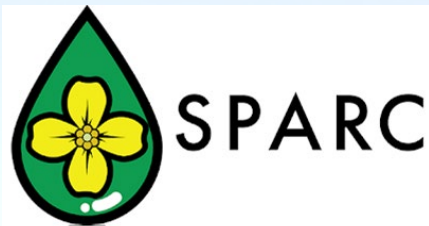
Reflection

- Outcomes and what could have been done better

Next Steps



What Was The Issue?



SPARC – Southeast Partnership for Advanced Renewables from Carinata

- SPARC is a USDA-funded public-private partnership that aims to transform farmers' unproductive winter fields in the Southeast US into sources of renewable fuel for aviation
- This diverse project has been working together since 2017 and united land-grant university research and Extension with private partners
 - Ben Christ is a social scientist on this team of nearly 80 professionals from varying disciplines
- Big changes to the carinata industry have left the group with varying levels of uncertainty about the project's future
- And so we set the stage...for SPARC Tank

October 2019



November 2019

Begin developing
scenarios planning
exercise

January 2020

Conduct stakeholder
interviews

January 2020

Based on new
information, scenarios
planning no longer
appropriate

January 2020

Back to the drawing
board!

February 2020

Category 5
Brainstorm session
leads to SPARC Tank
concept



February 28, 2020

SPARC TANK



March 2020

Follow-up with project
leaders

Shark SPARC Tank

- “Shark Tank” concept
 - Participants pitch their product ideas to billionaire investors
 - Investors question participants on aspects of their business ideas
 - The investors decide if and how much they would invest
- Using this concept, SPARC participants will be pitching their product ideas for carinata to a group of five pre-selected “SPARC Sharks”





THE ICEBREAKER



THE PITCH



THE SPARC SHARKS



QUESTIONS FROM SHARKS

SPARC Tank - Objectives

- **Primary Objective:** to provide the SPARC team with a useful exercise during their annual meeting to help them define past successes and develop a body of information that will allow for widespread adoption of the carinata crop when it is re-introduced to the Southeast.
 - Intended to result in a more cohesive and productive team despite the uncertainty surrounding the future market for carinata in the Southeast.
- **Desired Outcome:** a unified team that has worked past the elephant in the room (changes that have taken place within the private sector) to really understand everyone on the team is working toward the same goal: *carinata commercialization in the Southeast.*

Who Was Involved? *SPARC Tank Stakeholders*

Judge Takeaways

- Determine gaps + different approaches
- Aquaculture option
- Crush is a big piece of supply chain
- Lucrative Simaptic? acid market?
- Ratchet up areas of supply chain simult.
- YouTube?

Our Stakeholders

How to market carbon?

farmers	Biorefineries	- Think Tanks	Catfish!
aviation	State/fed Govt		Pet food!
Crushers	Env. NGO's	- The Earth	Disney
grain handlers	Public/Consumers		
Investors	- Global Pop.	- Future gens	
Universities	- Kids		
Scientists	- Teachers		
Catfish/Cats	- Millennials	- Policy Makers	
	Transport. Indust.	- Greta	
	- Wildlife		

Strategies for Success

PLANNING STAGE

- Remote conferencing via Zoom
- Engagement with SPARC leadership via Basecamp
- Pre-event interviews to gauge participant interest and inform activity
- Collaboration with other event facilitators to ensure smooth transitions between exercises
- Creation of a very complete process agenda

PRACTICUM

- Group introductions to Katelyn and Elizabeth
- Group icebreaker questions to get everyone to reflect and get moving
- Competition to bring new perspectives and creativity - and make it FUN!
- Break-out rooms for smaller conversations/strategizing
- Markers and flip charts for team brainstorming & pitch creation
- An expert panel to serve as “judges” and provide unique feedback
- Group debrief to review the lessons learned, gather feedback and plan next steps

Outcomes & Lessons Learned from SPARC Tank

- Planning a session within a pre-established agenda presented both challenges and opportunities
- Balancing silliness and competition with productive dialogue can create a participatory environment for diverse mindsets
- The framing of an activity – especially a risky one – requires a lot of planning and input from collaborators
- The more complicated the task, the more important clear instructions become

Outcomes & Lessons Learned from SPARC Tank

- The exercise may have encouraged more cohesive and productive work between working groups that all face an uncertain future
- SPARC Tank provoked serious thought about carinata stakeholders in the SE US – at a scale beyond what the group typically considers

What was surprising?

- The products designed by teams were *beyond* creative. During working group sessions post-SPARC Tank, teams were even referring to some of them as realistic ideas that should be considered for future work

SPARC Tank Winner! The Co-products Team!



What could have been better?

- Coronavirus was first diagnosed in Tampa the day we were there : [
- Our practicum idea changed 3+ times, and each time brought us back to the drawing board
 - Importance of adaptability
- Co-facilitation challenge of coming from different backgrounds, work/life realities, and physical distances. This presented challenges coordinating meetings
 - However, we were able to leverage both “insider” and “outsider” perspectives when communicating with SPARC leadership, leading to a stronger deliverable

Next Steps



- SPARC efforts will continue with a more cohesive team in 2020
- Ben will stay involved with SPARC and update Liz and Katelyn if any of the SPARC Tank ideas materialize or if there are opportunities for future collaboration
- We will all continue to integrate NRLI skills and techniques into our everyday tasks both within our organizations and with the broader community. Also, some of us are planning to implement them at home (empathetic listening, but maybe not expert panels)

Acknowledgements & Reflection



Questions?

