

With 20 employees, and a 1.2-million dollar budget, the Coalition for the Upper South Platte (CUSP) is one of the most successful watershed groups in Colorado. CUSP's Executive Director, Carol Ekarius, will offer tips, and discuss lessons learned in building an organization that is able to manage thousands of volunteers each year, get on-the-ground projects--both large and small--done, manage resources, and engage stakeholders.

1. Standup for what you believe in. Sometimes you have to be a bulldog, and that may mean arguing with someone, turning someone down who you hate to turn down (like a big funder)
2. Be your mission statement, because it is your reason to be.
3. Be willing to take a risk sometimes. The worst case is your NGO goes out of existence, but if you follow 1 and 2 you have to be willing to jump off a cliff sometimes...
4. Be business-like: have policies, do audits, make your process transparent.
5. Hire good help and then empower them to do great things. And then, when they are ready to move on, help be a spring-board for their careers.
6. Build on success--start with smaller and doable projects, and grow into larger projects.
8. Think outside the box--it sounds cliché, but it is true. Read about innovators in all kinds of fields, and think about how the lessons they have created apply to what you are doing.
9. Look for strategic partnerships and alliances. Other NGOs aren't your competitors.
10. Try not to alienate people, which means truly listening to everyone who isn't totally batshit crazy, and discussing things with them.
11. Be patient! Projects (especially big ones) can take several years to come to fruition.