**Food** Equity Fund

## ***2025 Starter Fund Grant Guidelines***

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## About the Food Equity Fund

The Food Equity Fund is a program of the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (DON). The purpose of the Fund is to invest in community-led work that contributes to an equitable and sustainable local food system. By ‘food system’ we mean any activities related to food, this can include growing, cooking, teaching, distributing food and/or managing food waste.

Created in 2021, the Food Equity Fund supports work led by those who experience the most food and health inequities: Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), immigrants, refugees, people with low incomes, youth, and/or elders.

Funding is provided by revenue from Seattle’s Sweetened Beverage Tax. In 2025, approximately $2.2 million is available in funding through two grant cycles: The **Food Equity Fund Grant** (open Jan 16 – March 17 2025) and **the Starter Fund.**

## Starter Fund

The Starter Fund prioritizes community organizations and groups with an annual budget of less than $500,000. The intention is to provide a nimble grant to smaller, grassroots organizations advancing an equitable and sustainable local food system who historically have limited access to institutional funding. The submission process consists of a simple written application and a required virtual interview.

## What We Fund

In Seattle and across the United States, there are deep and persistent inequities in the food system. The USDA reported recently, that from 2019 to 2023, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for food rose by 25.0 percent. In 2022 alone, food prices increased faster than any year since 1979. King County Public Health reports that at least 10% of adults experience food insecurity. Specifically, Black, Latino and American Indian and Alaskan Native populations experience food insecurity at significantly higher rates.

*Eligible proposals must*:

* Have project activities occur within Seattle.
* Be accessible and benefit people who live, learn, work and/or
worship in Seattle.
* Focus on contributing to an equitable and sustainable local food system.
* Be completed within 24 months of contracting.

## Eligible Applicants

* Organizations that have 501(c)(3) nonprofit status.
* Community groups that have a \*fiscal sponsor with 501(c)(3)
nonprofit status.
* Tribes and tribal organizations.

\***A FISCAL SPONSOR** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that agrees to act as the trustee of your project’s funds and assumes financial responsibilities related to recordkeeping and the disbursement of funds. If you are not a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, you are required to secure a fiscal sponsor for your contract with the City of Seattle. For groups that must hire a fiscal sponsor, a fee of 5% to 10% of the total grant award is often charged. This fee may be included in your proposal budget.



*Note: Only one application per organization is allowed, except if the organization serves as a fiscal sponsor for multiple groups.*

## Eligible Activities examples

The following activities are *ideas* of eligible activities:

* **\***capital project or physical improvement such as a new greenhouse, farm irrigation, and/or commercial kitchen
* coalition-building to advance food justice & food sovereignty
* community organizing
* food programs for elders
* food distribution site
* food justice leadership development
* food pantry & meal services
* gardening or farming
* food-related job training
* activities that advance economic opportunities in the food system
* storytelling & cultural preservation and/or education
* food programs for youth
* and many more!

**\*CONTINGENCY:** All capital/physical improvement project budgets must include a 15% cash contingency for all construction related activities and costs, including sales tax.


## Ineligible Applicants

We **don’t** accept applications from:

* an individual person
* 501(c)(4) political groups
* for-profit entities, including small businesses
* major institutions such as school districts, community colleges, universities, or hospitals
* applicants that have failed to successfully carry out an awarded
FEF project within the last three years

## What We Will Not Fund

The following activities are **not** eligible for funding:

* expenses made before the organization is selected and under contract
* for-profit activities including fundraisers, ticketed and/or retail events
* food markets that require purchase of food
* gift card and food vouchers
* lodging or hotel expenses
* organization’s overhead costs unrelated to the Food Equity Fund project
* projects not easily accessible by the public
* purchase of land or buildings
* purchase of a vehicle
* scholarships
* capital project or physical improvements on a private residency

The Department of Neighborhoods reserves the right to make the final determination of eligible expenses or project activities. **Please contact us at** **foodequityfund@seattle.gov** **directly with any questions about eligible activities prior to submitting a final application.**

## Physical Improvements

Are you planning on building new garden beds in your community garden? Are you making renovations to your senior center’s kitchen? Want to build a new greenhouse or shed for your organization’s urban garden?

Property owner permission is required with your application if a physical improvement is made to property not owned by your group or organization.

A **physical improvement** includes building semi-permanent or permanent structures or making renovations to a building.

### Things to Consider:

* We require all physical improvement projects to include a 15% contingency in the budget to cover unanticipated expenses.
* If you’d like a property owner permission template, please reach out to a Food Equity Fund project manager.
* If your project occurs on City property, please contact us at foodequityfund@seattle.gov to connect with the appropriate City staff liaison.

### Examples of Physical Improvements:

* installing new garden beds
* greenhouse
* shed
* commercial kitchen renovation and/or repairs
* irrigation system
* And more!

## How to Apply

Here’s everything you need to submit a complete Starter Fund application:

* [Application](https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/Neighborhoods/NMF/Food%20Equity%20Fund/Starter-Fund-Application-Cover-Sheet.docx)
* [Attachment: Grant Request Budget (Excel)](https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/Neighborhoods/NMF/Food%20Equity%20Fund/Starter-Fund-Grant-Request.xlsx)
* If registered 501(c)(3), include IRS 501(c)(3) determination letter or most recent (within the last three years) 990 filing
* If community group, include identified fiscal sponsorship
* If applicable:
* Property owner permission for any physical improvements

## 2025 Starter Fund Grant Schedule

|  |
| --- |
| **Award Amount:** $5,000 - $25,000 | **Proposal Length:** Up to 24 months |
|  | **April 1**  |  | Application open |
|  | **April 17: 11 a.m. - 12 p.m.****May 7: 12 p.m. – 1 p.m.** **June 9: 5 p.m. – 6 p.m.**  |  | Virtual Information Sessions(Interpretation available upon request.) |

## Virtual Interviews

The review process will include a virtual interview component. Interviews will be scheduled after a Food Equity Fund Project Manager reviews the written portion of the application. Language and American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation are available upon request, please allow 5 business days for planning. Virtual interviews will take place **every Wednesday between 2:00-3:30pm**, we will work with you to schedule the next available appointment slot.  The panel will include at least two Food Equity Fund staff. 

## Virtual Information Sessions

**Join a virtual information session** to learn more about the application process, qualities of a strong proposal and to ask any questions.

 Please register for an information session [**here**.](https://forms.office.com/g/jpGTffYvqT)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Thursday April 17, 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. | Link: [Starter Fund Info Session #1](https://seattle.webex.com/seattle/j.php?MTID=m7a1216b0160ade1d7589f987000c768f)Join by phone: (206) 207-1700  Access Code 2498 493 1544     Password 2025 |
| Wednesday May 7, 12 p.m. – 1 p.m.  | Link: [Starter Fund Info Session #2](https://seattle.webex.com/seattle/j.php?MTID=meef9bbe44a9e0fee148c5480a72c1820)Join by phone: (206) 207-1700 Access code: 2487 269 6974    Password 2025 |
| Monday June 9, 5 p.m.- 6 p.m.  | Link: [Starter Fund Info Session #3](https://seattle.webex.com/seattle/j.php?MTID=mc2d91e4eb78de4d0199787c41ff6d9a6)Join by phone: (206) 207-1700 Access code: 2482 123 1367    Password: 2025 |
|  |  |

## Staff Support

**Technical Assistance: Do you have** questions about the application or want to discuss your idea? A Food Equity Fund Project Manager\* can support you!



* Email **foodequityfund@seattle.gov** or call **206-727-FOOD (3663)** to schedule a one-on-one meeting with a project manager. Project managers are available to meet outside of regular business hours with advance scheduling.

**Examples of One-on-One Support**

* Help figure out eligibility activities or expenses.
* Support with property ownership questions.
* Assist you in your search for a fiscal sponsor organization.
* Explain the evaluation criteria.
* Provide feedback on a draft application

*\*The project manager providing technical assistance to an applicant will not be the same project manager making grant recommendations.*

## Proposal & Workplan examples

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1)** A Native-led organization seeks funds to grow and provide free culturally relevant produce to elders in their community. The proposal involves growing native plants and vegetables, intergenerational harvest parties and food distribution days for Seattle’s urban Native American elders.   Example milestone:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Milestone: What will you accomplish?**  | **How will you accomplish it?**  | **Timeline (start – finish)**  |
| Identify up to 50 elders to participate in monthly grocery bag distribution.  | Work with existing families, and one-on-one outreach at Community Center A.   | June.- Dec. 2025  |

  |
| **2)** A trusted coalition of BIPOC farmers working in Seattle seek funds to conduct a visioning process with their community. The project includes climate resiliency planning, soil health testing, and growing capacity for culturally relevant planting. The coalition aims to create a resource guide for local farmers to use in response to rapid climate change.  Example milestone:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Milestone: What will you accomplish?**  | **How will you accomplish it?**  | **Timeline (start – finish)**  |
| Convene up to 15 Seattle farmers to commit to monthly visioning sessions.  | One-on-one outreach with existing partners including Farm A, Farm B, Farm C.   | July. 2025 – Oct. 2026  |

  |
| **3)** A trusted community organization wants to develop a food & farming workforce training program for low-income youth. The organization works alongside youth leaders to create a 16-week training series. Youth are involved at multiple stages, from planning to implementation.  Example milestone:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Milestone: What will you accomplish?**  | **How will you accomplish it?**  | **Timeline (start – finish)**  |
| Develop food and farming curriculum for summer training program.   | Engage up to 5 youth leaders in developing workshop goals, field trip ideas, and desired skill building.  | Aug. 2025-Feb. 2026  |

  |
| **4)** A mutual aid group seeks funds to build a new greenhouse, and to re-design and expand their existing food storage and distribution area to make it more accessible. The proposal involves engagement with the property owner, community members, and volunteers to  co-design and build the new distribution area.   Example milestone:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Milestone: What will you accomplish?**  | **How will you accomplish it?**  | **Timeline (start – finish)**  |
| Design new food storage and distribution area.   | Work with property owner and incorporate ongoing feedback from community members who use the food storage space.   | Sept. 2025 – March 2026  |

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## Evaluation Criteria

All proposals will be screened for basic eligibility requirements and reviewed by the Food Equity Fund staff.

### Eligibility Checklist:

* Project activities occur within Seattle.
* Project is accessible and benefit people who live, learn, work and/or worship in Seattle.
* The applicant’s annual budget is less than $500,000
* Focus on contributing to an equitable and sustainable local food system.
* Be completed within 24 months of contracting.

**Criteria for Strong Applications:**

1. **PEOPLE**
* History, mission, and vision are aligned with the project proposal.
* Provides concrete examples of recent accomplishments that complement the work necessary to implement the proposal.
* The community they are a part of is clearly defined with specific details on neighborhoods and/or demographics.
* Priority communities are key decision makers and/or deeply involved at all phases of the proposed work.
* Proposal is originated by, designed by, led by, and benefits FEF priority communities\*
* If partners are included, they speak to either ongoing partners or new partnerships that demonstrate mutual partnership (Some examples: including partners in their budget, providing clear examples of reciprocity, and more)

1. **PROJECT**
* Project description is clear, specific and actionable.
* The project is consistent with Food Equity Fund purpose to invest in community-led work that contributes to an equitable and sustainable local food system in Seattle.
* The project aligns with the workplan and grant request budget.
1. **ATTACHMENTS: WORKPLAN, GRANT REQUEST BUDGET, LEADERSHIP BIO**
* Key milestones and timeline are specific, realistic, and actionable.
* Milestones are related to one another and build on each other.
* Budget is detailed and feasible. Budget descriptions are specific and explain the allocation in detail.
* Budget request also strongly aligns with the stated workplan and narrative.
* Majority or all team members working on the proposed work reflect the lived experiences of the communities they work with.

*\*FEF priority communities:  BIPOC, immigrants and refugees, people with low incomes, youth, or elders*

**Virtual Interview Criteria:**

* Provides a clear description of the leadership structure and share how key decisions will be made during their proposed work
* Food issues are specific and demonstrate a strong understanding of food inequities, needs, challenges, and/or priorities in their community or neighborhood.
* Their solutions are culturally relevant and/or speak to existing community assets, culture, and traditions.
* Success is clearly tied to meaningful and specific community benefits for those who experience the most food and health disparities.
* Success for the organization is defined with clear and actionable ways of measuring their achievements and or improvements.

**NOTE:** Funding recommendations made by the virtual interview panel will have final approval from the Food Equity Fund Program Supervisor.

## What To Expect If Awarded?

**If funded, organizations and/or fiscal sponsors will be required to:**

* Attend an orientation.
* Work closely with their assigned Food Equity Fund project manager to finalize project/program outcomes.
* Have a current City of Seattle business license.
* Secure and provide evidence of Commercial General Liability insurance.
* If applicable, provide documentation upon request of Washington State Patrol background checks for all project volunteers and staff working with youth under 18 years of age.
* Ensure all design and capital projects on City of Seattle property follow Federal law to provide readily accessible facilities per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
* Capital projects are expected to pay prevailing wages.

The Food Equity Fund makes payment based on mutually agreed upon outcomes. In addition, it includes a steady monthly rate that is negotiated during the contracting process.

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Can Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (DON) staff review my application?**

Yes, Food Equity Fund project managers are available to provide feedback on your application and answer any questions.

1. **How do I know how much funding is remaining in the Starter Fund?**

At any time, feel free to reach out to us via email at foodequityfund@seattle.gov to see how much funding is available. We will update the website with CLOSED as soon as we run out of funding.

1. **I’m waiting to hear back on a decision from the Food Equity Fund Grant that recently closed on March 17, 2025, can I apply for the Starter Fund?**

Organizations can only have awards in one cycle (either Food Equity Fund Grant or Starter Fund), we encourage you to wait to hear back from the Food Equity Fund grant (decisions will be finalized by late June) before applying so not to risk your original application.

1. **We’ve received a Food Equity Fund grant before, am I eligible to apply again?**

Organizations cannot hold two simultaneous contracts within the program. If you have an existing contract, it must be completed by Oct. 1,2025. If your contract ends after Oct. 1, 2025, you are ineligible to apply. If you’ve been awarded a Food Equity Fund grant in previous years but don’t have an existing contract, you are eligible to apply. If you have any questions about this, please contact foodequityfund@seattle.gov.

1. **Which fiscal year do you consider for the $500k eligibility requirement?**

Either your organization or group’s annual budget for 2024 or 2025 must be below $500,000.

1. **My office is not in Seattle, but the community we work with is based in Seattle. Can we apply to the Food Equity Fund?**

Yes. If your office is located outside of Seattle, you can apply if your project activities take place within Seattle city limits AND benefits people who live, learn, work, and/or worship in Seattle.

1. **What is your disbursement of funds?**

Food Equity Fund utilizes an outcome-based reimbursement process. The City makes payment based on mutually agreed upon outcomes. In addition, it includes a steady monthly rate that is negotiated during the contracting process. If awarded, this process will be covered in greater detail during an awardee orientation.

1. **How do we know if we need property owner permission for our application?**

Property owner permission is required with your application if a physical improvement is made to property not owned by your group or organization. More information can be found on page 6 of the enclosed Guidelines. We recommend talking directly to the property owner as soon as possible. It’s important to demonstrate that the property owner is aware of the intent to build on their property if awarded.

1. **What is Commercial General Liability (CGL) Insurance?**

It is liability coverage for the length of the grant contract. The “**City of Seattle**” must be added as an additional insured party to the policy. Please work with your Food Equity Fund project manager to determine the appropriate insurance coverage. You may include the cost of insurance in your grant budget.

1. **What is a City of Seattle business license?**

Anyone doing business in Seattle must have a Seattle business license tax certificate, also known as a business license or general business license. This is in addition to the Department of Revenue business license. You do not have to have a City of Seattle Business License to apply for this grant; however, if selected, your organization or your fiscal sponsor will be required to obtain one. For more information: [Business Licenses - City Finance | seattle.gov](https://www.seattle.gov/city-finance/business-taxes-and-licenses/business-licenses)

1. **I have another grant with a different program at the Department of Neighborhoods, am I eligible to apply for the Food Equity Fund?**

Organizations and community groups are allowed to hold multiple DON grants if they are for separate and unique projects.

1. **Where else can I get funding for food-related projects in Seattle?**

Here are a few other funding opportunities that support food or environmental justice related projects:

* [**Neighborhood Matching Fund**](https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/community-grants/neighborhood-matching-fund) - NMF Community Partnership Fund
* [**Human Services Department**](https://www.seattle.gov/human-services/for-providers/funding-opportunities)Funding Notices
* [**Equitable Development Initiative**](https://www.seattle.gov/opcd/ongoing-initiatives/equitable-development-initiative) - Office of Planning &
Community Development
* [**Environmental Justice Fund**](https://www.seattle.gov/environment/equity-and-environment/equity-and-environment-initiative/environmental-justice-fund) - Office of Sustainability and Environment
* [**KCD Seattle Community Partnership Grant**](https://kingcd.org/tools-resources/grants/seattle-community-partnership-grant-program/)- King County
Conservation District
* [**Waste-Free Communities Matching Grant**](https://www.seattle.gov/utilities/protecting-our-environment/community-programs/waste-free-grants) - Seattle Public Utilities
* [**Food Assistance Grants**](https://agr.wa.gov/services/food-access/hunger-relief-resources/food-assistance-grants)– Washington State Department of Agriculture

If you have any questions, please email us at foodequityfund@seattle.gov or give us a call at (206) 727-3663.