

New Jersey Innovative Healthy Food Retail Initiative

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Application Process and Timelines	1
Eligibility - Entities	2
Eligibility – Project Types	3
Innovation	4
Scoring & Reviewing.....	5
Technical Assistance	6
Use of Funds	7

Application Process and Timelines

Where can I access the RFA and the application?

You can download the RFA at: <https://www.reinvestment.com/grants/nj-innovative-healthy-food-retail-initiative/>

You can access the application at: <https://reinvestmentfund.smartsimple.com/> You must create a SmartSimple account in order to view and submit an application.

What determines whether a project is complete?

All projects must be completed by March 31st, 2026. By this time, grant funds must be spent down and receipts for applicable purchases with grant funding must be submitted with a final report.

What are the reporting expectations of grantees?

Grantees can expect that there will be regular reporting requirements which may include follow up conversations and/or a site visit. Reporting requirements will be outlined in your grant agreement and during the grantee onboarding process.

What is the process for determining location eligibility?

Applicants have access to an eligibility map to help determine basic geographic eligibility of serving low-to-moderate income communities for the Initiative. You can access this map [here](#) under the eligibility section. Applicants will be asked to provide with their LOI, a screenshot of their location based on the map results. Additional support can be submitted if map results are unclear. All LOIs will be screened for eligibility by Initiative staff. If determined to be eligible you will be invited to submit a full application.

Is there a limit to the number of applications an organization can submit?

One application may be submitted per organization.

Eligibility - Entities

What types of organizations are eligible to apply for the New Jersey Innovative Healthy Food Retail Initiative?

Eligible organizations include business enterprises, cooperatively owned businesses, tax-exempt nonprofit corporations, community health and other anchor institutions, government agencies, authorities, commissions, and food policy councils, tribal agencies and authorities.

What are the requirements for wholesalers or distributors who wish to participate in innovative healthy food projects?

Wholesalers or distributors are expected to offer innovative approaches aimed at enhancing supply chain access to retailers operating in communities with limited access to full-service supermarkets.

Retail clients should accept or will accept SNAP and/or participate in other public benefit food assistance programs such as GusNIP nutrition incentive programs and produce prescription programs.

Does an entity have to be registered/headquartered in New Jersey in order to apply? Are there any exceptions?

The Initiative prioritizes entities that are based in the state of New Jersey in order to create or retain market opportunities for New Jersey businesses and their owners. If you are a business that is not located in New Jersey, but serves New Jersey markets, you are welcome to submit an LOI, however, the priority for this Initiative is specifically for community focused, led, or owned projects in New Jersey.

Eligibility – Project Types

What are the specific criteria for determining if a community is considered underserved and eligible for this initiative?

Basic eligibility requires that projects must serve a low-to-moderate income (LMI) (equal to or below 80% median family income levels) community in New Jersey, be in a low supermarket area or an NJEDA Food Desert Community. You must also propose a food retail or food enterprise project that operates within the food retail supply chain. If a food retail project, you must accept SNAP or plan to accept SNAP. If a food enterprise, your project must supply SNAP accepting retail locations in eligible areas of New Jersey. You may use our eligibility map [here](#) to help determine preliminary eligibility.

If my organization operates a program that provides ready-to-eat food items in locations serving food-insecure and/or low-income individuals, would we be eligible?

Ready-to-eat, pre-packaged, or prepared food items are not an eligible use of funds. These items may be part of your overall project, but the primary use of funds must support the retail sale of an assortment (including a limited assortment) of staple and perishable items.

Do I need to have an assortment of staple and perishable items to be eligible?

While this grant program does not have a required number of items to be offered, applicants are encouraged to offer a variety of staple and perishable goods for retail sale. Staple and perishable items include basic dietary items such as vegetables, fruits, meats, grains, flour, etc. that are fresh, refrigerated, or frozen. A project that offers a limited assortment or combination of these types of items may be eligible and may require partnership and collaboration to achieve this assortment. Retail locations selling only one type of product are not eligible. If your project is a food enterprise operating along the food supply chain, such as an aggregator or distributor, to be eligible, your product(s) should be sold at eligible grocery retail outlets.

Is a farm stand that sells only (locally grown) produce eligible?

No. The initiative intends to increase or retain access to healthy grocery retail. If a food retail project, your project should include an assortment of staple and perishable food items for sale. The retail sale of a singular product is not eligible. If you're a food enterprise

aggregating or distributing a singular product, your project should propose a project that support supplying to eligible retail locations selling an assortment of staple and perishable foods in order to be eligible.

Is creating full meals from the products being offered a requirement?

In short, no. The ability to create a meal from the products being offered is an example to help you understand the assortment of products that can be offered. The Initiative intends to increase and/or retain the accessibility of affordable grocery retail that supports the purchase of foods that support healthy lifestyles.

I'm a wholesaler/distributor. Can I apply?

Yes! Healthy Food Enterprises such as wholesalers and distributors are eligible for grant funding if their customers are retail outlets that meet location eligibility criteria and accept SNAP/WIC.

Solely distributing to restaurants, schools, charitable food programs, etc. are not eligible outlets for this grant program and would make your project ineligible.

Are there dietary guidelines associated with the particular food items that are eligible? (i.e. added sugars and salts)

While this initiative will not impose any required dietary guidelines, applicants may use the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-2025 as a reference point for “healthy food(s)”. This includes vegetables, fruits, whole grains, seafood, eggs, beans, peas, lentils, unsalted nuts and seeds, fat-free and low-fat dairy products, and lean meats and poultry that are prepared with little to no added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium, and provide vitamins and minerals. (See USDA Dietary Guidelines: <https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/>).

Innovation

What does “innovative” mean?

Innovation within this initiative refers to the introduction of new, creative, or alternative approaches to addressing challenges in healthy food retail access. This includes diverse community food enterprise models along the food supply chain, such as innovative wholesale and retail businesses, nontraditional mobile and e-commerce retail, cooperative ownership, and partnerships with anchor institutions and developers.

Examples of innovative models may include but not limited to community or municipality-owned stores, mobile markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs, retailers offering nutrition incentives, community discount or Food is Medicine programs, self-service stores, SNAP or WIC focused stores, and community farms with a retail component. Other examples and insights of innovations in healthy food retail enterprises can be found in this 2020 report from the Wallace Center [here](#).

What criteria are used to determine if a project is innovative?

Your project does not necessarily have to implement the newest technology or idea but instead your project should reflect your thinking about new solutions that may work or expand upon ideas that are working or may work for your community that are beyond the traditional full-service grocery store. Innovation in this sense, is something that is unique, new, replicable, or un-tested in your community.

What determines whether a project is innovative?

Innovative projects are retail models that serve healthy, affordable grocery items outside of the traditional supermarket model. Examples of these projects can be mobile markets, community-owned co-ops, farmers markets, CSA programs, retailers offering nutrition incentives, community discounts, or Food is Medicine programs; municipality-owned stores and/or self-service stores. For more information, please refer to page 5 of the [Request for Applications](#) (RFA).

Scoring & Reviewing

How are applications reviewed and scored?

The application is a two-step process. All applicants must submit a Letter of Interest via Reinvestment Fund's grants portal, SmartSimple. All Letters of Interest will be reviewed for eligibility. If determined to be eligible, applicants will be invited to submit a full application. Full applications will be competitively scored against other submissions and can earn up to 100 points with an additional 16 priority points. The number of projects awarded for the round will be dependent on the number of submissions, amount of requested funding, and available funding. All applications will be evaluated and scored by an internal committee comprised of Reinvestment Fund and The Food Trust. Invited applications submitted by eligible applicants will be evaluated and scored based on the criteria outlined on pages 15-17 of the [RFA](#).

Technical Assistance

What is the difference between a predevelopment grant and an implementation grant?

Predevelopment grants are intended to be used to support the start-up activities of a new business. This can include covering the costs of business, feasibility, and operations planning, construction planning, community assessments, and other costs related to moving the project into the implementation phase.

What kind of technical assistance is available?

Predevelopment and technical assistance activities are an eligible use of funds. Predevelopment and technical assistance activities can be contracted by the grantee with the use of Initiative grant funds once awarded. Matchmaking with TA providers may be provided to eligible organizations; applicants may also contract with a TA provider of their choice.

The Initiative team can answer SmartSimple related application questions. If you need support please reach out via email to: NJ-innovativehealthyfoodretail@reinvestment.com with any questions or concerns. The Initiative team cannot consult on the content of your application.

What kinds of Technical Assistance are grant funds allowed to be used for?

Funds for Technical Assistance may be used for support with identification of food access needs and potential interventions, project planning, market studies, feasibility studies, business planning, financial modeling, appraisals, and community or customer engagement. Funds can be used for expenses that will directly support the planning and overall sustainability of the new or expanded business model.

Are there specific predevelopment deliverables you are requiring to be eligible for implementation dollars?

If awarded a grant for a predevelopment project, you will be required to complete all predevelopment activities outlined in your workplan in order to be eligible for implementation dollars. You may be eligible for implementation funding pending

availability of funding at that time and if your implementation project can be completed by March 31, 2026.

Use of Funds

Can grant funds be used for personnel?

Yes. Grant funds may be used for essential operations/implementation staff only, and are limited to up to 50% of the total grant amount may be used for personnel. If grant funds are requested solely for personnel, the applicant must prove that existing revenues from other sources will support the other activities that the project needs to be successfully operating by the end of the grant period. For example, if you request \$100,000 for personnel, and this is your only grant request AND you evidence that there is adequate funding through other sources, you will only be considered for 50% your personnel request (i.e. you'll be awarded \$50,000)

Are there any restrictions on how the funds can be used?

The Request for Applications outlines ineligible uses of funds on pages 6-7.

Is there a minimum grant request amount?

Projects of \$20,000 to \$200,000 will be considered for funding.

Would purchasing a vehicle being suitable if we are planning a mobile grocery store?

Yes, a vehicle is considered equipment which would be an eligible use of funds.

Are TA activities that are complementary to our primary (non-TA) implementation activities allowable?

No. While your overall project can include providing education or technical assistance, the funding that you are requesting must directly support the food retail or food enterprise activities. If you are awarded and your budget includes ineligible uses of funds, your budget can be amended at the discretion of the Initiative.