



# Building Expanded Access to Nutritious School Meals Program

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

May 6, 2026

***Applications Due: Wednesday, June 3, 2026 at 5pm ET***

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# Background & Purpose

School meal programs including the National School Lunch (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP) are an underutilized but essential tool in reducing statewide food insecurity. Providing as many as three meals a day plus snacks, school meals and childcare meals may be one way in which New Jersey families mitigate the impact of H.R. 1 as many families may face reduced benefits and/or access to programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and New Jersey Family Care. Additionally, ensuring our students have access to nutritious school and childcare meals reduces the potential burden on the charitable food sector, allowing them to focus outreach and support on families with no school-aged children.

On February 17, 2026, the [New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate \(OFSA\)](#) released the [New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan](#). This Strategic Plan, developed through cross-sector community engagement, identified building and supporting local partnerships to advance community-driven food security approaches as a key focus area (see Focus Area 3).

This focus area recognizes that no single program or agency can meet the complex challenge of food insecurity alone. It promotes building and investing in shared governance structures, county and local food networks, and technical support for less-resourced partners. It builds on the momentum of existing coalitions, encourages cross-sector alignment, and centers community voice in decision making. It also lays the groundwork for institutional partners like state agencies, philanthropy, and local governments to act as supporters of community-driven action, not sole drivers of it. This focus area emphasizes tailored education, outreach, and awareness efforts; county-level coordination; bi-directional community engagement; screenings and referrals; and multi-benefit hubs. As a result, more students and their families should gain access to nutritious school and childcare meals, reducing the time and economic burden on households as well as the added burden of H.R. 1 on the emergency food sector.

In support of advancing this focus area, OFSA is launching the Building Expanded Access to Nutritious School Meals (BEANS) program to support [eligible entities](#) in expanding access to and participation in school meal and childcare meal programs.

## Intended Outcomes

Intended outcomes of the BEANS program include:

- Increased awareness of and household application towards New Jersey Expanded Income Eligibility for free school meals
- Increased submission of school meal applications in support of expanding access to eligible students, reducing school meal debt, and increasing school district eligibility for state funding
- Increased enrollment of non-public schools into the National School Lunch (NSLP) and School Breakfast (SBP) programs
- Increased student participation in all school meal programs as a means of mitigating the impact of H.R. 1 on New Jersey families and the statewide emergency food sector
- Expanded site enrollment among early childhood care providers, after school, and pre-K programs in the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program including the after school and At-Risk Suppers program for eligible schools
- Increased number of CACFP sponsors and increased number of CACFP operators across the state

## Program Overview

### Available Funding

A total of \$439,000 is available for BEANS grants. Funding will be awarded through a Request for Applications (RFA) process. Applicants can apply for up to \$100,000 in grant funding towards statewide initiatives and for up to \$30,000 in grant funds for county-based initiatives. There is no cost sharing or matching requirement for funds. Project periods may be up to 12 months and to commence upon approval from OFSA, timeline may be subject to change.

### Eligible Projects

Projects must address one or more of the intended outcomes listed above in the [Intended Outcomes](#) section.

Projects must also directly advance focus area 3 of the [New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan](#): *Build and Support Local Partnerships to Advance Community-Driven Food Security Approaches*. This focus area recognizes that no single program or agency can meet the complex challenge of food insecurity alone. It promotes building and investing in shared governance structures, county and local food networks, and technical support for less-resourced partners. It builds on the momentum of existing coalitions, encourages cross-sector alignment, and centers community voice in decision-making. It also lays the groundwork for institutional partners like state

agencies, philanthropy, and local governments to act as supporters of community-driven action, not sole drivers of it. Projects will address one or more of the following strategies:

- **Tailored Education, Outreach, and Awareness Efforts:** In support of school meals, launch new, and support existing, community-informed education, outreach, and awareness efforts to increase participation in local food security - programs and build trust and partnerships with populations with lived and living experiences of food insecurity.
- **County-Level Coordination:** Support action-oriented local food coalitions through county-level coordination that brings together partners across sectors to align food security efforts, develop and implement localized strategies, and share funding opportunities specific to school meal programs.
- **Bi-Directional Community Engagement:** Establish consistent bi-directional community engagement strategies that feed into strengthening coordination between local and state food coalitions to inform decision-making and support implementation of long-term innovative and scalable school meal expansion strategies.
- **Screening and Referrals:** Provide cross-sector data integration, resources, technical assistance, and training to organizations on screening for school meal program eligibility/need and providing closed-loop referrals to services.

As determined by OFSA, projects must utilize the series of public service announcements around school meals created by OFSA,

Explore [Appendix A for expanded descriptions of each of these strategies.](#)

## Eligibility Information

### Eligible Applicants

Eligible BEANS applicants include:

- **Local governments:** New Jersey local (county and municipal) governments and their agencies. Examples include, *but are not limited to*, school districts, health departments, boards of social services, departments of human services, departments of agriculture, and departments of transportation
- **Nonprofit organizations:** A New Jersey association, cooperative, or other organization with IRS 501(c)(3) status. Examples include, *but are not limited to*, community-based organizations, community health centers, hospitals, public housing sites, colleges and universities, cooperative extension services, migrant health centers, faith-based organizations, unaffiliated food banks, pantries, and community kitchens, nonprofit advocacy organizations and coalitions.
- **County Coalitions:** A recognized county-based New Jersey food security coalition with application made by the lead partner as a representative for the coalition members.
- **Faith-based Organizations:** A New Jersey-based faith-based agency that has county-specific or statewide footprint.
- **New Jersey Colleges and Universities:** New Jersey-based research colleges and universities, both public and private institutions.

Applicants must be physically located and operate in New Jersey.

Coalitions that do not have a formal legal or organizational structure may apply through a designated member organization that serves as the lead applicant and fiscally responsible entity, with other coalition members participating as formal partners in the proposed project.

Collaboration among multiple entities is highly encouraged. Projects intending to benefit communities disproportionately impacted by food insecurity should engage and involve community members in the planning process when developing projects and applications. Applications will be evaluated in part on the extent to which the project delivers demonstrable community benefit, advances equitable access to services or resources, and contributes to long-term systems or infrastructure beyond the applicant organization.

In the event that two or more groups independently submit applications addressing the same community and focus area, OFSA may request they collaborate on a joint project.

## Eligibility Restrictions

The following entities are ineligible for funding:

- Organizations who serve a closed group, or otherwise limited constituencies, are not eligible for funding under this program.
- State of New Jersey departments, offices, and agencies.

## Allowable Expenses

Budgets can include direct costs related to personnel, contractors, equipment, meeting expenses, travel, giveaways, training specific to the operationalization of the grant, and partner subawards/regrants. Direct costs are costs specific to the grant itself and do not include costs associated with operating the business/agency. All applicants will be limited to no more than 10 percent allowed indirect costs. Additional Information on allowable expenses is outlined below:

- Equipment (i.e., items of personal property having a useful life of more than one year and a cost of \$5,000 or more) that are purchased using BEANS funds must be used during the grant period for the sole purpose of accomplishing the stated project objectives. The project must reflect appropriate equipment depreciation or request depreciation flexibility. If purchased equipment is not fully dedicated to the grant project, including extension beyond the grant period end date, the applicant must determine what percentage of the equipment's time or space will be dedicated to project activities when developing a budget.
- At any time, during or after the Grant Period, if OFSA determines any equipment purchased using these grant funds are no longer being used in alignment with the purposes of this program, or have been sold, OFSA may demand that the property or funds be returned. All property associated with this grant program are purchased using funds from OFSA and are therefore property of OFSA.
- Travel costs should be limited to mileage and paid at the prevailing IRS rate. Any travel costs beyond mileage must have a justification.
- Funds may only be expended during the grant period of performance. Any unspent funds at grant period end must be returned to OFSA within fifteen (15) business days of grant end date.
- Partner subawards/regrants must be spent down by the end of the grant period.
- Giveaways can cost no more than \$4.00 in value each and if branded, must include the OFSA logo

## Budgets may not include:

- Supplies (e.g., office supplies for general use),
- Travel expenses not related to project activities
- Reimbursement for pre-award costs
- Lobbying or advocacy
- Competitive sub-grant process

# Grantee Requirements

## Project Monitoring and Reporting

Grantees will meet with OFSA quarterly to provide additional updates, express concerns and request technical assistance outside of scheduled reporting requirements.

Grantees will submit a brief midpoint project report and one final project report at the conclusion of the funding period and submit any materials (e.g., educational, promotional, interview guides, data collection) developed as a part of this project with their final reports. OFSA will provide templates for all reports.

## Financial Reporting

BEANS will be administered by the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) with support from the NJDA fiscal team. Grantees are required to track monthly expenses and retain receipts, which must be made available upon request. Grantees are required to submit quarterly financial reports. Documentation must be retained for three years from the date of submission of the final financial report.

## Participation in Overarching Evaluation

All grantees will be required to participate in an overarching evaluation of the grant program led by OFSA. The evaluation is designed to be streamlined, supportive, and minimally burdensome for grantees, and is intended to inform continuous improvement and statewide learning rather than assess individual grantee performance.

OFSA will conduct the majority of evaluation activities using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data. Evaluation activities will focus on both process and outcome metrics and will primarily include brief surveys and facilitated focus group or interview discussions. Grantee participation may include:

- Completing short surveys related to program implementation and outcomes;
- Participating in interviews or focus groups conducted by OFSA or its evaluation partners;
- Assisting, as feasible, with recruitment of participants from impacted populations for interviews or focus groups; and
- Providing relevant administrative or programmatic data when available and applicable.

OFSA will provide clear guidance, standardized tools, and reasonable timelines for all evaluation activities. Evaluation expectations will be proportionate to grant size and scope, and grantees will not be responsible for designing or conducting independent evaluations. Findings will be used to strengthen future investments, elevate effective practices, and support shared learning across the field.

# Application Submission Information

## Application Logistics

**Applications Due:** Wednesday, June 3, 2026 at 5pm ET

**Question & Answer Period:** Wednesday, May 13, 2026 – Wednesday, May 20, 2026. Please direct questions about this funding opportunity to: New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) at [ofsa@ag.nj.gov](mailto:ofsa@ag.nj.gov).

**Initiative Term:** One year, to commence upon approval from OFSA, timeline may be subject to change.

**Application Submission:** All interested applicants should submit a completed BEANS application ([Application Template download](#)) including an itemized budget and budget narrative ([Budget Template download](#)) and Risk Assessment form ([Risk Assessment form download](#)) in a single (combined) PDF file to [ofsa@ag.nj.gov](mailto:ofsa@ag.nj.gov) by Wednesday, June 3 at 5pm ET. Use the email subject line, “BEANS Program Application” when submitting the application. Incomplete or late applications will not be accepted. Multiple organizations collaborating on a project only need to submit one application.

## Application Content Requirements

The following information should be incorporated into the application and is outlined in the [BEANS application template](#).

### Section 1. Applicant Information

- Applicant Organization Information and Description
- Primary Contact
- Budget Manager Contact

### Section 2. Project Summary

- Footprint: Statewide or County-Specific (Including which County)
- A summary overview of the project purpose, objectives, and high-level activities
- The strategy for which this project is aligned
- The total amount of funding requested for the project

### Section 3. Project Need & Community Assets

- Specific need this project will address
- Community resources or assets that inform the project
- How the project advances equity for communities disproportionately impacted by food insecurity

## Section 4. Project Design

- Alignment with the New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan Focus Area 3
- Specific tactic and objectives
- Planned activities, roles, and timeline
- Project team members
- Community engagement in the planning and implementation of the project
- Sustainability and transferability of the project post grant period

## Section 5. Project Learnings

- Plans for understanding progress toward identified goals and objectives
- Acknowledgement of compliance with grantee requirements

## Section 6. Budget ([download the budget template here](#))

- Itemized budget
- Budget narrative

## Section 7. Risk Assessment Form ([download the Risk Assessment form here](#))

- Organization funding and accounting information

## Selection Process

- Following an initial screening process for confirmation of the applicant organization's eligibility, OFSA will review and determine the technical merits of each application.
- Reviewers will independently score each application based on the criteria outlined in the [Scoring Rubric section](#).
- OFSA will require all reviewers to sign a conflict of interest and confidentiality form to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may affect the application review and evaluation process.
- Award notifications will be delivered to applicants via email up to four weeks after the RFP due date.
  - OFSA reserves the right to partially fund a grant application based on number of qualifying submissions, available funds, and application score.

## Scoring Rubric

Point Value (out of 100)	Application Template Heading and Scoring
5 Points	Section 1. Applicant Information
5 Points	Section 2. Project Summary
10 Points	Section 3. Project Need & Community Assets
55 Points	Section 4. Project Design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4.1 Strategic Plan Alignment - 5 Points</li> <li>• 4.2 Project Tactic and Objectives - 10 Points</li> <li>• 4.3 Project Activities, Roles, &amp; Timeline - 15 Points</li> <li>• 4.4 Project Team Members - 10 Points</li> <li>• 4.5 Community Engagement - 10 Points</li> <li>• 4.6 Project Sustainability &amp; Transferability - 5 Points</li> </ul>
5 Points	Section 5. Project Learnings
15 Points	Section 6. Budget <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6.1 Itemized Budget - 5 Points</li> <li>• 6.2 Budget Narrative Justification - 10 Points</li> </ul>
5 Points	Section 7. Risk Assessment

# Appendix A. New Jersey Food Security 3-Year Strategic Plan Focus Area 3

## Focus Area 3: Build and Support Local Partnerships to Advance Community-Driven Food Security Approaches

### FOCUS AREA 3 | STRATEGY 1

***Tailored Education, Outreach, and Awareness Efforts:*** Launch new, and support existing, community-informed education, outreach, and awareness efforts to increase participation in local food security programs and build trust and partnerships with populations with lived and living experiences of food insecurity

This strategy supports the design and delivery of locally tailored outreach efforts that reflect the needs and concerns of communities most impacted by food insecurity. Outreach efforts should be co-created with trusted messengers and embedded in familiar community settings, such as faith centers, civic organizations, childcare providers, healthcare providers, schools and local libraries, and may include online communication channels. Efforts should not only promote awareness of available programs but also address fears or misconceptions that may prevent engagement, such as concerns about eligibility, stigma, or data privacy.

### FOCUS AREA 3 | STRATEGY 2

***County-Level Coordination:*** Support action-oriented local food coalitions through county-level coordination that brings together partners across sectors to align food security efforts, develop and implement localized strategies, and share funding opportunities.

This strategy promotes the growth and sustainability of county- and local-level food coalitions that facilitate collaboration among county governments, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and residents. These entities serve as conveners of local knowledge and planning, helping communities identify gaps and duplications in services, define their food security tactics, drive implementation, monitor progress, and advocate for systemic change. This strategy includes support for participatory decision-making models that meaningfully incorporate resident voices, such as compensated advisory boards or community-led planning forums. This strategy can also include prioritization of grant funding and technical assistance for community organizations that

may not have historically accessed public funding. This includes simplifying grant applications, offering technical support during the application process, providing general operating support, and prioritizing funding for organizations that historically have been excluded from traditional philanthropic or government grants.

#### **FOCUS AREA 3 | STRATEGY 3**

***Bi-directional Community Engagement:*** Establish consistent bi-directional community engagement mechanisms that feed into strengthening coordination between local and state food coalitions to inform decision-making and support implementation of long-term innovative and scalable food security strategies.

To support effective and sustained food security efforts, this strategy includes the creation of routine engagement mechanisms and the strengthening of coordination between state and local food coalitions. Together, these efforts ensure that community voice is embedded in program and policy decision-making at all levels. This strategy promotes regular, structured opportunities for communities and coalitions to share bi-directional updates, provide feedback, identify challenges, and co-design solutions. Examples include statewide and local convenings, shared learning sessions, advisory councils, digital platforms for idea exchange, surveys, and focus groups. Strengthening feedback loops and shared priorities across levels of government and community coalitions reinforces strategic alignment, prevents duplication, and enables scaling local innovations statewide. Ultimately, this strategy positions residents, community-based organizations, and local coalitions as leaders in a coordinated system where state-level planning is informed by community knowledge, and where effective solutions can be replicated and celebrated statewide, furthering the state's position nationally as a recognized leader in promoting food security.

#### **FOCUS AREA 3 | STRATEGY 4**

***Screening and Referrals:*** Provide cross-sector data integration, resources, technical assistance, and training to organizations on screening for program eligibility/need and providing closed-loop referrals to services

This strategy invests in building organizations' capacity through tailored resources, training, and technical assistance on screening for food and nutrition program eligibility or need, providing information on available resources, and conducting referrals to existing services. This may include guidance on embedding screening into existing technological systems (such as electronic health records or case management platforms), establishing data sharing protocols that prioritize trust, privacy, and purpose-driven data use, and adopting bi-directional referral tools that allow organizations to communicate and coordinate more effectively. Technical assistance may cover data

collection and evaluation practices, coalition-building, and applying for public funding to sustain these efforts. Training should be accessible, practical, culturally responsive, and available in multiple formats. By investing in organizational capacity and enabling more seamless communication across sectors, this strategy helps community partners more effectively connect people to resources, reduce administrative burden on both staff and households, and participate in coordinated food security efforts statewide.

For a full description of Focus Area 3, please see the [New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan](#).