

HFFI 2024 Planning Grant Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 5.23.2024

Please note, this FAQ will be updated periodically with additional questions and resources.

Program Information & Funding Availability

- **Where can I find the 2024 HFFI Planning Grant Program Request for Applications (RFA)?**

The full RFA is available for download at www.investinginfood.com/planning-grant.

- **Is this program in Grants.gov?**

No, you cannot apply for this program using grants.gov. Applications must be submitted through Reinvestment Fund's online grants portal, SmartSimple (<https://reinvestmentfund.smartsimple.com/>), by 11:59 PM Eastern Time on Monday, June 17, 2024. Applications received by email, mail, or fax will not be reviewed.

- **Is this program the same as the HFFI Targeted Small Grants (HFFI TSG) Program or the HFFI Local and Regional Healthy Food Financing Partnerships Program (HFFI Partnerships Program)?**

No, the HFFI Planning Grant Program is a new HFFI funding opportunity. Similar to the HFFI TSG Program, the HFFI Planning Grant Program will provide awards to food retail and food retail supply chain enterprises. This opportunity specifically offers grants to organizations and businesses for eligible, healthy food retail or food enterprise projects that are in the planning, predevelopment or pre-operating stages.

- **How can I get my questions about the application answered or get help using the online grants portal?**

Please direct individual questions by email to help@investinginfood.com. Please include your specific questions in the email so Reinvestment Fund staff may best assist you. Reinvestment Fund staff will be available to answer questions until Friday, June 14, 2024. Reinvestment Fund strongly encourages applicants to submit early to avoid technical issues with the grant portal.

- **Where can I find examples of projects that have been previously funded through America's HFFI?**

Information on projects previously funded through America's HFFI is available at www.investinginfood.com/impact.

- **Will this grant program be offered again next year?**

Additional funding opportunities may be available in the future for planning grant activities, but there is no guarantee of an annual funding round.

- **Does being awarded an HFFI Planning Grant guarantee that I will be awarded additional HFFI funding or loans for my project.**

Receipt of an HFFI Planning Grant does not guarantee an organization's selection for future HFFI grant or loan funding.

- **How does this program differ from other programs called HFFI?**

Since 2009, PolicyLink, The Food Trust, and Reinvestment Fund have led a national effort to raise awareness of the issue of limited food access in many communities across America. To date, multiple federal, state, and local governments and philanthropies have supported healthy food financing policies and initiatives.

Thus far funded through U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Community Economic Development (CED) Program and the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund, federal HFFI programs have supported various healthy food initiatives that are designed to meet locally determined community needs and priorities. These HFFI programs have provided grants and loans to help construct new and renovated grocery stores, farmers markets, corner stores, food hubs, and urban farms. In addition, several states and municipalities have developed HFFI programs based on the public-private model of investment in food access.

The 2014 Farm Bill created this Healthy Food Financing Initiative within USDA, to be administered by a CDFI. This program, called America's Healthy Food Financing Initiative, is managed by Reinvestment Fund, and provides financial and technical assistance, either directly or through other partners and intermediaries, to eligible fresh, healthy food retailers and food retail supply chain enterprises.

- **Is there a match requirement?**

No, there is no match requirement for this grant program.

- **Can this grant be used as a match for other federal grant applications?**

No, HFFI grant awards may not be used as match for other federal awards.

- **If my application is awarded a grant, when will the grant period begin and end? When will funds be available?**

There is no standard grant period begin date for all grantees. Grant periods can be up to 12 months and will reflect the amount of time it will take you to complete your project, if awarded a grant. We will customize the start date for each grantee based on their needs, and it should be within 90 days of the grant agreement signing date, which should be shortly after the time you are notified of your selection for an award (award announcements will be made no earlier than August 2024). You can project in your application what grant end date seems reasonable to you based on your project timeline, as long as it is no longer than 12 months after the start date.

Funds will be available for disbursement, either as a reimbursement or an advance, throughout the grant period. Funds will be disbursed according to a schedule determined in consultation with the selected grantee as appropriate for their grant project.

- **How do fund disbursements work for awarded grantees?**

Once organizations are awarded grant funds, they may access these funds throughout the grant cycle as advances and reimbursements. Grantees are required to provide invoices or quotes for all advances, and proof of payment for all purchases made with HFFI grant funds. An onboarding webinar will be held for selected awardees with more information about this process.

Eligibility & Use of Funds

- **What is an underserved area?**

The term “underserved area” is defined by Section 6015 of the 2008 Farm Bill, as a community (including an urban or rural community and an Indian tribal community) that has: limited access to affordable, healthy foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables, in grocery retail stores or farmer-to-consumer direct markets; and a high rate of hunger or food insecurity or a high poverty rate. For the purposes of the Planning Grant Program, a project must be located:

1. In a Census tract determined to be a Low-Income and Low-Supermarket-Access Census Tract by the United States Department of Agriculture in its Food Access Research Atlas;
2. OR in a Census tract adjacent to a Census tract determined to be a Low-Income and Low-Supermarket-Access Census Tracts by the United States Department of

Agriculture in its Food Access Research Atlas; and which has a median family income less than or equal to 120 percent of the applicable Area Median Family Income;

3. OR in a Geographic Unit as defined in 12CFR Part 1805.201(b)(3)(ii)(B), which meets the criteria as having low access to supermarkets or grocery stores through a methodology that has been adopted for use by another government or philanthropic healthy food initiative or demonstrates other criteria describing low access to supermarkets or grocery stores for an underserved community.

More information, including data and maps available to help determine if a proposed location is eligible in an eligible underserved area, is available at

<https://www.investinginfood.com/eligibility/>.

- **What are staple or perishable foods?**

As defined in Section 4206 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, the term 'staple food' means food that is a basic dietary item, which includes bread, flour, fruits, vegetables and meat.

As defined in Section 4206 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, the term 'perishable food' means a staple food that is fresh, refrigerated, or frozen.

- **Does a retail outlet need to offer both staple and perishable foods to be eligible?**

Yes, a retailer must offer an assortment of staple and perishable foods to be eligible. Retailers must also accept SNAP. Farmers markets that offer only produce will not be eligible. For more information on SNAP food retailer stocking requirements, please visit

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailer>.

- **Are non-retail projects eligible to apply?**

Yes, this program is open to food retail and food enterprise projects that meet the eligibility requirements outlined in the RFA. This program aims to support projects that will increase access to healthy staple and perishable foods for retail sale, which includes supporting food enterprises in the food retail supply chain.

Food enterprises are businesses or organizations along the food supply chain such as food hubs; food producers, distributors, processors, and manufacturers; commercial kitchens and food business incubators; mobile markets; and other direct to consumer markets. Food enterprises do not necessarily involve the direct sale of food to consumers. Food enterprise projects applying to this program will need to describe how the planning and implementation of the business model will substantially contribute to the retail food supply chain and downstream retailers, ultimately improving access to an assortment of staple and perishable foods at downstream, SNAP eligible, retailers.

Please refer to the eligibility section of the RFA for more details on eligible applicants and projects.

- **Are projects involving business models that will not be physically located in an eligible underserved area but will involve delivery of SNAP eligible staple and perishable foods directly to consumers in underserved areas eligible?**

If the proposed business will not be physically located in an underserved area, but will create a business model that involves delivery of staple and perishable foods directly to consumers, the application will need to describe how their project is meaningfully focused on reaching communities physically located in eligible underserved areas, including how they will ensure the business will make a concentrated effort to deliver food to eligible underserved areas, and how deliveries to these locations will be targeted and sustained once operating. Any business selling direct to consumer also needs to be SNAP authorized.

- **Are food supply chain projects involving business models that will not be physically located in an eligible underserved area, but will distribute staple and perishable foods to SNAP authorized food retailers in underserved areas eligible?**

Food enterprise projects that involve the creation or expansion of food retail supply chain businesses do not physically need to be located in an underserved area but must directly impact the sale of an assortment of SNAP eligible staple and perishable foods in eligible underserved areas.

If the proposed food supply chain business will distribute staple and perishable foods to other businesses, the application will need to provide the location of the SNAP authorized food retailers to which the business will distribute food, and describe how they will ensure distribution to these retailers is sustained once the business model is operating in order to be considered eligible.

- **Are food banks, food shelves, or food pantries eligible?**

No, food pantries and other charitable or free food distribution programs are not eligible for HFFI grant funding. To be eligible, retail projects must sell food and accept SNAP for payment. A food bank or pantry is an eligible applicant if they are proposing an eligible retail project or food enterprise project, as defined in the RFA.

Please refer to the eligibility section of the RFA for more details on eligible applicants and projects.

- **Are projects in urban areas eligible?**

Yes, projects in urban and rural areas are eligible if they are located in an eligible underserved area. You can look up the eligibility of your location using the mapping tool available on our website: <https://www.investinginfood.com/eligibility/>

- **Can a retail store that also sells prepared food apply for this program?**

Yes, a retail store that also sells prepared or hot food may apply for this program if it plans to accept SNAP benefits. To be eligible, applicants must be planning a food retail or food retail supply chain business model that creates, expands, or preserves the availability of staple and perishable foods.

- **Are restaurants eligible?**

This program is not designed to support projects that are primarily focused on the sale of prepared, hot foods in a restaurant or takeaway setting to consumers, or for free congregate meals in a service setting. Prepared foods may be a component of an eligible food retail or food enterprise project that can also demonstrate how the proposed project will expand or preserve the availability of staple and perishable foods.

- **Are community gardens eligible?**

Projects that are primarily focused on gardening and farming are not eligible for HFFI grant funding. Projects to support retail food sales at community gardens are eligible if they offer an assortment of staple and perishable foods for sale and accept SNAP.

Please refer to the eligibility section of the RFA for more details on eligible applicants and projects.

- **Are food retail programs or initiatives eligible?**

Projects involving the creation or expansion of food retailers, or food retail supply chain businesses operated by any kind of legal entity, are eligible for this program. Applications seeking funding for projects involving the creation or administration food financing, technical assistance, consulting or educational programs and initiatives that are primarily focused on efforts like supporting retailers or food enterprises, coordinating among them, or offering services to them will not be considered eligible. To be consider eligible, applications must propose planning and predevelopment activities for a project that will support healthy food access in underserved communities through the creation or expansion of a discrete food retail or food retail supply chain business model.

- **Are mobile markets or farmers markets eligible to apply?**

Mobile markets, farmers markets, and other non-traditional retail models are eligible for grants if they will accept SNAP as payment and will offer staple and perishable foods, as defined in Section 4206 of the Agricultural Act of 2014. For more information on SNAP food retailer stocking requirements, please visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailer>.

General questions about SNAP and EBT should be directed to Ask USDA via <https://ask.usda.gov/s/contactsupport>. Reinvestment Fund cannot assist with SNAP applications or answer questions about the SNAP authorization process.

- **I am an existing store expanding or moving to a new location? Am I eligible for grant funding for predevelopment activities?**

Funds may be used for planning the expansion of an existing business model, if the expanded business model will serve new underserved populations that are not already serviced by the existing business. Grant funds may not be used for the operational costs of an existing business.

- **Can I apply for two projects? What about a single project with multiple locations?**

The HFFI Planning Grant Program will only accept one application per organization, and one application per project. A single application could include a project with multiple components, and/or multiple sites or locations. More successful projects with multiple components or locations will be those who demonstrate that the components are connected under a common theme.

- **Can start-up businesses apply?**

Yes, new food enterprises, new retail stores and other kinds of start-up projects are eligible for funding. This program will specifically support planning and predevelopment activities for new or expanded business models.

- **Can funds from this program be used alongside funds from another grant program?**

Yes, we encourage applicants to seek additional outside funding when possible and necessary.

- **Can these funds be used for real property acquisition?**

Funds for this program may not be used directly for the purchase or acquisition of property, land, or buildings. Acquisition may be a part of the overall budget but cannot be funded by this grant award. In addition, grant funds may be used for soft costs associated with land acquisition, such as legal fees and closing costs.

- **Can grant funds be used for construction expenses or equipment purchases?**

Funds from this program may not be used to cover construction, equipment, or other hard costs for the creation, retrofit, fit-out, and/or expansion of a facility. Brick and mortar facility development may be a part of the overall project budget but cannot be funded by this grant award.

- **Can this grant pay for staffing costs / wages / labor / personnel?**

Yes, personnel costs, including salaries, wages, and stipends are all eligible uses. For personnel costs, applicants should describe how specific staff will support planning and predevelopment activities that will ultimately lead to the execution of a successful business model and operations.

- **Can this grant support pop-up shops or mobile market operations if they are in anticipation of a brick-and-mortar retailer?**

This grant will not support general operating costs. If there are specific things happening at the pop ups, such as community engagement activities, that would directly inform the ultimate business model, we may consider the costs to support those activities allowable.

- **Can this grant support programs that provide incentives, coupons, or prescriptions for food?**

This grant program is focused on supporting operators or retail access points themselves in providing food for sale, rather than supporting consumers in buying foods. Programs to administer, promote, or run an incentive program, such as prescriptions for fresh food or double bucks coupons are not eligible. The coupons themselves are not an eligible grant use.

- **Can this grant be used to start a loan or grant fund to support the creation of healthy food retail in an underserved community?**

No, funds from the HFFI Planning Grant Program may not be used to create a loan or grant fund for healthy food retail. Nonprofits, intermediaries, and/or governments may apply in partnership with retailers and enterprises to undertake a discrete project to support healthy food access in underserved communities.

- **Can this grant be used to support meal programs, like CACFP, school food, or emergency meals?**

No. While we recognize that there is great need for funding to support child nutrition, emergency meals, and support for food insecure families, the HFFI Planning Grant Program is

not able to support meal programs or emergency food. This program is only available to projects that are focused on providing food for retail sale.

Application Requirements & Guidelines

- **Do organizations need to be formally incorporated in order to apply? Can I apply using a fiscal sponsor?**

Yes, organizations must be legally incorporated, and must provide documentation of their legal status to apply. To be awarded a grant, an applicant must be legally incorporated, have an EIN/TIN and a UEI number, as well as an active SAM registration. If an applicant doesn't have an EIN/TIN, they may apply through a partner or a fiscal sponsor.

The organization that intends to hold the grant agreement with Reinvestment Fund if awarded the grant should be the applicant in SmartSimple. The Applicant Information and Attestations/Supplemental Questions should also be completed on behalf of the fiscal sponsor. You should describe your organization (who will be completing the project) in narrative questions.

- **Will all submitted applications be scored?**

All submitted applications will be screened for eligibility. Only submitted applications that are eligible will be scored based on the criteria outlined in the RFA.

- **What are the requirements for SAM registration?**

Applicants are required to register with the System for Award Management (SAM) at sam.gov and keep the sam.gov registration open until application process is complete. If an applicant is selected to receive a grant award, SAM registration must be active throughout the life of the award.

You can register with SAM at <https://sam.gov/SAM/>. SAM is an official website of the U.S. government. There is no cost to use SAM. For more information and assistance with using SAM, please review the HELP page at: <https://sam.gov/content/help> and/or contact SAM directly.

When applicants submit their application, they will be asked to provide their SAM UEI number and expiration date. During the application process, prior to making grant awards, Reinvestment Fund will screen applicants for SAM registration.

- **Can I submit letters of support?**

Letters of Support may be submitted with your full application through the online application portal. Letters of support are not required but are encouraged to be submitted as supplemental application materials. Applicants should not mail physical letters to Reinvestment Fund.