**Team Innovation**

**FIRST: Food Integrated Resources System Team**

A holistic strategy to food business development that provides equitable and integrated resources and information for business planning and licensing for the successful launch of a small food business in MN.

**Current climate:**

1. First Steps to starting a food business in MN are not clear.
2. Availability of information, resources and advocacy is not equitable. Many entrepreneurs can’t afford consultants to help them through the system.
3. The steps to business planning and licensing are disjointed, poorly integrated and unnecessarily complex.
4. Navigating food rules and regulations is difficult for many; delegated authorities add another layer of complexity.
5. New business models pose the greatest challenge to both entrepreneurs and regulators leading to wasted time and resources and delays in licensing and business development which delays launch.
6. Regulatory resources (time and personnel) are not adequate to the number of new business inquiries
7. New food business entrepreneurs do not have adequate business planning help for sustainable models.
8. Business planning and regulatory navigation need to have points of contact so food entrepreneurs can manage both facets.

**Outcomes of current system**:

1. **Reduced number of new business** starting operations every year (of 1,600+ inquiries, only 300+ receive licenses to launch).
2. **New food businesses failing** within the first year due to lack of proper business preparation and lack of understanding of food safety rules and regulations and
3. **Reduced number of innovative models** due to lack of regs that pertain to that new model and regulators understanding where to fit the models. Some businesses never get off the ground because their models are so new that regulators don’t have experience in fitting the model into existing regulations.. In this case, many of these business owners decide not to pursue their new model or change to a more predictable one.

**Solution**:

Create Team Innovation, a cross-organizational/representational team that provides equitable (targeted) information, resources and advocacy/mediation to help plan and license a new food business in MN.

**Desired Outcomes**:

1. The creation an equitable system of information, resources and advocacy/mediation for food entrepreneurs and food business owners. Levels the playing field for small-scale and limited-resource entrepreneurs.
2. The integration of the business planning and licensing process across relevant organizations.
3. The reduction of wasted time and resources by streamlining the process.
4. The improvement of point of entry (website) information (Smart system).
5. The improvement of business planning for long-term business viability.
6. The improvement of information on food safety after the business is launched.
7. The improvement of MDA/MDH customer service.
8. The improvement of the economic climate of the state of MN.
9. The improvement of food safety compliance of new business models.

**Issues to consider**:

1. The Team must have representatives from the agencies (mostly MDA, but MDH as needed). This presence has to be mandated for it to be dependable (**legislation**).
2. Those regulators present must be high level inspectors/supervisors, with the authority to adapt models.
3. Regulators must be free to provide alternative plans (education?) that will allow compliance with regulations.
4. The team must be fluid to be equitable: representatives from DEED, MFMA, MISA, RTC, etc. will be “on-call” as the need for their services arises with each new model.
5. The Team will provide information to MDA and MDH on how to improve point of entry layout (website information layout), and on how to improve messaging for communication with entrepreneurs. This is the “smart” component of the system.
6. The Team will also identify rules and regs that need to be changed to accommodate new business models while protecting food safety.
7. Structure and funding:
	1. Mandate funding from general fund to support a sub-task force group housed within the Task Force for Food Safety and Defense.
	2. Apply for grant funding to fund this sub-task force (legislature will have to approve outside funds be used for this purpose). Grant funding may be the first means of support for the first two years. Data acquisition during this pilot phase might be beneficial for presenting to legislature in the future.