Office of the
Food Security Advocate

Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)

Community Kitchens Innovation Grant Funding

Fiscal Year: FY27
Administering Agency: New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA)
Applications Due: January 8, 2027 via email attachment to OFSA@ag.nj.gov

I. Funding Opportunity Overview

The New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) announces the availability of **$100,000 in state funding** to support innovative approaches to improving food purchase, programming, infrastructure and collective impact work for community kitchen organizations. In New Jersey, soup kitchens (traditionally defined as prepared meal service sites) have been evolving for many years and began to spearhead innovative models for community service, benefits enrollment, and food preparation during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Thus, the term "community kitchens" was coined by the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) to acknowledge that soup kitchens in New Jersey offer more than just food. Rather, they can be anchor organizations that build community, promote and support public health, and drive economic opportunity. This definition is aligned with OFSA's definition of food security and the six dimensions of food security. For further information, please refer to the OFSA Food Security Primer.

This NOFA is aligned with OFSA's statutory purpose under N.J.S.A. 52:27J-3 and with Focus Areas 1, 2, and 3 of the New Jersey Statewide Food Security Strategic Plan. These focus areas are as follows:

- **Focus Area 1** - Enhance information exchange and access to improve public awareness, optimize programs and support data-driven decision-making)
- **Focus Area 2** - Expand Community-Based food infrastructure and market channel creation for enhanced ongoing food access, utilization, and availability
- **Focus Area 3** - Build and support local partnerships to advance community-driven food security approaches

II. Statutory Authority and Alignment

Funding is authorized pursuant to the FY27 New Jersey State Budget language, which provides that:

“Notwithstanding the provisions of any law or regulation to the contrary, the amounts hereinabove appropriated for the Community Kitchens Grant Program shall be utilized by the Office of the Food Security Advocate to develop and implement a competitive grant program to support community kitchens across the State. Appropriated amounts shall be utilized to develop application criteria, issue a request for proposals, and award grants, in amounts determined by the Office of the Food Security Advocate, to eligible applicant community kitchens. Grants awarded under the program shall support the procurement of food and related supplies, including bulk purchasing of prepared or ready-to-prepare food products, as well as operational costs necessary to produce and distribute prepared meals. In administering the program, the Office of the Food Security Advocate shall establish criteria that recognize the unique operational needs of community kitchens, including food sourcing, storage, preparation, and distribution requirements. For the purposes of this paragraph, "community kitchen" means a nonprofit or community-based organization that primarily prepares and serves ready-to-eat meals to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity, as distinct from food pantries or food banks that distribute unprepared food items.”

III. Purpose of the Funding

The purpose of this funding is to support "community kitchens". A community kitchen is a nonprofit or community-based organization that primarily prepares and serves ready-to-eat meals to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity, as distinct from food pantries or food banks that distribute unprepared food items. This grant can:

- Support community-centered efforts to gather quantitative and qualitative data on food insecurity in New Jersey and utilize data to create more coordinated efforts to improve systems that community kitchens operate within, create collective impact, and drive collective decision-making based on data-driven strategies per Focus Area 1 of the Strategic Plan.
- Create and/or enhance markets for New Jersey-based food producers and establish and/or enhance more resilient local systems for New Jersey-based food producers and connect food producers to community kitchens per Focus Area 2 of the Strategic Plan.
- Build and support local partnerships through tailored education, outreach and awareness efforts that can produce collective impact and bi-directional community engagement efforts for community kitchens per Focus Area 3 of the Strategic Plan.

Funds may not be used for activities inconsistent with the FY27 budget language, Section III Purpose of Funding of this NOFA, or outside OFSA’s statutory purpose.

IV. Funding Amount and Term

- **Total State Funding Available:** $100,000
- **Required Match:** There is no required match for this grant
- **Grant Term:** Up to 12 months upon grant execution

- **Funding Structure:** State funds will be deployed by the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA).

V. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include:

- **Agricultural entities:** A New Jersey–based entity engaged in one or more stages of the food system, including food production, aggregation, processing, distribution, transportation, storage, preparation, or market facilitation. Eligible agricultural entities may be nonprofit, for-profit, cooperative, or producer-led organizations. Examples include, but are not limited to, farms and ranches, food hubs, agricultural cooperatives, producer collectives or associations, fisheries and aquaculture operations, value-added food processors, shared-use or community commercial kitchens, distributors and aggregators, mobile or wholesale market operators, and other food system enterprises rooted in New Jersey. For-profit entities are eligible to apply; however, projects must demonstrate a clear and measurable benefit to the broader community. Funding may not be used solely to subsidize routine business operations or activities that primarily increase private profit.
- **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.

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

consortia are permitted, provided one entity is designated as the lead applicant and fiscal agent.

VI. Roles and Responsibilities

Grantee Requirements

Project Monitoring and Reporting

Grantees will submit a brief mid-point project report and one final project report at the conclusion of the funding period. Grantees will meet with OFSA at least quarterly to provide additional updates, express concerns, or request technical assistance outside of scheduled reporting requirements. Grantees will also 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

This grant will be administered by the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) with support from the NJDA fiscal team. Grantees will be required to track monthly expenses and retain receipts and should be able to provide that documentation upon request. Grantees will be required to submit quarterly financial reports. Documentation should 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.

OFSA Responsibilities

- Provide strategic direction and oversight for the pilot(s);
- Ensure alignment with budget language, the Food Security Strategic Plan, and state financial practices;
- Monitor performance, reporting, and evaluation activities; and
- Coordinate with the Division of Budget and Accounting for fiscal compliance.

VII. Application Requirements

The following information should be incorporated into the application.

Section 1. Applicant Information

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

Section 2. Project Summary

- A summary overview of the project purpose, goals, and high-level activities.
- Project title
- Project duration
- The lead applicant entity and any partner entities on the project
- The strategy for which this project is aligned
- Priority population and geographic scope of the project
- 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
- 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
- Itemized budget
- Budget narrative

Section 7. Risk Assessment Form (download the Risk Assessment form here)
Organization funding and accounting information

VIII. Review and Selection Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on:
- Alignment with statutory mandate and strategic plan focus areas;
- Strength and feasibility of the public–private partnership model;
- Capacity to secure and administer the required match;
- Demonstrated fiscal and programmatic accountability;
- Commitment to equity, transparency, and learning; and
- Readiness to deploy funds within the FY27 timeframe.

IX. Anticipated Timeline

- **NOFA Announcement**: November 20, 2026
- **Questions Accepted**: December 21, 2026
- **Q&As Posted to OFSA Funding Opportunities Webpage**: December 30, 2026
    - For questions about this funding opportunity, please contact OFSA at ofsa@ag.nj.gov. In accordance with state policies, all questions received by December 21, 2026 will be answered by December 30, 2026 and available to all interested applicants via a link on OFSA's Funding Opportunities page.
- **Applications Due:** January 8, 2027 via email attachment to OFSA@ag.nj.gov
- **Anticipated Award Announcement:** January 2027

X. Contact Information

Please submit any questions and application responses to:

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OFSA@ag.nj.gov