

Austin Fresh

Call for Ideas 2026 – Revised Guidelines & FAQs

Opportunity

Austin has a rich history and strong community cohesion, but generations of Austin residents have struggled with low access to what others might consider basic resources. Austin envisions a better future. The community-driven Quality of Life Plan, titled [Austin Forward. Together.](#) states emphatically that *Austin can become known as a vibrant, healthy community—from good food to open space.*

We agree. In line with the *Austin Forward Together's* Strategy 3 in the Community Narrative Issue Area, this call for ideas seeks to *create environments that foster health and wellness in the community by promoting healthier food choices across Austin*, and developing green shared spaces, further increasing the community's access to nature. The goals of Austin Fresh include helping foster creative alternatives, transforming the Austin community from a food desert into a food oasis, and enabling residents to lead happier, healthier lives.

Background

[Builders Vision Philanthropy](#), [The Christopher Family Foundation](#), [Food:Land:Opportunity](#), [The Lumpkin Family Foundation](#) and the [Walter Mander Foundation](#) want all Chicago communities to thrive. We are united in the belief that access to healthy, affordable food is a human right and critical to community health. We envision an equitable Chicago region in which all people have knowledge of and access to healthy food.

In 2020, we created Austin Fresh, a minimum one-million-dollar annual fund with an initial five-year aim to work collaboratively with partners to expand healthy retail options, support community gardens and local food production, grow food enterprises, and protect and strengthen food assistance programs in the Austin neighborhood on Chicago's West Side. Since 2020, Austin Fresh has supported twenty-three organizations with grants totaling \$8.1 million.

In 2024 we embarked on an evaluation process to help us understand the early impact of Austin Fresh. As funders, we wanted to understand better how we could improve and best serve Austin. We extend our thanks to the Austin Fresh grantees and community partners, including Austin Coming Together, who participated in the evaluation—your feedback helps us iterate and improve each year.

Following the evaluation, we announced that Austin Fresh will continue for another five years, with a minimum one-million dollar commitment for each year 2025-2029. As we move forward, we'll continue rolling out changes in line with the recommendations in the evaluation report including tracking shared metrics, which will help us understand and tell others about the impact of our collective food system work in Austin.

You can read the evaluation report and learn about the 2020-2025 grantees [here](#).



Food:Land:Opportunity
Localizing the Chicago Foodshed



WALTER S. MANDER
FOUNDATION

Goals & Outcomes

We believe in place-based models of funding. We strived to listen and learn from the community in the creation of Austin Fresh, including aligning grant making goals with Austin's quality-of-life plan *Austin Forward. Together* (AFT). Community representatives from AFT's food justice initiative, Austin Eats, will continue to inform the grant-making process. Austin Eats serves as community advisor on the Austin Fresh team by providing feedback throughout the call for ideas and application processes while facilitating community outreach and engagement.

Our work in Austin has led us to the wells of talent in the community and a deep appreciation for all of Austin. The foundation partners will seek additional ways to learn from and with the people of Austin to ensure that the challenges of providing affordable, plentiful, and healthy food are community-owned and supported. We hope our investments can lend support to local leaders in ways that tip the scales toward justice, healing, and equitable access for all.

Austin Fresh seeks to encourage fulfillment of the goals of [Austin's Quality of Life Plan](#) Community Narrative Strategy 3.2 by supporting organizations working to do the following in Austin:

- Build the Austin economy through food-related businesses including grocery and culinary enterprises
- Innovate emergency food efforts and nutrition assistance programs that expand healthy food options
- Expand access and quality of green spaces and food production
- Develop and promote culturally relevant food justice education
- Promote information on existing food resources and activities to Austin residents

Examples of Eligible Ideas

- We are issuing this call for ideas to elicit projects and encourage collaboration among organizations and people who know the Austin landscape and understand the requirements for success. Examples of the types of ideas we would welcome include (but are in no way limited to):
- Planning grants to support the early development of large-scale and long-term project ideas that need more time and resources prior to implementation (see the FAQs below for more info);
- Commercial ventures, including brick & mortar stores, designed to increase access to healthy or local food while building the economy of the Austin community (provided a non-profit organization/partner is the applicant);
- Promoting the importance of purchasing food within Austin and increasing awareness of where to buy healthy food whether that be grocery, restaurant, farmers market etc.;
- Community food gardens which increase access to healthy, affordable food, or activating and connecting Austin's network of food growers;
- System improvement: planning for longer-term strategies around food access in order to create improved systems and build out underdeveloped ideas and strategies;

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- Community kitchens and other processing enterprises that add value to food and empower entrepreneurs to build businesses and create jobs;
- Food co-operatives;
- Food as medicine and food education approaches to health which focus on diet and nutrition;
- Nutrition education, cooking classes, or community cooking efforts focused on the preparation of fresh and healthy meals, in which the work of creating prepared meals is shared to make it easier for families to eat well;
- Expanding or coordinating emergency food efforts;
- Neighborhood or school habitat projects that support food production (e.g. pollinator gardens) or which give residents greater access to nature or green spaces, even if they aren't directly related to food production (e.g. tree planting).

Idea Evaluation

Ideas submitted to Austin Fresh will be considered and evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Understanding of and connection to the community, its needs, and possible partners
- Idea design and strength
- Organizational capacity
- Innovation and creativity
- Alignment with the *Austin Forward. Together.* Quality of Life Plan's priorities

Requirements

All applicants must be:

- A 501(c)(3) non-profit or operating with a fiscal sponsor. See below for more info about fiscal sponsors.
- Deeply embedded in Austin, and preferably located in Austin, or be an [active member of Austin Eats](#). See below to read more about what it means to be embedded.
- Anchor applicants of collaborative work must be led by members of the Austin community
- Organizations that are actively and always trying to learn from their work, and improve their approaches, even if that involves risk.
- Organizations that are open to shared learning and working collaboratively.

How to Submit

Initial ideas can be submitted through a short form at the [online application system](#), hosted by Forefront, the fiscal sponsor of Fresh Taste who manages Austin Fresh. See the Online Application FAQs below for more information. Contact us at austinfresh@freshtaste.org for assistance with the online system.

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Key Dates

The 2026 Call for Ideas will open August 3, 2026. Info Sessions—like last year, we'll offer two info sessions, hosted by our community partner Austin Coming Together.

- **July 28, 4:00 p.m.**—Online information session as part of the monthly Austin Eats meeting.
- **August 5, 5:30 p.m.**—In-person info session to workshop ideas. Held at the ACT office, 5500 W Madison St.

To attend either information session, please register [here](#). For questions, contact Grace Cooper gcooper@austincomingtogether.org.

Idea submissions are due August 31, 2026. 11:59 p.m. You will hear from us on or before September 25, 2026. For those invited to submit a full proposal, the deadline is October 26, 2026. Grant decisions will be made by a committee of foundation representatives and community members. Grantees will be notified by December 4, 2026.

Important Information

Previous Grantees

You may apply even if you have previously received funding from Austin Fresh or any of the Austin Fresh funding partners. Organizations that have received prior funding from Austin Fresh will be asked to provide an update on their current Austin Fresh project during the application process.

Grant Request Amounts and Terms

The annual pool of funding for all projects funded by Austin Fresh is a minimum of one million dollars. You may submit an idea of any size; ideas for multi-year projects; ideas for general support; and/or separate ideas for more than one project.

501(c)(3) Partner Options

Austin Fresh can only fund 501(c)(3) organizations. However, organizations without a 501(c)(3) status may engage in projects in several ways:

- Community organizations or emerging projects that are deeply embedded in Austin and do not have nonprofit status (like block clubs) may partner with established non-profits that can support the work as a program expense through a fiscal sponsorship relationship OR may work with a traditional fiscal sponsor organization (fiscal sponsor entities need not be Austin-based)
- Collaborations that include organizations without 501(c)(3) status can be led by an anchor applicant that is already established as a 501(c)(3) and led by members working in Austin
- Food system businesses may partner with a 501(c)(3) organizations on a proposal. The 501(c)(3) must be the applicant to Austin Fresh, with the business included as a consultant or vendor contract. The business and the 501(c)(3) must be deeply embedded in Austin. Food system businesses cannot apply under a traditional fiscal sponsor arrangement. There has to be a clear partnership in the proposed work.

If you're uncertain whether you qualify or about fiscal sponsors, email us at austinfresh@freshtaste.org.

FAQs

What does it mean for an organization to be “deeply embedded in Austin?”

Applicants whose work, leadership, and/or relationships reflect their commitment to enhancing Austin residents’ quality of life are considered deeply embedded in Austin. Rather than providing a narrow definition, we’d like to let organizations define their ties to the Austin community. A hypothetical example of an organization we would consider to be deeply embedded in Austin can be a nonprofit organization incorporated in Garfield Park that has deep and long-standing relationships in Austin teaching youth urban agriculture and entrepreneurship skills through running a farm stand, selling their grown herbs, flowers, and vegetables to Austin residents at accessible prices.

What constitutes a project eligible for a planning grant?

We highly encourage organizations to submit ideas for planning grants if they are in the early stages of projects that require initial research, feasibility studies, convening a steering committee, large capital investments in the long-term, and/or entail large infrastructural developments, for which Austin Fresh funds would help organizations break ground on the build-out of that project. An example of an application that would be considered for a planning grant could be a request for funds to acquire site control over a building or begin construction of a building that your organization dreams of one day turning into a food co-op.

About the Foundations

Builders Vision Philanthropy works to realize a humane and healthy planet, while changing markets and minds for good. We champion communities, people, and ideas on the frontiers of change. At TBI we see our role as taking risks, laying the groundwork, and establishing the baseline for change and scale to come.

The Christopher Family Foundation’s mission is to support family well-being. Most Foundation funding is focused on the Chicagoland area, with special consideration for the needs of the West Side of Chicago and the Austin neighborhood. CFF primarily provides funding in the areas of food security, education, employment, and entrepreneurship.

Food:Land:Opportunity aims to create a resilient local food economy that protects and conserves land and other natural resources while promoting market innovation and building wealth and assets in the Chicago region’s communities. Food:Land:Opportunity is a collaborative initiative between Kinship Foundation and The Chicago Community Trust and is funded through the Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust.

The Lumpkin Family Foundation supports people working together to create healthy, sustainable communities in east central Illinois and across the US. Our interest in Austin arises from family members who live in and care deeply about the health and vitality of Chicago.

The Walter Mander Foundation is a medium sized, family foundation which supports Chicago-area organizations working in the areas of community gardening, urban agriculture and community economic development, particularly organizations seeking to strengthen local food and agriculture businesses.

Community Partners

Austin Coming Together (ACT) is dedicated to providing backbone support for a 50+ network of non-profit, faith-based, public, and private entities with the shared mission of increasing collective impact to improve the quality of life in the Austin community of Chicago. ACT facilitates Austin Eats, a coalition working to strengthen the healthy food ecosystem in the community by synergizing groups working on food justice. Austin Eats has built a structure that maximizes collective impact and believes it is vital to support partners' efforts through careful coordination. Austin Eats considers the entire food continuum, from community gardens, food pantries, and grocery stores, to food cooperatives, culinary entrepreneurs, and restaurants.

Questions?

General questions or help with the online application system:

Logan Henderson, Fresh Taste, austinfresh@freshtaste.org

Specific questions about projects may be directed to any of the partner foundation representatives:

Lenore Beyer, Director of Conservation Initiatives, Kinship Foundation,
Lenore.beyer@kinshipfoundation.org

Molly Truglia, Program Partner, The Christopher Family Foundation molly@christopherff.org

Haven Leeming, Senior Program Officer, Builders Vision Philanthropy,
hleeming@buildersvision.com

Emily Wisniewski, Program Officer - Chicago, Lumpkin Family Foundation,
emily@lumpkinfoundation.org

Cassandra West, Walter Mander Foundation waltermanderfoundation@gmail.com

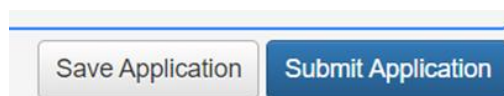
ONLINE APPLICATION SYSTEM FAQs

How do I use the online application system?

- **If you are a previous applicant or grantee** of Austin Fresh (or North Lawndale Fresh, IFMF or CRFSF) —log in to the [online application system](#) using your existing account and password.
- **If this is your first time applying** for a grant from Austin Fresh (or North Lawndale Fresh, IFMF or CRFSF), go to the [online application system](#), create a new account, and set up your password. The confirmation email to finish setting up your account will be sent to you from “Forefront administrator@grantinterface.com.” Be sure to check your junk and spam folders.
 - **We’re an organization applying for funding through a fiscal sponsor. How do we register and apply?**
 - You will register as your organization and include the fiscal sponsor name in parentheses. For example: Fresh Taste (Forefront). The registration form includes fields for providing your fiscal sponsor information.
- **TIP: Centralized user accounts:** Some organizations prefer to set up a centralized user email in the online system (like grants@XYZ.org) so that multiple staff members can access all the applications and reports using the same account information.
- **To invite someone to work on the application with you:** use the “Collaborate” button on the top right of your application page and follow the instructions.
- **If you don’t know your password,** please select the reset password link on the [login screen](#). Your user name is the email you used to create your account. If you don’t know which email you used, contact austinfresh@freshtaste.org.

Can I log out of the online application system and return to my grant request at a later time? Does the online system automatically save my work as I go?

The system autosaves each time you click into a new question, but if you are not ready to submit your application it is advisable to save your work before logging out to ensure no information is lost. Select the “Save” button in the bottom right-hand corner. (Some applicants find that it’s easier to type out answers in a separate Word document and then copy/paste into the online system before submitting.) You can save your draft request in the bottom right corner of the application. Once saved, you can return at any time to complete your request by looking for your draft in the “Action Needed” section. Look for the “Application” button below the fund name. Do not begin a separate application every time you log in. When a funding round closes, all applications still in “draft” status will be marked as ‘abandoned.’



I added the wrong document to my grant request or report. How do I remove it and add the correct one?

If you're still in draft form, you can remove the attachment and reattach different documents. If you notice an error after you have submitted your application, please email austinfresh@freshtaste.org to let us know, and we'll work with you on the correction.

I accidentally started multiple drafts of a grant request. How do I remove the ones I don't need?

To edit drafts you have already started, click the "Continue" button under "Application" on your dashboard rather than returning to the Apply page and starting over. To avoid starting multiple requests in the future, please check your active requests folder before beginning a new request and be sure to save your request as you go. When a funding round closes, all applications still in "draft" status will be marked as 'abandoned.'

How can I be sure I've submitted my application?

First, when you're done editing, always "Save" your request using the button at the bottom. Saving ensures you can return to your application and continue editing. When your application is complete, be sure to click the "Submit" button at the bottom of the page. Once you submit, you'll receive a confirmation email from Forefront, administrator@grantinterface.com. You can also log into the online application system, look to the "No Action" section. A submitted application will say "Submitted" next to the "Application" button.

How do I save and download a copy of my application for my records?

While you are logged-in and viewing your application, select the "Application Packet" button to download the application to your computer. Simply name the pdf to save it. This can be done with any documents including grant agreements or other follow-up forms.

