



**2024 Call for Proposals:
Advancing Food Security in New Jersey Through Community-
Accountable Benefits Programs and Anti-Hunger Policy Solutions**

Proposal Deadline: Monday, April 1, 2024 at 11:59 p.m.

FUNDING SNAPSHOT

The [New Jersey Food Security Initiative](#) (NJFSI) is launching this Call for Proposals to support implementation of initiatives with strong potential to achieve changes in practices, policies, systems, and/or environments that increase food security and improve nutrition to advance health equity in New Jersey, with impact that can be sustained once grant funding ends. Proposals are expected to engage cross-sector partners (including community-based, grassroots organizations, and/or residents with lived experience of hunger, food insecurity, and poverty in New Jersey), align with NJFSI priorities, and help leverage momentum within the state. A total of \$1,000,000 is available for four to six one-time awards ranging from \$175,000–\$225,000. Grants will begin in June 2024 and continue for 15 months, inclusive of an optional three-month planning period.

Eligible proposals will focus on one or both of the following NJFSI priorities:

1. Streamline state/local benefits outreach, application, and recertification practices and processes that enhance customer service, increase accountability to residents, and improve community purchasing power.
2. Enhance equitable implementation and monitoring of current federal/state/county anti-hunger policies that center equitable food access and food security.

BACKGROUND

NJFSI is a three-year (2024–2026) cross-sector, collaborative, community-centered effort to increase food security and improve nutrition to advance health equity in New Jersey. It is led by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF).

Food insecurity is a pervasive and multidimensional issue that requires creative solutions across sectors and across levels of influence. NJSFI aims to help increase food security, equitable access to healthier food options, and community purchasing power in New Jersey through enhanced infrastructure; coordination across systems; advocacy; and leveraging of federal, state, and local resources, and assets and opportunities. It seeks to support and uplift existing initiatives and collaborations across the state by providing additional funding opportunities, capacity building, resources, and technical assistance.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Stark disparities in food insecurity exist within the state, which must be addressed to create an equitable opportunity for good health and well-being for everyone. A history of community disinvestment and systems of oppression, like systemic racism, result in disproportionate burdens of food insecurity in New Jersey along geographic lines and by race and ethnicity.

The USDA report [*Household Food Security in the United States in 2022*](#) found that, on average, 8.8% of New Jersey households were food insecure from 2020–2022. Food insecurity has serious health repercussions across the lifespan. It negatively impacts the ability of children to develop and learn, fuels harmful and chronic health conditions, and costs New Jersey an estimated \$1.3 billion each year. A mass of research provides evidence that food insecurity is associated with costly chronic diseases and unfavorable health outcomes, including diabetes, hypertension, poor mental health, poor birth outcomes including low birth weight, iron deficiency, cost-related medication underuse, and increased health care utilization and costs.

In response to the significant issue of food insecurity and the opportunity costs of not comprehensively addressing it, RWJF and FRAC embarked on an assessment of the landscape of hunger and its solutions in New Jersey in collaboration with state, county, and local experts with professional and lived experience with food insecurity. The final report, [*Hunger and Its Solutions in New Jersey: Landscape Analysis of Current Initiatives, Recommended Action, and Emerging Opportunities for Further Investment*](#), outlines key policies, systems changes, cross-sector outreach, and programmatic initiatives that, if implemented in New Jersey, will create more equitable and accessible food access across the state.

NJFSI seeks to jumpstart implementation of a prioritized subset of the recommendations over the next three years through this funding opportunity as well as other initiatives and investments. Many organizations, community-based groups, government agencies, universities, and businesses are working to address food insecurity in New Jersey, through innovative and effective cross-sector collaborations. NJFSI seeks to

complement this work through the provision of funding, technical assistance, information, and convening opportunities.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

Developed with guidance from New Jersey organizations and residents who have experienced food insecurity, this funding opportunity will provide four to six one-time grants ranging from \$175,000–\$225,000 to support implementation of initiatives with strong potential to achieve changes in practices, policies, systems, and/or environments that increase food security and improve nutrition to advance health equity in New Jersey, with impact that can be sustained once grant funding ends. Proposals are expected to engage cross-sectors partners whose involvement will be critical to the project's success (including community-based, grassroots organizations, and/or residents who have experienced food insecurity due to limited food access and poverty), align with NJFSI priorities, and help leverage momentum within the state. Grants will begin in June 2024 and continue for 15 months, including an optional three-month planning period.

Funding is available to support community-based organizations and coalitions, state and local government agencies or school districts, and/or universities collaborating at the township, county, region, and/or state level on efforts that are working to advance these NJFSI priorities:

1. Improve Community-Accountable Food Security Benefits Programs in New Jersey. Streamline state/local benefits outreach, application, and recertification practices and processes that enhance customer service, increase accountability to residents, and improve community purchasing power.

Projects will improve delivery of benefits programs through initiatives that include but are not limited to the following:

- Collaborative efforts between state and/or county agencies and community-based organizations that lead to new or expanded customer feedback loops and engagement activities that center the priorities of SNAP and/or WIC recipients.
- Training and other interventions for frontline staff in state, county, and/or local social services agencies and organizations to strengthen their ability to deliver dignified, compassionate, client-centered service equitably and in culturally appropriate ways.
- Implementation of health care, hospital system, and/or Federally Qualified Health Center-based food security referrals, services, and initiatives with community-based partners.
- Other practice, policy, environmental, and/or systems changes that improve community-accountable food security benefits programs in New Jersey.

2. Anti-Hunger Policy Outreach and/or Implementation. Enhance equitable implementation and monitoring of current federal/state/county anti-hunger policies that center equitable food access and food security.

Projects will help increase utilization of federal/state/local anti-hunger policies through initiatives that include but are not limited to the following:

- Community-driven outreach/education campaigns that center the voices of residents with lived experience of food insecurity, hunger, and poverty to increase public support, program enrollment, and benefit redemption in SNAP, WIC, and/or other benefit or school meal programs.
- Updated advocacy tools and resources (e.g., federal nutrition program participation reports, mapping, and toolkits) that help New Jersey organizations and coalitions with policy implementation and monitoring.
- Initiatives that enhance the capacity of social service agencies and community organizations in New Jersey to effectively implement state/federal policies that improve food security and equitable food access in the state.

Prospective applicants are encouraged to refer to [*Hunger and Its Solutions in New Jersey: Landscape Analysis of Current Initiatives, Recommended Action, and Emerging Opportunities for Further Investment*](#) for additional project ideas. See Recommended Actions below, excerpted from Page 5 of the landscape analysis.

GOAL 1: ENHANCE CROSS-SECTOR COORDINATION AND EXPAND COMMUNITY OUTREACH		
Outreach and Coordination	Policy and Systems	Place-based Initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create multisector customer feedback loops. • Design engaging client-centered outreach campaigns. • Engage and empower frontline workers and other trusted messengers on making effective referrals. • Strengthen and expand the network of partners from a broad spectrum of sectors engaging in communications and outreach with the federal nutrition programs. • Promote the implementation of health care/hospital systems-based food security referrals, services, and initiatives with community-based partners. • Build out statewide learning collaboratives and communities of practice across the food system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in technology systems to enable cross-agency data sharing and communication. • Maximize state and county agency utilization of federal nutrition program options streamlining benefits access. • Provide capacity, expertise, and community connections to the upcoming Office of New Jersey Food Security Advocate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replicate and support the development of community service hubs offering wholistic, wraparound services to New Jersey residents facing hardships. • Support, enhance, and build local cross-sector community coalitions, councils, and task forces. • Support and create effective locally based systems to fully inform residents of food access/food program benefits opportunities.
GOAL 2: MAXIMIZE EQUITABLE FOOD PURCHASING POWER AND PROCUREMENT SYSTEMS		
Outreach and Coordination	Policy and Systems	Place-based Initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a cross-program training and resource portal on public benefit programs and food program procurement contract (vending, food products, and food such as produce) opportunities. • Develop a joint New Jersey food security research agenda. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in and/or develop food-focused enterprises to support local food access in federal nutrition program meal service and other public purchasing. • Foster local small food businesses' startup and sustainability in underserved communities. • Leverage the New Jersey Food Desert Relief Program (NJ FDRP) to equitably improve food access for individuals who face transportation and delivery barriers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and expand the use of Double up Bucks, Produce Prescription Programs, and other nutrition incentives at local retailers and farmers markets, leveraging SNAP, P-EBT, and WIC benefits. • Ensure streamlined and stigma-free benefit redemption via stores or online for all SNAP and WIC clients. • In partnership with local governments, leverage federal funding to build food-based, community-driven, economic development enterprises.
GOAL 3: BUILD INFRASTRUCTURE NECESSARY TO LEVERAGE POLICY AND PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES		
Outreach and Coordination	Policy and Systems	Place-based Initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage the USDA WIC innovation funds to promote trusted messenger community organizations outreach. • Strengthen outreach campaigns to maximize ongoing flexibilities and expanded benefit options enacted during the pandemic. • Increase the public understanding and awareness that solving food insecurity is vital to the health and well-being of individuals, families, the New Jersey economy, and every local community. • Supplement capacity of state and local agencies and organizations to prepare strong proposals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue waivers and demonstration projects that adapt certain temporary COVID-19 flexibilities and changes in services and benefits for the longer term. • Foster cross-sector partnerships and memorandums of understanding to enable continued remote services and benefits issuance long term. • Leverage American Rescue Plan Act, as well as New Jersey state food program legislation funding and momentum to advance food security. • Strengthen customer service in SNAP and other benefit programs at the county and local levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage American Rescue Plan or other funding and issue a request for proposals to provide innovative and trusted local organizations matching funds for USDA's SNAP outreach funding. • Provide a structure and mechanism for organizations, municipalities, and residents to work together to address barriers and protocols that lead to application denials and churning out of programs.

Regardless of their focus, all projects should:

- Foster cross-sector collaboration and coordinate key activities with New Jersey-based organizations whose involvement will be critical to project success;
- Be developed, planned, and/or implemented with community-based, grassroots organizations, and/or residents who have experienced food insecurity due to limited food access and poverty*; and
- Focus on changes in practices, policies, systems, and/or environments that can be sustained when the grant period ends and that increase food security and improve nutrition to advance health equity in New Jersey.

*Guidance on meaningful, equitable engagement practices can be found [here](#).

Examples of outcomes that funded projects should seek to achieve include but are not limited to the following:

- Increased participation in and access to New Jersey food programs and/or other state-administered benefit programs.

- Increased capacity (e.g., financial, staffing, knowledge, skills) of food security benefits systems and programs in New Jersey to be accountable to residents and enhance customer service.
- Increased community participation in governmental and organizational decision-making processes, and program planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- Increased commitment to coordination among a greater number and diversity of community organizations and agencies promoting and supporting equitable policy implementation.
- Increased awareness of and enhanced capacity by social services agencies and community-based organizations to effectively implement state/federal policies that improve food security and equitable food access.
- Increased SNAP/WIC recipient satisfaction with benefit application processes and procedures and support from state/county agency staff.

FUNDING DETAILS

- **Eligible Applicants:** Applicants must be (a) based in New Jersey; and (b) classified as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, a public or private academic institution or school district, or a state or local government agency. Organizations that are not eligible to apply may serve as a partner in a proposal submitted by an eligible organization.
- **Type of Award:** Awards funded under this opportunity will be structured as grants.
- **Number of Awards:** Four to six grants will be awarded.
- **Amount of Award:** A total of \$1,000,000 in funding is available from this Call for Proposals. Budgets should align with the project scope and potential for impact. Proposed budgets can range from \$175,000–\$225,000.
- **Award Duration:** Awards will be for up to 15 months, beginning on June 3, 2024, and ending on August 31, 2025.
- **Use of Funds:** Award funds should cover the actual costs of the project, including personnel and other direct costs and any external consultants or contracts. A percentage of the requested budget may be used for indirect costs to support the applicant organization’s general operations. See [RWJF’s Indirect Cost Rate Policy](#) for more information, including maximum allowable rates. Funds may not be used to support clinical trials of unapproved drugs or devices, to construct or renovate facilities, and for lobbying or political activities. Additionally, funds may not be used to purchase and/or distribute emergency food.
- **Payment of Awards:** 90 percent of the award will be paid up front, and 10 percent will be paid upon receipt of the final budget and narrative reports.

OPEN ACCESS

To ensure NJFSI-supported research is made accessible to a wide and diverse audience, awardees who publish findings in peer-reviewed publications must do so in open access journals and/or must include funds in their budgets to cover the cost of

making the resulting publications open access (typically \$2,000–\$5,000 per manuscript). This requirement is in conformance with RWJF’s [Open Access policy](#).

SELECTION CRITERIA

Competitive proposals will demonstrate the following attributes, which will serve as proposal review criteria:

1. a clear description of the proposal, including the needs it seeks to address, who will benefit, the goals you hope to achieve during the grant period, key activities and, if relevant, how the proposal is informed by or adapted from an evidence-based approach from within or outside New Jersey (20 points);
2. alignment with one or both of the NJFSI priorities that are the focus of this funding opportunity (5 points);
3. strong potential to increase food security and improve nutrition to advance health equity in New Jersey by impacting practices, policies, systems, and/or environments in ways that can be sustained once grant funding ends (15 points);
4. a team with substantive experience in designing, managing, and implementing similar initiatives, including centering the needs of residents who have experienced food insecurity due to limited food access and poverty (10 points);
5. active engagement of community-based, grassroots organizations, and/or residents who have experienced food insecurity due to limited food access and poverty in New Jersey in the proposal development process and in project planning, implementation, and/or evaluation, and funds budgeted to support their participation (15 points);
6. relationships and cross-sector collaboration among New Jersey-based organizations whose involvement will be critical to the project’s success and that will catalyze collaboration among key partners (15 points);
7. a clear understanding of potential challenges and realistic ideas for mitigating them (5 points);
8. measurable outcomes that can feasibly be accomplished within the grant period (10 points) and plans for sharing progress and results with residents/populations most impacted; and
9. a budget that aligns with the proposal’s focus and scope and includes (if appropriate) a commitment of in-kind resources (5 points).

EVALUATION AND MONITORING

The Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition (GSCN) will evaluate NJFSI overall, including the degree to which the overall initiative achieved its stated goals as well as learning related to implementation. Grant project directors and key staff are expected to help inform this evaluation by:

- Participating in a one-hour exit interview (via Zoom) with GSCN to discuss their perspective on NJFSI and their funded project.

- If applicable, providing non-proprietary administrative data (i.e., information that is already being or will be collected during the grant period) that is relevant to evaluating the progress and/or impacts of NJFSI overall and/or assessing individual projects supported by NJFSI. GSCN will work with awardees to execute any necessary agreements (if applicable) and identify data that is suitable and feasible and will require minimal effort from the grantee to share.
- If applicable and feasible, working with GSCN to help recruit participants to engage in survey, interview, and/or focus group data collection that GSCN will lead. These data collection efforts will help GSCN explore the impacts of NJFSI overall and/or its individual projects on people helped by the funded projects.

REPORTING EXPECTATIONS

Grantees will be expected to meet FRAC requirements for the submission of narrative and financial reports, as well as periodic information needed for overall project performance monitoring and management, including the following:

- Grantee orientation kick-off meeting (via Zoom)
- Quarterly check-in/update meetings with FRAC staff (via Zoom)
- End-of-project narrative report
- End-of-project budget report

HOW TO APPLY

Proposals for this funding opportunity must be submitted via FRAC's online application system. Click [here](#) to begin the application process. Applicants are encouraged to review application questions before getting started. Applications in progress can be saved and completed in multiple sessions.

Applicants will be asked to respond to nine questions that align with the review criteria described in this CFP; provide background information about the lead applicant organization, project director(s), project staff, and key partners; and include a high-level timeline with key milestones (subject to refinement during an optional three-month planning period) and a 15-month budget and budget narrative. One-page letters of support from key partners are highly encouraged but not required.

Additional Information

Finalists may be required to submit additional information to FRAC prior to finalizing the award.

Please direct inquiries to:

Jackie Bavaro, Program Manager
New Jersey Food Security Initiative
Email: jbavaro@frac.org

Applicants should log in to the [online application system](#) and familiarize themselves with submission requirements well before the deadline. Staff may be unable to assist applicants in the final 24 hours before the submission deadline. Please note that FRAC does not provide individual feedback on proposals submitted.

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

Monday, February 5, 2024

Call for Proposals released.

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

Webinar for prospective applicants; register [here](#).

A recording of the webinar will be posted at NJFSI.org for those who are unable to participate.

Monday, April 1, 2024 at 11:59 p.m.

Deadline for receipt of proposals.

May 2024

Applicants notified of decision.

June 3, 2024

Anticipated grant start date.

August 31, 2025

Grant end date.

DEADLINE POLICY

Late submissions will not be accepted for any reason. While late submissions will not be accepted, FRAC may choose, at its sole discretion, to extend the proposal deadline for all applicants. Such extensions generally will be granted only in the event of: (1) a verified issue with the FRAC proposal system that prevented completion and submission of proposals; or (2) a disaster, emergency, or significant internet outage that affects one or more areas of the state. If the deadline is extended for any reason, the extension will be posted at NJFSI.org.