



Community Food Systems – Learning and Evaluation Partner Request for Qualifications (RFQ)

Purpose

The Colorado Health Foundation ([CHF](#)) is seeking partners who are interested in partnering with us to **evaluate the impact of our Community Food Systems funding opportunity**. This funding opportunity is a key body of work within our broader Food Access and Security (FAS) priority. It represents one way in which CHF is directly supporting communities to advance equity and systems change in their local food system.

This evaluation should assess the progress being made as well as key assumptions that lie beneath this work. The evaluation will focus on how grantees are engaging in systems change work, what is changing, and how deeply equity is integrated into the work.

The total budget for this work is not to exceed **\$75,000** (including all fees and expenses) for this phase of the work. There is the possibility of a second phase in fall/winter of 2022, pending a review and determination of need by the Foundation – however, this RFQ only covers the work in 2021.

About the Colorado Health Foundation

CHF believes that the opportunity for health is a human right. CHF's work is grounded in serving Coloradans who are living on low income and historically have had less power or privilege, to stay informed by the community and those we exist to serve and to do everything with the intent of creating health equity.

Our approach aims to strengthen bodies, minds, and communities in the fight against unfair and avoidable differences in health. Under our [Strengthen Community Health](#) focus area, we are partnering with communities to help them identify and tackle health-related challenges.

One of our priority areas focuses on food access and security, including investments in collaborative community-level efforts to reduce food insecurity. These investments are designed to support communities to connect existing assets in more effective ways, to develop relationships, and to more intentionally focus on equity.



About the Community Food Systems Funding Opportunity

In June 2019, CHF opened a new funding opportunity (FO) focused on strengthening community food systems across Colorado. The FO is aligned with the Food Access and Security objective that aims to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of collaborative community-level efforts to reduce food insecurity, as well as with statewide goals identified in the [Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger](#). Specifically, this work is designed to support the following two Blueprint goals:

- Goal 2: Increase the number of Coloradans who can access affordable, nutritious food in their communities.
- Goal 3: Increase the number of Coloradans who can access food assistance and nutritious food through community-based organizations.

Equity and systems change are central to this funding opportunity, with an emphasis on equitable and inclusive processes and outcomes, as well as targeting and shifting the conditions that create and perpetuate existing inequitable systems – with a specific focus on building and strengthening relationships and connections between local food system actors.

The initiative was not intended to support or expand the operations and/or programming of individual organizations, but rather to support partners working together to align and enhance local food systems and/or reduce barriers to accessing food within a specific geographic area. The specific outcomes the Foundation is seeking through this initiative are:

- Shifts in relationships and connections between actors around food.
- Coalitions working on solutions that would shift systems around food.
- Shifts in power dynamics around who is making/influencing decisions.
- Shifts in the food environment (e.g., food affordability, access and availability of nutritious food).

Planning Grants

October 2019- October 2020, 15 Coalitions

New and existing coalitions of partners across Colorado were invited to apply for 12-month planning grants to develop community-informed implementation plans. CHF funded an initial cohort of 15 local-level coalitions from October 2019 through October 2020. Planning grantees were asked to:

- Address either or both Blueprint goals.
- Focus on addressing the needs of communities most impacted by food insecurity and a high percentage of low-income residents, including rural areas and communities of color.



- Focus on a specific neighborhood, city, or region in Colorado.
- Include a minimum of four partners representing various segments of the community food system (e.g. food policy councils, food providers and feeding sites, public health/nutrition providers, educational institutions and agriculture extensions, government agencies, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, food recovery organizations, food chain worker/labor organizations/associations/unions and agriculture organizations, etc).
- Ensure that individuals with the lived experience of food insecurity are active participants in the coalition, the assessment of the food environment, and prioritization of strategies.

To support these efforts, in the planning phase CHF also selected technical assistance (TA) providers to support: 1) coalition development, 2) implementation planning technical assistance, and 3) evaluation capacity-building to grantees throughout the planning process.

During the planning period, coalitions spent the better part of a year building and strengthening their coalitions, engaging their communities, collecting baseline data, assessing their local and/or regional food environments and systems, mapping local and/or regional food networks, identifying and selecting goals and strategies, and developing learning plans. Further, coalitions received training and capacity-building support through virtual and onsite technical assistance, including a webinar series on core topics and tailored telephonic and in-person coaching to meet individual coalition needs.

Implementation Grants

October 2020 - October 2022, 12 Coalitions

Following the completion of the planning period, coalitions were invited to apply for additional funding for a two-year grant to execute their community food systems implementation plans. Grantees who were part of the planning grants were eligible to apply for implementation funding in August of 2020, to be considered for an award in October of 2020. To receive implementation funding, coalitions were required to demonstrate forward movement in the areas of equity and systems change efforts, as well as engagement with the community and, in particular, those with lived experience of food insecurity. Implementations grants were awarded to 12 coalitions across rural, urban, frontier, and mountain communities in October 2020.

Implementation grantees were asked to submit a multi-stakeholder implementation plan that included a feasible plan of systems-focused strategies that address Blueprint Goals 2 & 3 and articulation of their coalition development outcomes; equity outcomes; and learning outcomes.

Complex systems are not easy to change and doing so requires intentionality and flexibility. Rather than requiring coalitions to develop highly structured implementation



plans with defined, single solution oriented action steps over a multi-year period, coalitions were asked to take a more adaptive strategy approach and develop plans that were shorter term and which allowed them to more effectively respond to complex problems and environments.

To support these efforts in the implementation phase, CHF continued the provision of technical assistance with a focus on supporting grantees in executing their implementation plans. CHF recognizes that the implementation phase is fluid as coalitions adapt to current opportunities and challenges in their landscape (i.e., COVID, staff, and coalition member changes, etc.). The TA was also designed to connect coalitions for shared learning, peer support, and potential regional collaborations.

Coalitions started their work from different places along the continuum in terms of readiness and capacity, how they think about and approach equity and systems change, and where they are with the development of their coalitions. Some coalitions are well-established and have been working together for an extended period, while others are newer with significant work remaining to get more partners to the table. The funding opportunity was specifically designed to take a developmental approach so as to better meet the needs of each coalition given where they are in terms of the longevity/maturity of their partnerships, equity practice/cultural responsiveness, and experience with undertaking systems change work.

Objectives for this Evaluation

To help inform our approach of supporting communities, and to understand the impact of our investments, we are seeking an evaluation partner to assess the extent to which our efforts are:

- 1. Shifting community systems around food.¹**
 - a. What kinds of relationships or connections did this funding opportunity help shift? What difference did these changes make?
 - b. To what extent are relationships/connections a key leverage point to address food security? What other issues are greater barriers?
 - c. What types of system changes were grantees able to accomplish? How meaningful were these changes in improving people's access to food?

- 2. Shifting power dynamics around who is making and influencing decisions around local food supply.**
 - a. How are grantee coalitions thinking about equity? What steps did they take to engage in equitable processes and outcomes? How was this the

¹ Recognizing that systems change is a long term and complex endeavor, we are seeking early signals of what is happening and how that might matter for improving community food systems.



same/different from the way they usually worked? How meaningful was the impact of these changes?

- b. In what ways did coalitions include those with lived experience in their work? How meaningfully did coalitions include those with lived experience in decision-making about how the coalition was working to improve the local food system?

The evaluation will also take into account the supports provided (e.g., TA, program officer engagement) and consider what role these played in supporting the work of the coalitions and what types of value they may have contributed.

We offer these questions as a representation of our initial thinking based on the intent of the work, and how we are defining success from the Foundation's point of view. However, we will work collaboratively with the evaluation partner to develop a final set of questions to guide the evaluation.

Evaluation Approach

The Foundation's work is centered on serving those living on low incomes, being community informed, and putting equity at the center of everything that we do. The latter is critically important for our practice of evaluation. We are seeking a partner who is deeply committed to practicing evaluation in ways that reflect principles of equity – the Learning & Evaluation department at the Foundation has been heavily influenced by the work of the [Equitable Evaluation Initiative](#) and has been actively exploring how to better align our mindsets and practices to reflect equity. We are seeking an evaluation partner who will intentionally consider how to embed equity within this work. Our goal is to learn with our partner on this journey – we do not claim to be experts in how to do this, but we are committed to exploring that in partnership with the selected partner, and seek a relationship where our partner can push us beyond our current practices around equity and evaluation.

The evaluation approach for this project should:

- Be based in a strong lens around equity, both in terms of process and outcomes. All phases of the evaluation process from scope design to reporting should deeply reflect concepts of equity. Our evaluation partner should also be willing and able to assess how CHF's actions supported equity, where we fell short, and to point to ways we may have unintentionally perpetuated oppressive practices or structures in this body of work.
- Be able to create a conceptual framework that allows us to draw out general themes, conclusions and lessons across 12 very different grantees who operate in different ways and contexts. The evaluation partner will need to be able to make sense of diverse actions and themes across sites to draw conclusions about overall progress and impact.



- Methods and processes should consider ways to share power over various components of the evaluation with grantees, balancing this appropriately with the needs and questions of the Foundation.
- Rigor should be based on the quality of data and thoughtful analysis, rather than focusing on certain methods or approaches (e.g., quantitative).
- Be thoughtful and innovative in how to deal with any Covid-19 related considerations to evaluation design and methods, including a high likelihood of needing to conduct data collection through remote/virtual methods.
- Be sensitive to community context and develop methods and processes that reflect culturally responsive approaches.

Key Deliverables

The specific deliverables and evaluation methodology will be co-constructed between the evaluation partner and the Foundation after a contract is awarded.

Budget

The total budget for this work is not to exceed **\$75,000** (including all fees and expenses) for this phase of the work. There is the possibility of a second phase in fall/winter of 2022, pending a review and determination of need by the Foundation – however, this RFQ only covers the work in 2021.

At the RFQ phase, we do not expect partners to provide detailed proposals and budgets, but we share the maximum budget to ensure that we have a mutual understanding of the scope of the project. Cost-effectiveness is considered in decisions about contract award.

Timeline

The timeline for the evaluation is between approximately August 2021 through January 2022, in coordination with the evaluation partner. Our intent is for data to be collected at approximately the 1 year mark of the implementation grants – which would be October of 2021. Our goal is to start the contract in a way that allows the evaluation partner adequate time to engage with CHF in preparation for conducting the evaluation. We are seeking to have the final deliverable by the end of January 2022 to inform decision-making.

Reporting Structure

The evaluation partner will report to a member of the Learning & Evaluation team at CHF, though they will also need to collaborate occasionally with other individuals including CHF program staff and the TA provider for the funding opportunity.



Responding to this RFQ

Step 1: Send us an email and share a little about your work

If you are a firm, group or individual and are interested in being considered for this evaluation, please let us know by email **by June 18th, 2021**. Send an email to the Senior Director of Learning & Evaluation, Kelci Price, kprice@coloradohealth.org. We want to get to know you a little, so please include these three things:

- 1) **Share the name and email of the person you want us to use as a primary contact.**
- 2) **Share with us a brief paragraph or two that addresses these questions:**
 - a) What about this makes it compelling work you want to take on?
 - b) Given what we've shared about the project, why do you think you/your team would be a good fit for this work in terms of the skills and mindsets you bring?
- 3) **Share with us up to 2 deliverables from other projects that give us a sense of your work and thinking.** These can be of any type - reports, powerpoints, video recordings, etc. Send us whatever you think best exemplifies how you approach your work.

Step 2: Let's chat!

If you indicate interest, we will then schedule a 75 minute discussion so we can get to know each other better. During this time, we will ask you to come ready to talk about the following:

1. Why are you interested in partnering with us?
2. Give us a sense of how you'd think about approaching this project. How are you thinking about incorporating equity? How would you approach answering the evaluation questions we're interested in?
3. Tell us a bit about the person/team who'd work on this project. What kinds of experience and mindsets will they bring to the work?
4. Given your experience, what should we be thinking about as we evaluate this set of work? What will it take for us to understand progress and impact in a way that matters – so we can better understand our communities, and improve how we implement our strategy?

We will use these as starter questions for the conversation, and see where it takes us! We also want you to get to know us. So please bring any questions you have about the Foundation, the Learning & Evaluation team, or about the project itself! Our intent is that during this time together you can get to know who we are and how we approach our work.



Prior to this conversation, we will also ask that you share with us the hourly rates for the staff you might engage on this project. CHF and its partners will keep confidential any materials sent to us and will not use these in any way other than for this process.

Step 3: Contract Award

Based on Steps 1 and 2, we may seek further information from some applicants if necessary to inform our decision.

Given what we've learned through this process, we will reach out to the applicant we'd be interested in awarding the contract to – so we can talk about whether they are interested in contracting with us, and to discuss the specifics of contracting. Our intent is to have a contract in place by mid-August of 2021.

We will communicate with all applicants in a timely way to let them know about the outcome of this process.

Terms and Conditions

Application Rejection

The Colorado Health Foundation reserves the right to reject any or all applications and to waive informalities and minor irregularities in applications received and to accept any portion of an application or all items proposed if deemed in the best interest of the Foundation.

Modification or Withdrawal of Applications

Applications may be modified or withdrawn prior to the established deadline.

Expenses

The Colorado Health Foundation is not liable for the costs incurred in the preparation of a response to this RFQ.

Review

The review will identify the applications that most effectively meet the requirements of this RFQ. The work will be offered to the contractor whose application conforming to the RFQ will be most advantageous to the Colorado Health Foundation, price and other factors considered.