

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Western New York Regional Food System Assessment and Planning

Western New York philanthropists seek to retain the services of one or more consultant firms to provide professional services for the development of a Western New York Food System assessment and plan/model. Western New York philanthropists are issuing a Request for Proposals to solicit written proposals from consultants or consultant teams who are interested in providing such services.

Abstract:

A food system includes all processes and infrastructure involved in feeding a population. It is an important component of community economic development and indicator of social well-being within a region. Regional food systems refer to place-specific clusters of agricultural producers of all kinds, along with consumers and institutions engaged in production, aggregation, processing, packaging, distribution, marketing, consumption, and disposal of food and food-related items.

The food system comprises a highly diverse range of activities that are central to building equitable, healthy, sustainable, resilient, and economically thriving communities. Historically, the broader 'system' has not been well-defined in the context of development finance and this has limited its access to financing tools. Examining the potential creation of a food systems asset class which supports the market growth of local and regional food systems which meet the economic, social, environmental, and cultural needs of communities throughout the country should be considered in this effort.

In June 2010, The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (formerly the American Dietetic Association), American Nurses Association, American Planning Association, and American Public Health Association met to develop a set of shared food system principles as outlined below. The creation of these principles was made possible by a Food Systems and Public Health Conference Work Team grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

A healthy, sustainable food system is:

- **Health-Promoting.** Supports the physical and mental health of all farmers, workers, and eaters. Accounts for the public health impacts across the entire lifecycle of how food is produced, processed, packaged, labeled, distributed, marketed, consumed, and disposed.
- **Sustainable.** Conserves, protects, and regenerates natural resources, landscapes, and biodiversity. Meets our current food and nutrition needs without compromising the ability of the system to meet the needs of future generations.
- **Resilient.** Thrives in the face of challenges, such as unpredictable climate, increased pest resistance, and declining, increasingly expensive water and energy supplies.

- **Diverse in Size and Scale** — includes a diverse range of food production, transformation, distribution, marketing, consumption, and disposal practices, occurring at diverse scales, from local and regional to national and global.

Geography — considers geographic differences in natural resources, climate, customs, and heritage.

Culture — appreciates and supports a diversity of cultures, socio-demographics, and lifestyles.

Choice — provides a variety of health-promoting food choices for all.

- **Fair.** Supports fair and just communities and conditions for all farmers, workers, and eaters. Provides equitable physical access to affordable food that is health promoting and culturally appropriate.
- **Economically Balanced.** Provides economic opportunities that are balanced across geographic regions of the country and at different scales of activity, from local to global, for a diverse range of food system stakeholders. Affords farmers and workers, business owners and employees in all sectors of the system a living wage.
- **Transparent.** Provides opportunities for farmers, workers, and eaters to gain the knowledge necessary to understand how food is produced, transformed, distributed, marketed, consumed, and disposed. Empowers farmers, workers, and eaters to actively participate in decision making in all sectors of the system.

A healthy, sustainable food system emphasizes, strengthens, and makes visible the interdependent and inseparable relationships between individual sectors (from production to waste disposal) and characteristics (health-promoting, sustainable, resilient, diverse, fair, economically balanced, and transparent) of the system.

Background/General Information:

A collaboration of local philanthropic organizations created the WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund to identify and address our region's most critical needs. Our community supported this effort in a huge way and this collective generosity has made an impact on thousands of people. However, the need is still great — and growing.

As the crisis continues to unfold, the WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund will focus on Building Back Better by developing and supporting strategies focused on recovery efforts through collaborative systems that work to address specific needs such as sourcing personal protective equipment for nonprofits and food security. We are committed to evaluating the evolving challenges and creating targeted initiatives to address the ongoing and long-term needs in our community.

The Western New York COVID-19 Community Response Fund released a Request for Ideas (RFI) to seek out collaborative solutions from nonprofit leaders to address challenges our

community is facing due to COVID-19, coupled with the persistent challenges of racial inequities.

In addition to the RFI Initiative, Build Back Better (B3) has carved out specific funds for solutions-based conversations that will reduce vulnerabilities in WNY's regional food system and its reliance on producers outside of the region. It is critical that we respond urgently and thoughtfully to address acute hunger, and to change the entrenched, chronic conditions that have perpetuated long term food insecurity in Western New York and hurt food-based economic development or stunted food production growth.

A robust, 18-month planning phase of a long-term project to improve regional food systems is being created as part of a "Western New York Food Response" effort, to begin in Fall 2020. An innovative group of regional practitioners and experts will collaborate closely to set a cross-county, cross-sector vision for food access and security. The COVID-19 pandemic is magnifying the structural inefficiencies in our food systems across the United States. This moment calls for visionary and bold structural change rather than piecemeal approaches across the region.

Program Goals:

- Set a big-picture vision for food in the region – less hunger and systemic instability; more resiliency and jobs.
- Develop actionable strategies to support emergent, short-term needs.
- Develop middle- and longer-term strategies to stabilize food systems that minimize disruptions to the supply chain.

The goal of this new effort is to tackle entrenched challenges in new ways and to emerge from COVID-19 with a regional food system that is more equitable, effective, efficient, and resilient. Farmers, producers and processors will have greater opportunities to develop regional linkages, and access to markets of varied scales, local, regional, and others; families will have easier access to healthy, affordable and culturally preferred foods; all industry workers will experience safe and healthy working environments, living wage compensation and appropriate benefit packages as we re-structure and create new food related jobs that contribute to the economic development of the region. There will be better coordination of services in the community, particularly services that focus on getting food to low-income communities and food insecure neighborhoods. Opportunities will be identified to support WNY's farming and agricultural industry, creating increased income for regional producers, and generally creating more jobs in the WNY region. Recognizing that our soils and climate underpin the productive capacity of our region, and by employing advances in technology many of the climatic limitations can be overcome and productivity can continue to grow at the farm level, all the preceding goals are to be established through the lens of maintaining the health of the land, air and waterways of the region, encouraging growth and development within the regional Green Industry sector.

Geographic Scope

Build Back Better and regional funders are committed to supporting communities in Western New York. Community engagement will focus on the following nine counties: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Monroe, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming.

Research:

Please refer to the following links to learn more about some of the local assessments and planning efforts that have been done in recent history.

Cultivating Prosperity in Chautauqua County: Leveraging the Food System as a Catalyst for Economic Development http://growingfoodconnections.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2018/11/Cultivating-Prosperity_Report_20180813print_ES.pdf

A policy brief that was completed with the Growing Food Connections program. http://growingfoodconnections.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/10/FINAL-Chautauqua-Case-Study_Growing-Food-Connections-2016.10.13.pdf

The Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan is a roadmap for improving the entire food system, from production to consumption, in the city of Niagara Falls. The NFLFAP includes 41 action items that will provide residents of Niagara Falls better access to nutritious, affordable food. These items also promote long-term health outcomes for the city of Niagara Falls. <https://www.healthiarniagarafalls.org/our-work/healthy-food-healthy-people>

One Region Forward's Regional Plan for Sustainable Development entitled "A New Way to Plan for Buffalo Niagara" weaves together nearly three years of research, community engagement, partnership building and planning by over 5,000 citizens and more than 700 local organizations. http://bap-home.net/solarize/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2017/05/1RF_A-New-Way-To-Plan-For-Buffalo-Niagara_FinalPlan_reduced.pdf

Western New York Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan- a regional strategy that includes agriculture. https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2017-11/A_Strategy_for_Prosperty_in_Western_New_York_November_2011.pdf

Resources and planning documents include technical reports on food systems planning, climate change action, and a planning resource for coordinating housing investments across the region. Growing Together, Food Access and Justice Strategy Document. This was a technical report for One Region Forward. http://growingfoodconnections.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2018/07/39_Raja_Hall_etal_2014_GrowingTogetherEnsuringHealthyfood...BuffaloNiagara_UB.pdf

Project Scope/Scope of Services/Scope of Work:

This RFP seeks responses from qualified organizations to facilitate the development of a strategic platform for the region's food system or food delivery model. A submission from a collaborative of individuals/firms with skill sets in all the desired areas are welcome. Proposals should outline how the organization would design, convene and run a community-focused, regionally coordinated planning effort that will bring together stakeholders, representing different aspects and perspectives of the region's food system, who will identify action steps to address a food system challenged by social and economic inequality, a lack of coordinated efforts and communication, entrenched and chronic conditions that have perpetuated long term food insecurity and hurt food-based economic development. The goal is to find common solutions that address multiple issues simultaneously.

The proposal should include details outlining the approach to the following areas:

1.) Regional planning: Lead joint planning among participants to develop a vision for a more sustainable, efficient, and equitable food system. Prioritize solutions to address gaps and build necessary capacity and coordination of local partners to improve and grow the regional food system. The planning process will involve a process for stakeholder and agency involvement that will create solution-based action items to enhance the resiliency of the region's food system, boost and promote the farming and agriculture economy, grow the economic impact of farm and food enterprises, create jobs and improve wages in food, food production, and farming, grow and improve nutritional health for the region's population, and increase access to fresh, culturally appropriate, and affordable food.

- ***A plan of action that outlines and coordinates mutually reinforcing activities for each participant.***

2.) Working Groups: Develop criteria and manage multiple advisory and taskforce groups, including a role for area funders. A table of local industry experts, researchers, and practitioners composed of members representing a wide array of interests will lead the planning effort (Advisor Table). In addition, the planning process should involve significant public engagement, potentially with subgroups that will focus on developing key findings and recommendations specific to different food sector areas, to be determined. These groups will be identified by the Advisor Table members and the consultant and will be as inclusive of perspective as possible. i.e. service recipients and consumers, parents, social workers and nutritionists, academics, philanthropists, etc. It is important that those most impacted by the food system deficits are included in creating solutions. An advisory team may be formed to assist with recommendations for outreach and engagement from all/most counties, for often under-represented groups. To support equitable engagement, the budget should include financial support allocated for participating organizations and persons (excluding funders).

- ***Open and continuous communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation;***
- ***All participants have a common agenda for change, including a shared understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.***

3.) Measurement and Evaluation: Document learnings across the region, including insights, trends, and gaps to support future strategies. (Note: UB Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab will be doing a network analysis as part of their mapping project.)

Experience and Knowledge:

Experience consulting in the food system industry and/or experience working on the issues of food security.

Experience with diverse cultural and geographic communities.

Experience planning and facilitating meetings with diverse partners.

Ability to identify clear outcomes and next steps from thoughtfully facilitated discussions amongst partners with differing interests.

Ability to transform concepts into actionable work plans and operationalizing work plans to successful completion.

Demonstrated understanding of systems thinking.

Ability to approach people and situations with cultural humility.

Strong verbal and written communication skills.

Timeline:

- Proposal due date: September 23, 2020
- Interviews of selected applicants: October 1-7th.
- Selection of successful applicant: October 12th.
- Anticipated start date: November 2, 2020
- Expected completion date: May 2022, subject to negotiation of a final agreement.

Proposal Content:

Please submit the following items, where applicable. We respectfully ask that you limit your proposal to 10 pages, excluding budgets and references.

- Cover Letter - no longer than one page.
- Authorized Contacts.
- A statement of qualifications for your organization, including an organization chart, a statement of size organization, a description of services provided by your organization, and a statement of the extent of experience/history providing the services proposed by this application.
- A description as to why you are interested in this project and why your organization is qualified to successfully perform the work proposed by this RFP.
- A description as to how you will use an outcome driven approach in developing the strategic platform. How will you develop a plan that brings partners and collaborations together to focus on a common set of outcomes and hold those partners and collaborations accountable?
- A high-level timeline of planning action steps.
- Description of previous experience working in one or more areas of the food system.
- Description of previous experience working in urban, suburban, and rural communities.
- A demonstration of your capacity to begin this work in Fall 2020. Include special accommodations necessary to address the current pandemic environment, i.e. remote and virtual platforms.
- A list of existing relationships or previous projects involving Western New York.
- A description of any experience with food systems work, either as an organization or in partnership with other organizations.
- A proposed budget (with narrative) and timeline for the work. Include percent of staff time, staff titles, benefits, programmatic expenses and indirect expenses. Please prepare a separate budget for travel-related expenses
- A list of references.

Expectations:

The following expectations are defined to assist individuals/firms in understanding the scope of the desired planning initiative which should help with the development of the planning team, budget and required outreach strategies.

Advisory Table-A round-table of local experts have been identified. It is expected that this well-managed, talented group will drive this planning effort. There has been/will be defined criteria for membership, to include leaders whose current work spans multiple counties in WNY and multiple areas of expertise. Much of the Advisory Table members will be in place by project start. Other members may be identified upon project start.

Segmented Working Groups or “Task Force” – to dive deeper into key issues, and to supplement the efforts of the main group, numerous additional members will be identified to serve on a “Task Force.” These smaller groups will be open to a wide range of perspectives and will include those who are disadvantaged by the current system. Task Force issues areas, to be determined, may include early childhood, seniors, economic development, racial equity, and many other areas.

Local partners should include representatives/thought leaders from all nine counties, and across all sectors related to the food system: production, processing, distribution, food service, food retail and wholesale, logistics and distribution, emergency food, and food waste.

Regular updates and reports to all sectors (Advisory Table, funders, community etc.) on the status of the planning phase; utilizing of community forums to share information and seek feedback from community groups in all nine counties

Focus on Equity -Multiple perspectives will be essential – diversity in race, ethnicity, gender identity, abilities, developed human settlements, sector, professional and personal perspectives, etc. The main group and overall process must be as apolitical as possible.

Stipends and Translation-utilization of stipends and translation services required by and for select community planning members.

Final Plan / Written Report – to end the planning phase with a roadmap action plan to begin to build a new, improved regional food model. The plan, once developed and put into action, will serve all residents of the nine-county region of Western New York: Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Niagara, Allegany, Genesee, Wyoming, Orleans, and Monroe Counties.

Defining Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:

The definitions listed below can be credited to UC Berkeley Center for Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity and the University of Houston’s Center for Diversity and Inclusion.

Diversity: Includes but is not limited to race, color, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, veteran status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, gender expression,

gender identity, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, genetic information, and learning styles.

Equity: The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically under-served and under-represented populations and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to assist equality in the provision of effective opportunities to all groups.

Inclusion: Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power and ensures equal access to opportunities and resources.

Submitting Proposal:

Please submit proposals by 12:00pm on September 23, 2020 to Lauren VanOsten at Lvanosten@wnyfoundation.org. Only electronic proposals will be accepted.

Lauren will collect the applications and respond to any questions. Questions about this RFP may be submitted to Beth Gosch at bgosch@wnyfoundation.org through September 16, 2020. For your planning purposes, allow up to three working days for responses.

Evaluation Criteria:

The following criteria will be used to evaluate submitted proposals:

- Adherence to proposal guidelines
- Alignment of stated interest and approach to reaching project goals
- Clarity and completeness of proposal
- Applicant(s)' experience with the subject matter and skills required for the work

Review and Selection Process/Evaluation Process:

Submittals will be reviewed by a Review Committee that will identify the most qualified proposers. At the discretion of the Review Committee, selected consultants/teams may be interviewed to determine the most qualified firm or firms. A Zoom presentation from the final candidates may be requested.

Additional Information:

Separate and apart from this consultancy, the planning process will/may include other significant components:

1.) Regional Mapping: a regional mapping project to identify gaps and opportunities across the spectrum will be undertaken by the State University at Buffalo's Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab. Stakeholders in the region's food system will co-design the portals that map and monitor problems and/or opportunities. The mapping portal will aid multiple groups

in making practical, strategic, and policy decisions within WNY. Access to timely and community-relevant information about food-related assets will play a key role in COVID-19 recovery.

- ***Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all the participants ensures shared measurement for alignment and accountability.***

2.) Shared Learning Agenda: A project to design, implement and facilitate shared learnings among participants. A consultant will build a learning and capacity building agenda, that may include, but not be limited to human centered design, data driven decision making, and the creation of a shared diversity, equity and inclusion framework. Develop online and on demand communication tools and resources that facilitate learning and sharing among participants. Connect with and include external experts to implement learning and skill building sessions. It is essential that all parties appreciate that there is an opportunity to learn from each other: Funder to table and table to funder, task group to table and table to task group, etc., and that the power dynamics are neutralized. There will be no “reporting up to”, but instead elevating each party to work at its greatest potential to achieve a common goal. (Interested parties may bid on this as part of this RFP. Please label as RFP Additional Services Bid)

3.) Storytelling: Create a program to transform our region by telling- and listening to -stories. about the approaches we want to leave behind and the system we want to create.

- Provide a medium to demonstrate that the system people work in is failing the people it is supposed to serve.
- Curate stories designed to lift up the voices of those who are directly impacted by food insecurity and systemic inequities, as well as from people with passion and vision for efforts that will allow their communities to thrive.
- Develop new narratives that engender empathy across differences and drive real change.

Note: Funding for this effort has been approved by members of Build Back Better, The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr., Foundation, and Western New York Foundation. Western New York Foundation is distributing this RFP for consultancy on behalf of regional funders who have invested in this initiative. The contracting party, serving as a fiduciary pass-through partner, is yet to be determined.