2024 Request for Applications (RFA)

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

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Part I – Program Description

The New Jersey Innovative Healthy Food Retail Initiative ("the Initiative") aims to identify and support applicants who are introducing innovative food retail models to improve access to food and economic opportunity in low-income underserved areas of New Jersey and are led by community-focused organizations and/or businesses. To address the challenges in accessibility, availability, and affordability of healthy foods, proposals are expected to align with Food Research and Action Center's (FRAC) final report, *Hunger and its Solutions in New Jersey: Landscape Analysis of Current Initiatives, Recommended Actions, and Emerging Opportunities for Further Investment*. More specifically this initiative will support the goal of maximizing equitable food purchasing power and procurement in low-resourced neighborhoods with limited healthy food retail options.

The Initiative will offer grants and technical assistance to promising organizations and enterprises to pilot, operate, expand, and sustain retail outlets. This Initiative will prioritize equitable and innovative approaches to food access. Specifically, the Initiative seeks to support a diverse cohort of community food enterprise models along the food supply chain, including innovative wholesale and retail businesses, nontraditional mobile and e-commerce retail, cooperative ownership and collective purchasing, community engagement strategies by independent grocers, and partnerships with anchor institutions and developers. These models offer promising approaches to increasing food access in communities that cannot attract or sustain a full-service supermarket.

Furthermore, the Initiative will prioritize supporting an equitable and sustainable local and regional food system through innovative grocery retail. This includes prioritizing food retail businesses that serve low to moderate-income communities that are BIPOC or community-owned and led. Additionally, priority will be given to organizations and enterprises helping families afford a basic diet by increasing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) redemption rates, and may be collaborating with other food access programs, such as nutrition incentives and SNAP online redemption, thus furthering the other goals of the New Jersey Food Security Initiative (NJFSI), which is led by FRAC.

This is a two-year (2024-2026) community-centered effort to improve food access and nutrition to advance health equity in New Jersey. The Initiative is co-administered by Reinvestment Fund and The Food Trust, and is funded by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Grant Amount Available:
This initiative will provide up to $1,500,000 in total grants. An expected 5-10 implementation grants will be funded up to $200,000 each, based on project type, need, and impact. A limited number of pre-development grants, with the potential to be eligible for a subsequent implementation grant may also be awarded. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until funds are fully deployed. Applications will be reviewed and scored at regular intervals for eligibility and project scope. Please refer to *Part III. Application Process and Timeline* for full application deadlines.

Part II – Eligibility

The Initiative will provide grants to existing healthy food retailers and planned ventures in eligible underserved areas. Grants will support the implementation and/or expansion of projects designed to

improve access to fresh, healthy food through food retail. A limited number of predevelopment grants for promising new business ideas, with the potential to qualify for subsequent support, will also be considered. The Initiative will assist a variety of organizations and innovative business models that process, distribute, aggregate, market, or sell healthy, fresh, and affordable foods in underserved communities and markets in New Jersey.

Eligible Organizations

- Business enterprises (such as corporations, limited liability companies, sole proprietorships, and public benefit corporations)
- Cooperatively owned businesses or managed ventures
- Tax-exempt nonprofit corporations
- Community health and other anchor institutions
- Government agencies, authorities, commissions, and food policy councils
- Tribal agencies and authorities

Individuals are not eligible.

Eligible Locations

To be eligible, applicants must propose a project in an eligible underserved area in New Jersey. This includes areas that have limited access to affordable, healthy foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables, and lack grocery retail stores or farmer-to-consumer direct markets, and have high rates of hunger, food insecurity, and poverty.

Eligible areas must:

a. Serve a low to moderate income (LMI) area with a median family income equal to or below 80% of median local income levels.
b. Serve a Low Supermarket Access (LSA) area or be in a New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) designated Food Desert Community.

More information, including data and eligibility maps will be available to help determine if a proposed location is eligible at: https://www.reinvestment.com/grants/nj-innovative-healthy-food-retail-initiative. Applicants will use the eligibility map to indicate whether they meet the above eligibility criteria.

If you are unsure if a location is eligible, or have questions about location eligibility, please contact us. Contact information can be found on page 2 of this RFA.

Eligible Project Types

To be eligible for this initiative, applicants must propose a project that demonstrates the following criteria:

- Introduce and/or expand existing and innovative food retail models in New Jersey that improve access to affordable, healthy foods. Eligible models should be outside of a traditional full-service grocery store format and may be based on promising models piloted elsewhere in New Jersey or other states and show potential for food access solutions.

- These models may be nonprofit, for-profit, or cooperatively owned ventures; operate as a brick and mortar, mobile market, e-commerce platform, or pop-up; may employ unique approaches to procurement, distribution, delivery, or shopping; may prioritize local food procurement and support local food systems; and to the maximum extent possible prioritize equity and inclusion through ownership and employment.
  - 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](#).
- Plans to expand or preserve the availability of staple and perishable foods in underserved urban and rural areas with (LMI) populations.
- All retail projects must accept or plan to accept benefits under Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) established under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 USC 2011 et. Seq.) and/or Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). If your project is a food supply chain enterprise, your project must serve clients that accept or plan to accept SNAP and/or WIC.

Partners and Collaborators

Applicants are encouraged to establish partnerships with public, nonprofit, or for-profit entities, as well as other appropriate professionals, community-based organizations, institutions of higher education, and local anchor or government entities. Only the applicant must meet the eligibility requirements. Award recipients may subaward to organizations necessary for the completion of the proposed project.

What We Will Fund

Grants will be awarded to eligible organizations located in eligible underserved areas of New Jersey to implement a project that is designed to improve access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food through an innovative, community led and/or supported food retail model. Eligible projects may be already operating, in the predevelopment stage, and/or ready for the implementation and expansion of their proposed projects.

Implementation projects should describe and execute activities that will contribute to the sale of affordable, healthy foods by the completion of the project. Eligible implementation activities include (but are not limited to):

- Hard costs for the creation, retrofit, expansion, or other one-time investment in innovative, healthy food retail or alternative food supply chain enterprises such as land or building acquisition; construction; and fixtures, furniture, and equipment for the construction, renovation, expansion of a brick and mortar, or other facility improvements, vehicles, machinery, equipment, technology, software, purchase of existing business assets or inventory or raw materials.
- Soft costs such as training, consumer/community engagement, governance support, financial or development consultants, project management, marketing and merchandising, environmental/energy assessments, food safety assistance, project

learning and/or to assess the project's contribution to preserving or expanding access to healthy food retail.

We encourage applications to demonstrate:

- **Equity:** Applications that will prioritize diversity and inclusion through community and/or BIPOC ownership, leadership, management, and employment
- **Food Incentives:** Applications that will increase SNAP and WIC redemption, and/or are working with other food access programs (such as nutrition incentives, SNAP online redemption)
- **Innovation:** Applications that aim to test, scale, and/or demonstrate new, emerging, creative and/or alternative approaches to addressing healthy food retail access challenges
- **Community Involvement:** Applications with diverse and relevant partnerships and collaborations that reflect inclusion of the community and targeted beneficiaries
- **Replicability:** Applications that include approaches to preserving or expanding access to food retail that may have or could be replicated or scaled in other communities
- **Project Readiness:** Applications that demonstrate a proposed project is ready for implementation with the requested assistance
- **Sustainability:** Applications that will not depend on uncommitted sources of revenue after the grant period is over
- **Unlocking Capital Access:** Applications to help proposed projects to qualify, leverage, and access additional sources of capital to fund their project, including financing from public and private capital sources

Predevelopment projects: A limited number of planning grants to projects with the potential to qualify for subsequent support will also be considered. Eligible predevelopment activities include (but are not limited to):

- ○ **Business, feasibility, and operations planning:** Information gathering, and decision-making activities including market research, feasibility studies, financial analysis, business/strategic planning, development of proformas and business financials, financial modeling, personnel training, financial or development consultants, project management, marketing and communications, governance support activities
- ○ **Construction predevelopment:** Site or facility location analysis, support for lease, leasehold improvements, appraisals, architectural or design assistance, and soft costs that will indirectly support the acquisition and/or pre-construction preparation of land such as legal support, permitting, fees and environmental/energy assessments
- ○ **Community engagement:** Community food assessments, community/consumer outreach and engagement
- ○ **Other capital needs:** including software or development of technology that will operationalize the next phase of the project, such as the building of an app or build out of a website

Ineligible Uses of Funds

- **Agriculture-Only Projects:** Projects that are exclusively limited to food production, including gardening, farming, ranching, hydroponics, aquaponics, vertical farms, or similar other agricultural activities are not eligible. Educational or community gardens (i.e., educational

gardens, or other gardens whose harvest is for self-use) and productive farms whose harvest is primarily for self-use or sale are not eligible. Projects that include growing or production, as well as downstream food supply chain activities, including distribution and sale of healthy food could be eligible, if grant funds will primarily support supply chain activities.

- **Charitable Food:** Projects that primarily support programs where food is given for free, such as food pantries, food banks, meals programs, and food donations, are not eligible. Organizations that engage in charitable food donation are eligible to apply if funds are used to support a market-based food access project that meets the eligibility requirements described earlier in this RFA.
- **Nutrition Education:** This program will not support educational programs about nutrition, culinary skills, or the food system.
- **Restaurants:** This program will not directly support projects focused on the sale of prepared, hot foods in a restaurant or takeaway setting to consumers.
- **Consumer Packaged Goods:** This program will not support the startup, operation, or expansion of enterprises that produce only one or only a few consumer-packaged goods, such as health food items for sale at a retail location.
- **Research:** Projects for research studies will not be eligible.
- **Operating Capital**: Grants may not be used to support the general operating costs of an existing venture.
- **Regranting and Lending Activities:** Grants may not be used for regranting or lending purposes.
- **Food Retail Programs and Initiatives:** Applicants seeking funding to administer programs and initiatives that are primarily consulting, technical assistance activities, or educational activities, will not be considered eligible.

Length of Project
Projects may last up to 18 months and must be completed by **March 31st, 2026**.

Technical Assistance
The Initiative encourages existing and early-stage projects to apply. The Initiative will offer Technical Assistance (TA) grants to eligible organizations that are in a planning phase or early stage of a food retail or enterprise project. TA is non-financial assistance provided by contracted specialists. TA resources may include 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. Match making with TA providers or industry resources may be provided to eligible organizations where expert guidance would further clarify and advance a project that supports the Initiative's goals and priorities. Applicants may also contract with a TA provider of their choice.

Selected applicants in the preliminary stages of project development may have an opportunity to seek further implementation funding pending review of the planning project results and available funding.

Part III. Application Process and Timeline

The Initiative will have a two-phased application process via the application portal, SmartSimple. Applicants will submit a Letter of Interest (LOI) that will be reviewed for eligibility and alignment with

the Initiative's goals. LOIs will request brief details about the applicant organization, stage of project development and funding requests.

LOIs will be reviewed on a rolling basis. Eligible LOIs will be invited to submit a full application for review and scoring. **LOIs must be received by June 14, 2024, to allow enough time to determine eligibility and for an approved applicant to complete the full application by the deadline.** LOIs submitted after this date may not be processed in time for the full application deadline.

Full applications will be reviewed several times throughout the grant cycle. If funds remain available, a second round of LOIs may be accepted until September 30, 2024. All funding rounds depend on available funds, please plan LOI submissions accordingly.

Full application submission deadline schedule is as follows:

- **ROUND 1: July 15, 2024**
- **ROUND 2: October 31, 2024***

LOI Submission Periods	Full Application Due (if invited to apply)	Award Announcement
Round 1: May – June 14, 2024	July 15, 2024	September 2024
Round 2: August – September 30, 2024*	October 31, 2024*	December 2024*

*All funding rounds are subject to available funding.

Phase 1: Letter of Interest (LOI)

The LOI is the first step in the Request for Application (RFA) process and is required for all applicants to express interest in grant funding and technical support. The LOI submission phase includes a brief business background and eligibility questionnaire, and narrative project summary that includes an overview of the applicant's proposed project, budget, community to be served, organizational background, impacts, and project timeline.

LOIs will be reviewed to determine applicant basic eligibility for the Initiative. LOIs will be reviewed on a rolling basis during each submission period. **Please carefully review the full application deadline schedule above and plan accordingly.**

The Initiative team will screen all LOIs for eligibility based on submission requirements, applicant eligibility, project location, and project type and scope. **Applicants will be contacted within two to three weeks on the status of their LOI submission, and, if eligible, will be invited to submit a full application**.

Phase 2: Application

Only projects determined to be eligible by Reinvestment and The Food Trust will be invited to submit a full application. Applicants cannot submit a full application before being invited to do so. Full applications build upon the LOI submission and will require additional project information, operating projections, budget detail and budget narrative. Full applications will be due by the deadlines in the schedule listed above.

All applications will be evaluated and scored by an internal committee comprised of Reinvestment Fund and The Food Trust and based on the criteria in this RFA. Funding decisions for the first round will be awarded by the end of August 2024. Selected grant award recipients will be notified of their selection

electronically and should be ready to work with Reinvestment Fund to begin the Grant Agreement and funding process.

Part IV. Submitting a Letter of Interest and Application

Only electronic submissions will be accepted in response to this RFA. Applicants must use Reinvestment Fund's online grants portal, SmartSimple (https://reinvestmentfund.smartsimple.com), to submit applications. Applicants must register for an account on SmartSimple and then locate the *New Jersey Innovative Healthy Food Retail Initiative* under '**Current Funding Opportunities**'.

Submissions in response to this RFA should follow the instructions in the sections below. If there is discrepancy between the information presented here and the online grants portal, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.

Applications received by email, mail, or fax will not be reviewed. Please contact us if you have any issues with the online submission process. Early application submission is strongly encouraged to avoid technical issues with the grant portal. All LOIs will be reviewed, and, within two to three weeks, eligible applicants will be invited to submit a full application.

Applicant Requirements
To submit an LOI in response to this RFA, applicants will first need to provide:

Organization Information
Organization Name
Legal Entity
Organization Address

Primary Contact Information
Name
Position (owner, manger, operator, sponsor)
Email
Phone Number
Mailing Address (if different than above)

Legal Status of Applicant Entity
Applicants must identify the type of organization they are, and provide the following documentation to evidence the legal status of the entity submitting an LOI:

- Evidence of the applicant's Employer Identification Number (EIN) via an IRS issued EIN Notice
- Official documentation indicating the applicant's legal name and status as an entity, such as Articles of Incorporation or Certificate of Formation (only one will be required as evidence)
- *If the applicant is a tax-exempt organization* (such as a nonprofit, state, local, or tribal government or governmental agency, authority, commission, or similar), proof of the applicant's tax-exempt status, such as an IRS issued tax exempt Determination Letter or Governmental Information Letter. More information on IRS documentation of Government

entities is available at: https://www.irs.gov/government-entities/federal-state-local-governments/governmental-information-letter

Letter of Interest (LOI) Requirements

Applicants will be required to provide the following information for an LOI submission:

Business Background Questionnaire
- Name of Business
- Business Formation Date
- Retail Site Address(es)
- County
- Site Control
- Ownership Type
- Type of Entity (Applicants must be an incorporated business by the time of funding)
- Ownership Identity
- Type of Retail
- SNAP Authorization
- WIC Authorization
- Monthly SNAP and WIC redemption rates, for existing retailers
- Funding Objective

Project Background Questionnaire
- Grant Amount Request
- Development Status
- Potential Uses of Funds
- Location Eligibility: Please visit: https://www.reinvestment.com/grants/nj-innovative-healthy-food-retail-initiative to use the eligibility map. The map will include data to indicate whether your project is a low-to-moderate income community, is a Limited Supermarket Access area or is in a NJEDA Food Desert Community.
- Community Involvement
- External Funding Sources
- External Funding Amount
- Project Timeline
- Estimated Annual Operating Budget

Narrative Questions

Organizational Background (250 words)

Applicants must provide a brief description of their organization. Please include a mission or values statement and list any current or pending program partners relevant to the project.

Project Summary (500 words)

Applicants must provide a brief narrative description of the proposed project for which they are seeking grant funding and technical assistance. The narrative must include the following elements:

- Project proposed, including brief overview of business model
- Why this Initiative funding is necessary for the project to move forward. If pre-development funds are requested, explain how the Initiative's funds and technical assistance will lead to project implementation.
- Description of what makes the project innovative to the state of New Jersey or the community being served. If the project type has been piloted locally or elsewhere in the country, please describe and provide any relevant links.

Project Impact/Community Served (250 words)

Briefly describe the change on food access expected from the proposed project. Indicate the extent to which the project will expand or preserve the availability of affordable staple and healthy perishable foods for retail sale. The narrative must include the following elements:

- Demographic description of the community and/or market to be served
- The project's location and how the proposed project will serve an underserved or low-income community
- A description of the healthy food access barriers in this community and how the anticipated project will help address these concerns in this community to be served

Project Timeline (100 words)

Overview of project timeline, including status, key milestones and key factors determining project feasibility over the next six weeks to 18 months.

SNAP Sales (100 words)

Explain how this project will prioritize increasing access to healthy food options for SNAP, WIC, and other nutritional assistance program recipients, and for other residents living in underserved places that may not be able to attract or sustain more traditional, full-service retail options.

Multi-site or Unidentified Retail Addresses (if applicable) (100 words)

If the project serves multiple locations, please list all the retail addresses being served. If one or more locations do not have a street address, please describe the project location. If your project serves more than 20 locations, operates as a distributor, CSA, or an online retail store with many household deliveries, please describe the geographic areas that you serve instead of listing individual addresses.

Full Application Requirements

If invited to submit a full application, applicants will be required to provide the following information as a supplement to the project summary and other information submitted during the LOI phase.

I. Narrative

Organization Overview and Background (250 words)

Briefly describe the applicant organization, its ownership or management structure, size, and relevant project partners including supplier or buyer relationships and/or community partnerships as applicable.

Please describe the applicant organization's and/or project partners' experience relevant to developing and operating the proposed project.

Population, Community, and/or Market Served (500 words)

Describe the critical elements and needs of the local food environment and the community that would benefit from the proposed project. This could include brief demographics and geographic characteristics of the area or population involved with or to be served by the proposed project. Applicants should describe the market within the food economy to be served by the food retailer or food enterprise. If relevant, include details of how long the community has been without supermarket or other healthy food retail options.

Applicants could draw from a Community Food Assessment or a market study to describe the challenges to access to food in this community. Most relevant is an explanation of who is to be served by this proposed project, and to what extent they participate in project development, activities, and how residents will benefit.

Project Objectives, Activities, and Outcomes (750 words)

Describe the overall project for which you are seeking funding, including the community or market needs to be met; the goals of the project; the overall model, such as business model, program model, and sources of revenue and ability of the business to cover ongoing operating expenses beyond the requested grant; project activities to be undertaken and the timeline to accomplish these activities; the specific changes (outcomes) that will occur as a result of the project, and who and what will benefit. Most relevant is why these activities were selected, and what impact on food access the applicant expects they will produce.

Use of Funds (500 words)

Describe the elements of the project for which you are seeking grant funding, and how grant funding will be used. Most relevant is why grant funding is needed, what grant funding will enable for the project, and the organization to do. If grant funding is part of a larger set of private and/or government funding sources, describe what the grant will support within the project funding structure, as well as the source of other funding or financing, and the status of those other funding sources. The most successful submissions will be those that have demonstrated how grant funding and technical assistance will enable a sustainable project that can thrive after the grant period is over.

Project Impacts (250 words)

Applicants must briefly describe the metrics to track the progress of their proposed project, as applicable, such as:
- Projected growth in annual revenue for their organization/enterprise
- Leveraged capital – the amount of other capital supporting the project
- Square footage created – the amount of food retail space created or preserved
- Quality jobs to be created or preserved - the number of jobs created or retained
- Sales revenue – weekly or annual sales revenue, weekly basket size, percentage of sales from SNAP and/or WIC transactions

- Support of regional food systems and locally grown foods
- Involvement of women - or BIPOC-owned entrepreneurs and businesses that are rooted in the community and/or communities to be served
- Incorporation of innovative strategies beyond the traditional full-service grocery model.
- Other metrics appropriate to the project's impact

Applicants may answer the following optional questions, to describe, if applicable, their project's impacts relating to the following program priorities:
- Will your project create or retain quality jobs for area low-income residents in the community? Please describe the number of jobs created or retained and job quality, including how wages and other benefits compare to similar positions in comparable businesses and economies. (100 words)
- How will your project support accessibility and inclusivity of food for a community with limited food retail access? This may include considerations such as offering pricing models that reflect the community's buying power, free delivery services, online ordering, proximity to public transit, walkability, and accommodations for diverse dietary and cultural preferences. (100 words)

II. Budget

Applicants will be asked to provide a complete project budget breakdown and explanation for the grant request by cost category. Describe with some detail how you arrived at the budget figures (such as quotes, estimates, or comparable figures) and the associated justification for each of the following cost categories included in your project:

Personnel and Fringe
As applicable, include salary (annual or hourly), percent effort for this project, roles of person for this project and why their role is essential to the implementation of the project. Fringe may include costs of employee benefits beyond salary and amount allotted (if any) for each role listed in personnel.
Up to 50 percent of the grant award can be used for this category.

Travel
As applicable, include if travel is local and what it will be used for.

Furniture/Fixtures/Equipment
Examples of such purchases are equipment, automobiles, real property (land and fixtures such as portable/unaffixed refrigeration, kitchen, and storage equipment, furniture, Point of Sale (POS) or computers, copy/fax machines, telephones, and software.

Construction
If to support renovations or construction, what is the status of the planning and financing and how would this grant be used? As applicable, include the acquisition and/or construction and renovation of land and/or buildings. Construction budget should include a minimum of 10 percent contingency.

Contractual
If to support contracted services, what is the status of the planning and financing and how would this grant be used? As applicable, list all contractual services such as predevelopment soft costs, third-party consultant or design fees, or training.

Materials/Supplies:
As applicable, include short-lived items, such as stationary supplies, marketing materials, etc.

Other Costs:
As applicable, list other costs not covered by the above categories, such as initial inventory, raw materials, insurance, maintenance costs, or other.

Indirect Charges:
As applicable, you may charge up to 10 percent of total direct costs as indirect costs or 20 percent if a nonprofit entity.

Budget Narrative:
Please describe briefly how you arrived at the budget figures (such as based on existing expenses, quotes, estimates, or comparable figures).

Additional Sources of Funds:
Please describe any additional sources of funding you may have for this project (other funding is not required).

Sustainability:
How will your project be sustainable beyond the grant period? What other resources would you need to sustain this project and how would you go about securing those?

III. Attachments

Operating Projections
Applicants must submit 5-year projections for the operations of the proposed Retail Outlet or Food Enterprise. Financial projections may include estimates for sales projections, gross margins and operating expenses based on the best available information. Where possible, applicants should include details concerning how you arrived at the assumptions, in addition to general sources of income. These projections would demonstrate the sustainability of operations beyond the grant period.

If applicable, existing enterprises may submit the most recent tax return OR profit/loss statement and balance sheet.

Sources and Uses
If your grant request is part of a larger project with additional sources of funding and activities, applicants must provide a budget spreadsheet summarizing the additional funding sources, the status of these funds (i.e., applied or committed), and uses of funds in the overall larger project.

Letters of Support

Letters from the key organizations involved in the project, partners, and other project stakeholders, acknowledging their support and contributions, may be provided as applicable. For projects involving real property and/or construction, letters of support to demonstrate engagement of the local community are recommended. Letters of support are not required, and applicants who do not include letters of support will not be penalized.

Part IV: Application Review

Invited applications submitted by eligible applicants will be evaluated and scored based on the criteria outlined below. This is a competitive program, and scores will be assigned based on the quality of the information provided. Reviewers will base scores solely on the information provided in the application.

There are 100 total points available for the criteria, and 16 additional points for the priority areas listed below.

Applications selected for an award will be funded up to the maximum amount requested, up to $200,000. Budgets will be reviewed and may be adjusted for allowable costs and reasonable uses of funds.

Scoring Criteria

A. Project and/or Business Model (0 to 30 Points)

Implementation projects (existing or new) will be evaluated for the strength of their proposed concept to improve food access through innovative community-based food retail and food enterprises. More points will be awarded for a clearly defined problem and proposed solutions, with projections supported by market analysis and/or community assessment and industry metrics or historical financials. Additionally, projects will be awarded more points if the operator or supplier or buyer relationships have been determined.

Planning projects will be evaluated for the appropriateness of their planning strategy towards improving food access through innovative community-based food retail and food enterprises. More points will be awarded for a clearly defined problem and organized strategy towards determining a feasible and viable business model. Additionally, projects will be awarded more points if proposed business models can be supported by market analysis and/or community assessment, industry metrics and/or projected financials.

B. Applicant Background (0 to 10 points)
Applications will be evaluated for the applicant and project team's record and experience in food enterprise and/or food retail industry development and management, and/or food systems or food supply chain experience. The application will be evaluated for the applicant's demonstrated ability to deliver the project described. More points will be given to applications with relevant experience,

relevant partners in the project team, and/or projects that will seek or have received qualified services to expand or implement their proposed project.

C. Community Involvement (0 to 20 Points)
Applicants will be awarded points for the extent to which they demonstrate inclusion of community-based groups and/or residents in the design and operation of the project. Points will be given to projects that describe established or proposed partnerships and collaborations with relevant organizations and businesses. More points will be given to projects that demonstrate authentic community ownership or leadership from the same LMI (median family income is 80% or below) community their business serves, have deep roots in the LMI community it serves, contribute to local economic development, and/or empower communities to take ownership of their food systems and foster community resilience.

D. Food Access Goals (0 to 30 Points)
Projects will be awarded points based on how strongly they align with the goal of the Initiative, which is to improve access to affordable, fresh, and nutritious food, including perishable and staple foods for sale at community owned and led retail outlets in underserved areas of New Jersey. More points will be awarded to projects that demonstrate: 1) enhanced local food access by strengthening connectivity and collaboration among New Jersey's local and regional food system and its stakeholders.
2) improved accessibility and inclusivity by helping overcome food accessibility barriers for a community with limited food retail access. This may include considerations such as offering pricing models that reflect their community's buying power, free delivery services, online ordering, proximity to public transit, walkability, and accommodations for diverse dietary and cultural preferences.
3) increased redemption of SNAP and WIC benefits and/or other food access benefit programs such as nutrition incentives or SNAP online.

E. Budget (0 to 5 points)
Applications, budgets, and budget narratives will be reviewed for completeness and detail. Up to 5 points will be awarded for the budget and budget narrative. Points will be awarded for applications that describe all categories of costs, including estimates or quotes, and categorize items within line items. More points will be awarded if the budget includes additional funding sources demonstrating efforts to strengthen the overall project's viability.

F. Timeline (0 to 5 points)
Up to 5 points will be awarded for the timeline. More points will be given to timelines that describe activities in detail and include a reasonable and differentiated timetable for proposed tasks to be completed during the grant period.

Priority Points

Priority points will be given to projects that have the following attributes. Up to two (2) points will be awarded for each attribute for a total of up to 16 priority points awarded on top of points awarded for the criteria above.
- Serve low-income (median family income is 50% or below) communities with limited access to affordable, fresh, healthy foods

- Involve an innovative project model beyond the traditional full-service grocery model
- Creates or retains quality jobs for lower-income residents in the community
- Projects that support local and regional food systems and locally grown foods to the maximum extent possible
- Women or BIPOC-owned/controlled or community owned/controlled
- Cultural Competence and Diversity: Projects that recognize and celebrate the diverse cultural backgrounds and dietary preferences of the communities they serve, including initiatives that offer culturally relevant food options, engage with diverse community stakeholders, and promote inclusivity and cultural competence.
- Applicants who have secured funding from other sources demonstrate that a grant award will serve to leverage other sources of capital
- Prioritizes increasing SNAP and WIC redemption and/or working with other food access programs such as nutrition incentives or SNAP online redemption