



LAKE MICHIGAN  
SCHOOL FOOD SYSTEM  
INNOVATION HUB

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## **Spark Awards | Application Questions**

### **Pre-Screen Questions**

Please respond to these questions (yes/no) to determine your eligibility for a grant:

1. Does your project intend to benefit at least one school within the Lake Michigan region (Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan)?
2. Have you been awarded funds as a lead applicant from the USDA-funded Project SCALES (Supporting Community Agriculture and Local Education Systems) or Project PLANTS (Partnerships for Local Agriculture and Nutrition Transformation in Schools) grant programs? Award decisions for both of these projects are expected in March 2024.
3. Have you applied for or been awarded USDA funds for the Lake Michigan School Food System Innovation Hub project you are proposing?
4. Are you willing to attend three virtual training/networking sessions, which are designed to support your work throughout the course of your project?
5. Do you understand that there are federal regulations and guidelines that apply to this grant, and are you committed to following these rules and requirements as outlined in the grant agreement?
6. Has your organization ever been disqualified or had its eligibility revoked for receiving federal funds?
7. Have you, as an individual or organization, been required to return federal funds due to criminal activity?

### **Applicant Information**

Project Title:

Lead Applicant Organization:

Organization Address:

Grant Main Contact:

Name:

Job Title:

Email:

Phone:

School Food System Sector:

- Farmer
- Food Producer
- Food Processor
- Food Supplier
- Food Distributor or Hub
- Food Preparation Service or Organization
- Food Service Professional or Manager
- Community Support Organization
- School/School District/School Educator
- Wellness/Nutritionist/Dietitian
- Other (please describe)

## Project Team Information

*[This section informs the Collaboration and Feasibility Selection Criteria]*

*[Applicants will be able to add as many partners as needed]*

List who is on your project team, their affiliated organizations and their primary role(s) within the school food system. Then describe the work they will perform for this project. Please note — you should have a letter of support from each organization listed here. You can download Letters of Support Guidance and Templates at

[InnovateSchoolFood.org/application-information/#docs](http://InnovateSchoolFood.org/application-information/#docs).

Partner Organization Name:

Partner Organization Zip Code:

Name of Primary Contact:

Job Title:

Contact Email:

School Food System Sector:

- Farmer

- Food Producer
- Food Processor
- Food Supplier
- Food Distributor or Hub
- Food Preparation Service or Organization
- Food Service Professional or Manager
- Community Support Organization
- School/School District/School Educator
- Wellness/Nutritionist/Dietitian
- Other (please describe)

Describe the work this partner will perform for this project, including the expertise the partner brings to this project:

### **Application Questions**

Would you prefer to submit answers to the following questions by typing responses in the boxes or uploading audio files?

- Typing
- Audio files

Note: If you switch between 'Typing' or 'Audio files', all previously entered and loaded data will be cleared after the save action.

All questions in the following sections have a 3,000-character maximum or 5-minute audio maximum; however, we encourage you to follow the suggested length requested for each question.

### **Project Description**

*[this section informs Feasibility and Accountability Selection Criteria]*

1. Please provide a brief summary of your proposed project (what, where, why, who, when) and how you would spend your budget. Suggested length: one short paragraph or 1 minute of audio.

### **Project Goals**

*[this section informs Alignment with Goals and Innovation Selection Criteria]*

In this section, describe how your project meets one or both goals of this grant program:

- Increasing the number of small food producers and local food businesses working in the school food system and Lake Michigan region

- Improving the amount or quality of nutritious and culturally relevant foods that align with the current USDA meal pattern requirements for school meals
2. Which of these goals align most closely with your project? Choose all that apply. Review Appendix A in the Request for Proposals for definitions of these terms.
    - Increasing the number of local food businesses engaged in the Lake Michigan region school food system
    - Increasing the number of small food producers engaged in the Lake Michigan region school food system
    - Improving the amount, frequency or quality of culturally relevant foods in school food/meals programs
    - Improving the amount, frequency or quality of nutritious foods for school meals that align with USDA meal pattern requirements for school meals
  
  3. What are the primary ways your project is impacting the Lake Michigan school food system? Choose 1-3 areas you see your project affecting.
    - Developing or innovating distribution systems via food service companies, farmer cooperatives, food hubs and/or specialty distributors
    - Capacity building, or enhancing skill, knowledge and resource sharing, (e.g., food safety, meal pattern training) for food system partners to serve schools
    - Integrating educators (e.g., teachers, school administrators, informal educators) into the food system
    - Integrating students, parents, teachers, other community members, nutritionists/dietitians, and/or school administrators into the development of food options
    - Improving elements that go into food preparation at schools, including equipment needed and training for school food service professionals to prepare whole, fresh ingredients and/or scratch made food
    - Bringing new or improved products to the school food system
    - Enhancing relationships between food distributors and food preparers
    - Other, please briefly describe:
  
  4. Describe how your project meets the goals and local food system impacts indicated above. Suggested length: 2 paragraphs or 2 minutes of audio.

**Priority Community Involvement**

*[this section informs Priority Communities Selection Criteria]*

Another goal of this grant is to prioritize investments in communities that have experienced racism and discrimination and/or historically underserved communities, including any of the following populations: Black or African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic or

Latine, Asian or Pacific Islander, or other people of color; people who live in rural areas; or people with limited incomes.

5. Which of these priority communities does your project serve? (Check all that apply)

- Rural community
- Limited income community
- Primarily Black or African American community
- Primarily American Indian/Alaskan Native community
- Primarily Hispanic or Latine community
- Primarily Asian or Pacific Islander community
- Primarily a community of color

6. Provide the full name of the school(s) or school district(s) that your project intends to work with or benefit, as well as their addresses. If you are working with or intending to benefit a large number of schools, you may provide information for up to three schools or school districts that are representative of who you are impacting. Please note — the review team will look up public information for the school(s) you list to determine if the school is considered a priority community, as described in the Request for Application.

*You can download Letters of Support Guidance and Templates at [InnovateSchoolFood.org/application-information/#docs](https://innovateschoolfood.org/application-information/#docs).*

Name of School or School District

Address of School or School District

7. Describe how your project team aligns with or represents any of the priority communities listed above, including if any team members have firsthand experience being part of those communities. Suggested length: 1-2 paragraphs or 1-2 minutes of audio.

### **Community Connection**

*[this section informs Community Connection Selection Criteria]*

This grant program intends that applicants understand the community they are serving. In this context, “community” refers to the group of people who are benefiting from your project. Your project may serve more than one type of community.

- 8. Who is intended to benefit from this project? Suggested length: 1 paragraph or 1 minute of audio.
- 9. Describe how your project helps to address an identified community need. How did you identify this need? Suggested length: 2 paragraphs or 2 minutes of audio.

10. Describe how your project team is connected to the community your project intends to benefit, such as if any team members live, work or have previously worked with the community. Suggested length: 1 paragraph or 1 minute of audio.
11. If awarded, one of the grant's required trainings is a student and family engagement training. It will cover ways to connect with students and families so you can be responsive to students' dietary, cultural and religious needs and preferences. What potential opportunities are there for students and families to inform your project? Suggested length: 1 paragraph or 1 minute of audio.

## **Innovation**

*[this section informs Innovation Selection Criteria]*

This grant program is based on the idea that innovation doesn't just mean "first" or "only." In addition to novel approaches, this grant is intended to support community-driven ideas that build on what's already working or can succeed in other locations.

12. Describe what your team views as the innovative aspects of your project. How would your innovation change the status quo in the school food system for the priority community you are serving? Suggested length: 1-2 paragraphs or 1-2 minutes of audio.

With innovation comes testing. When we come up with new ideas, we have to try them out to see if they work. We see missteps as opportunities to learn and improve our efforts. We want to know how you're going to remember and apply lessons learned from your experiences so your innovation can continue to live on in some way, such as improving processes in the future or helping the team grow.

13. How will the partnerships, systems and/or products that your project is working to develop be able to continue past the grant period, regardless of the outcome of your innovation? Suggested length: 1 paragraph or 1 minute of audio.

## **Team Collaboration**

*[this section informs Team Collaboration Selection Criteria]*

This grant program seeks to promote equitable collaboration among partners with diverse perspectives, locations, experiences and/or abilities. Collaboration would include skill-, knowledge-, resource- and power-sharing amongst the group. Please answer the following questions with that in mind.

14. How does your team structure fairly balance the needs of all partners involved? Please consider elements such as making sure everyone's voice is heard, maintaining communication and integrating new ideas. Suggested length: 1 paragraph or 1 minute of audio.
15. What is your process for decision-making, and how will you ensure that all team members are included in the process — particularly any team members who have

firsthand experience being part of a priority community? Suggested length: 1 paragraph or 1 minute of audio.

## Budget

*[this section informs Feasibility and Accountability Selection Criteria]*

### **Total Amount Requested:**

**Complete the Budget Template for Spark Awards.** You can download the template at [InnovateSchoolFood.org/application-information/#docs](https://InnovateSchoolFood.org/application-information/#docs) or from the Request for Proposals. You will upload your budget into the application portal.

Your budget will be assessed on how well it meets the following considerations:

- The budget includes costs necessary to support the described plan for team collaboration, including compensating any team members with firsthand experience being part of a priority community
- The budget amount adequately supports project goals
- There are clear linkages between budget line items and activities or tasks needed to complete the project

Equipment must be essential to your project, meaning that it is directly related to the project's outcomes. You will need to demonstrate that your equipment purchase is justified, meaning that the particular item that you are buying has the best value. In order to demonstrate that you are purchasing the best product for the price, you will need to provide 3-4 estimates for the equipment you wish to purchase, to show you have searched for the best value. Please upload equipment estimates and any other justification into the application portal.

View a PDF of the Allowable Costs document at this link:

[InnovateSchoolFood.org/allowable-costs](https://InnovateSchoolFood.org/allowable-costs).

## Letter of Support Uploads

You can download Letters of Support Guidance and Templates at

[InnovateSchoolFood.org/application-information/#docs](https://InnovateSchoolFood.org/application-information/#docs).