

REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

*Rooted in Community: A localized approach to
growing the farm to institution movement in New England*

2022 Application Narrative (excerpt)

Grant Project Type:

Farm to Institution

Applicant Organization:

TSNE MissionWorks, fiscal sponsor of Farm to Institution New England (FINE)

Requested RFSP Funds:

\$968,940

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 250 words or less, briefly describe the operational model of the partnership, and the project's intended goal(s) with a description of how the goal(s) will be completed during the project period. This summary will be made available to the public.

This project invests in strengthening regional, equitable farm to institution (FTI) relationships and value chains in three New England Communities, which in coordination will lead to greater regional and values-based food procurement across New England while shifting institutional power dynamics around race. Springfield, MA; New Haven, CT; and Cumberland County, ME will form a Cohort, represented by three community-based organizations—Springfield Food Policy Council, Cumberland County Food Security Council, City of New Haven Food System Policy Division—who are already driving food systems change at the local level. The partnership will be supported by three state departments of agriculture and coordinated by a regional network backbone organization— Farm to Institution New England — who will connect the cohort with regional partners, resources, and trainings, while sharing stories and strategies developed in each community with the broader network. We believe that strong, inter-woven and community-driven foundations of FTI work lead to sustainable regional impact for New England producers and residents who eat at institutions.

Three objectives drive this project:

- Community level: Plan and implement multi-sector community-driven farm to institution initiatives in three New England communities, ensuring authentic engagement with residents who are most affected by this work and prioritizing disinvested communities.
- Cohort level: Establish a cohort among three communities for peer-to-peer learning, capacity building, and cross-cohort leveraging.
- Regional level: Reinforce and grow New England's farm to institution movement by creating a dynamic and multi-directional exchange of promising practices, success stories, and relationship building opportunities between the community cohort and the broader New England network.

ALIGNMENT AND INTENT

Describe the specific issues that the project will address in relation to the statutory language of the program (7 U.S.C. 1627c). Include data and/or estimates that describe the extent of the issue and justify the project's objectives and approach. Address the following points in this section:

List the objectives for this project, relating them directly to the issues mentioned above. Add objectives as needed:

Objective 1:

Objective 2:

Objective 3:

Describe the partnership's goals, why they are significant and how they improve marketing opportunities in the local or regional food system.

The issues we will address: This partnership will facilitate regional and values-based food chain coordination and mid-tier value chain development, using a community-driven model to achieve more successful, racially-equitable, and longer-term farm to institution successes across New England.

This project's goals: To have reliable institutional value chains that are accessible, fair, and equitable for a diversity of producers, meet the cultural and dietary needs of residents, and ensure the ecological sustainability of our region through a community-driven and network-supported model.

Our approach: This proposal leverages USDA and match funding to coordinate a community-driven partnership, founded on principles of racial equity, to strengthen farm to institution value chains and systems across New England. We aim to increase the amount of values-based (regional, sustainable, equitable) food being grown and purchased in the region. At the center of this partnership are three vibrant and diverse communities that are working to build sustainable local food systems and who face deep and enduring economic and social disparities: Springfield, MA; New Haven, CT; and Cumberland County, ME. These communities are represented in this project by community-based organizations — Springfield Food Policy Council, the Cumberland County Food Security Council, and the City of New Haven Food System Policy Division — who are already driving local food systems change. The partnership is coordinated by a regional network backbone organization, Farm to Institution New England (FINE), and actively involves state departments of agriculture and community-based value chain partners including producers and institutions. We will form a Partners Council with representatives from each partner to help guide our work. Together, we intend to create an environment in which each community has the resources and support needed to chart a path to food sovereignty through farm to institution work. Communities, working with value chain partners, will identify and address barriers to farm to institution. FINE will coordinate cohesive communications, implementation, and evaluation processes. FINE will also help share lessons learned from these communities with its extensive regional network, while connecting communities with additional regional partners, resources, trainings, and technical assistance (TA). Ultimately, we will create a strong network for regional farm to institution based on an interconnected flow of resources and support — and where communities are driving the regional conversation.

Objectives:

1. Community level: Plan and implement multi-sector community-driven farm to institution initiatives in three New England communities, ensuring authentic engagement with residents who are most affected by this work and prioritizing disinvested communities.
2. Cohort level: Establish a cohort among three communities for peer-to-peer learning, capacity building, and cross-cohort leveraging.
3. Regional level: Reinforce and grow New England's farm to institution movement by creating a dynamic and multi-directional exchange of promising practices, success stories, and relationship building opportunities between the community cohort and the broader New England network.

Each community entity will select or hire a coordinator and engage local partners. The coordinator will develop new, and nurture existing, relationships with additional community stakeholders and food system collaborators. Stakeholders in each community will include residents, institutional food service operators, farmers, distributors, processors, local government, and others. The coordinators will work with stakeholders to identify the community's unique assets, challenges, goals, and strategies to increase procurement of values-based food and foster the relationships essential to an equitable and resilient food system. The coordinators will also connect stakeholders with peer-led and other learning opportunities and TA provided by FINE, content experts, and the state agency partners. The community coordinators, along with other community leaders, will form a cohort to build capacity and leverage resources and lessons learned. FINE will manage the grant, organize the partners, organize the activities of the cohort, and connect partners to other resources — people, tools, TA, funds, initiatives — to

support the efforts. FINE will also gather the stories and aggregate the data generated from community efforts, and share them out through their broad regional and national network, robust communication channels, and a soon-to-be developed *Farm to Institution Impact and Story Center*.

Why we are undertaking this work: There is a long and inspiring history of farm to institution efforts across New England. Certain schools, colleges, hospitals, early care, and correctional facilities are national models of sourcing good food from regional farmers and fishers while serving nutritious meals and providing food literacy education. FINE and others in the region have been working for over a decade to support producers in the region by connecting them with greater institutional markets.

Eight years ago, a collaboratively developed New England Food Vision was launched, with a goal for the region to produce at least 50% of our food by 2060.¹ The Vision described farm to institution as an important strategy to achieving this goal. Aligning with this goal, the FINE network developed a numerical target for institutional purchases: “By 2030, New England institutions will spend 30% of their food budget on regionally grown, raised, harvested, or manufactured food.” This goal would increase regional purchases from an estimated \$160 million currently being spent to over \$300 million annually.²

Although New England food system entities have made significant strides in FTI over the last decade, the 30% purchasing target and greater implementation at scale remain elusive. Institutional purchases of good local food are often sporadic, isolated efforts. Early successes often arose from efforts driven by FTI champions: a foodservice director who is dedicated to offering fresh and local foods, a farmer or food maker who doggedly pursues an institutional buyer, an institutional administrator that signs a commitment to purchase more local food. These approaches created critical value chains, but did not sustain them when disruptions (such as the departure of the champion) occurred.

FINE regularly tracks institutional purchases across multiple sectors, and few institutions even meet 20% of purchases from local producers. Early assessments by FINE of COVID impacts indicate that collectively institutions are spending less of their food budgets on local food than before the pandemic, despite the fact that local suppliers often proved more consistent and reliable than national distributors.³ Local and especially BIPOC farmers struggle for consistent access to institutional markets, and institutional diners are missing important cultural connections with the food offered. Nearly 1.5 million New Englanders are food insecure⁴ and many communities with the highest food insecurity rates, the deepest histories of institutional racism, and the greatest health disparities, have not had the same access to the resources and capital that lead to farm to institution benefits.

When the food system came under significant strain, food needs related to health, equity, and prosperity were met by farms, distributors, and institutions who networked with community partners and understood local needs and resources.⁵ This partnership envisions a new community-driven and network-supported model for farm to institution, inspired by the resiliency and adaptability of community-driven approaches and food systems through the pandemic.

¹ New England Food Vision. <https://www.nefoodvision.org>

² New England Farm to Institution Metrics Dashboard. 2021. Farm to Institution New England. <http://dashboard.farmtoinstitution.org>

³ Unpublished data, Farm to Institution New England 2021 Campus Dining Survey

⁴ Feeding America, Food Insecurity in America. 2021. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>

⁵ Thilmany, D., Brislen, L., Edmondson, H., Gill, M., Jablonski, B. B. R., Rossi, J., Woods, T., & Schaffstall, S. (2021). Novel methods for an interesting time: Exploring U.S. local food systems' impacts and initiatives to respond to COVID*. *Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, 65(4), 848–877.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8489.12456>

Description of the Partnership

Scope

Describe the region covered by this partnership (geographic, economic, etc.), and why it is the most appropriate place to carry out partnership activities. Include information about how the partnership adds value to the local or regional food system, as opposed to each entity acting independently.

The partnership will work in three diverse communities (Springfield, MA; New Haven, CT; and Cumberland County, ME). Each of these communities is distinct in that they cover different geographies, food production types (including seafood), and urban and rural settings, yet they represent communities across New England who can learn from this work. Each community will build FTI relationships and value chains that support the needs of their residents. Additional food system collaborators from these communities will join a cohort to connect to peer-to-peer learning, technical assistance and trainings, as well as additional resources, stories, and lessons learned from FINE's decade of regional work. The work of the cohort will also lead to coordinated and cross-community value chains that will be accessible to the broader regional FTI network. The cohort will also work with FINE to identify and develop new tools, templates, and guides that will support work in each community while simultaneously contributing to a suite of new or revised FTI resources for the region. We believe this model is the future of farm to institution success: building strong community-driven foundations of FTI work that are woven and connected, and lead to big regional impact. As the network backbone organization for FTI work in New England, FINE is refocusing strategy in alignment with this model.

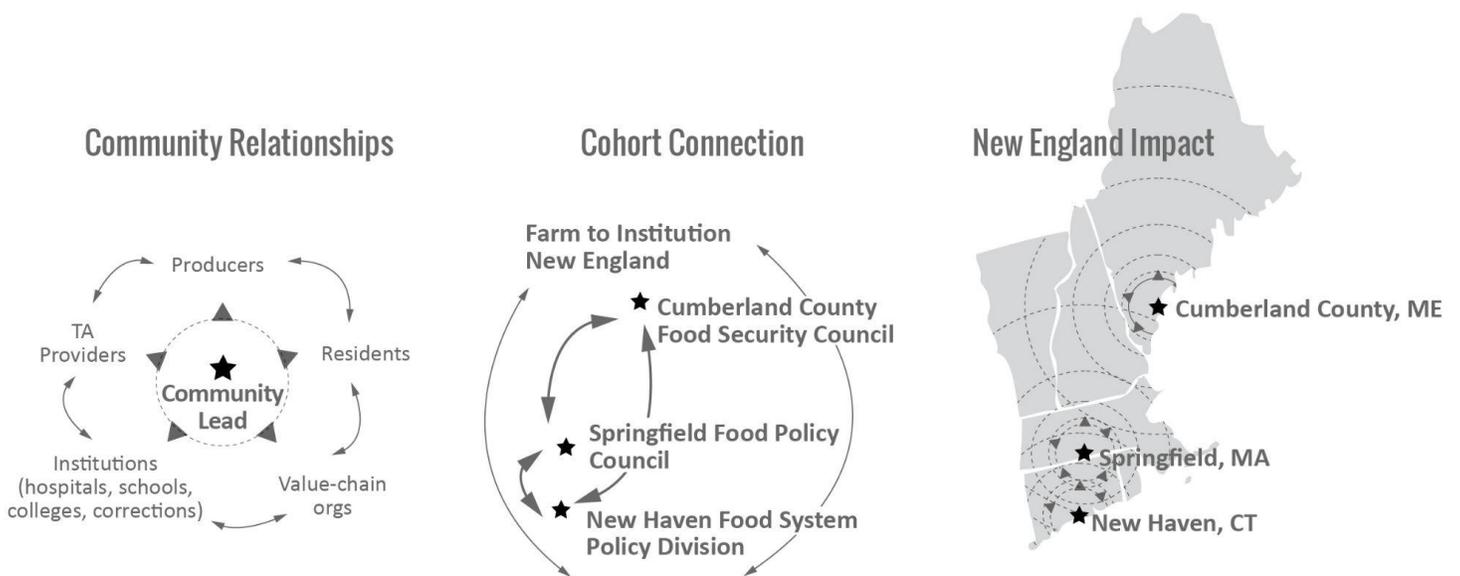


Figure 1. Rooted in Community: A localized approach to growing the farm to institution movement in New England.

Springfield, MA and the Springfield Food Policy Council (SFPC)

Springfield, MA (pop. 153,000) sits in the agriculturally productive Pioneer Valley. As the third largest city in MA, it is also a major urban industrial center. Residents are vulnerable to a variety of health risk factors including economic (25.5% fall below the poverty line), race (46% Hispanic, 19% Black, 3% Asian),

and age (about ¼ of the residents are children).⁶ A recently completed Community Health Needs Assessment revealed areas of the city with rates of food insecurity over 20%.⁷ Springfield is home to numerous institutions, including Springfield College, Baystate and Mercy hospitals, and a large public school system, several of which are managed by Sodexo. Like many communities in New England, they are surrounded by farmland yet community members face extensive barriers to accessing local food. In 2019, after years of advocacy by SFPC and other community members, and in cooperation with Sodexo and the City of Springfield, the Springfield Culinary Nutrition Center opened. This 62,000 ft² facility prepares and provides meals for 30,000 Springfield students daily. The Center, while a huge win, just grazed the surface of the infrastructure and coordination necessary to ensure that Springfield residents have access to fresh and nutritious food. Through this collaboration, SFPC will continue to fight hunger and nutrition inequities and expand access to fresh, affordable and culturally appropriate foods in the city's institutions, including healthcare systems that extend across the state. As a cohort member, they will bring their specific experiences with food service management companies, urban gardening, land use, and environmental justice to the FTI conversation.

New Haven, CT and the City of New Haven Food System Policy Division (FSPD)

New Haven (pop. 134,023) is a vibrant coastal city in southern Connecticut. It is a racially diverse community, home to roughly 32% Black or African American, 31% Hispanic/Latinx, and 5% Asian residents. More than 25% of its residents — including 34% of its children — fall below the poverty line.⁸ More than 50 community gardens and seven farm sites in the city together produce more than 75,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables each year, yet there are still municipal and systemic barriers which prevent institutional procurement opportunities for hyperlocal producers, especially those in Black and Brown communities. The FSPD, led by one of only 20 municipal Food Policy Directors in the country, supports and helps manifest community-led efforts that envision and create an environmentally sustainable and socially just food system. As a city government, FSPD has a mission to provide information and services to *all* city residents making them a unique partner in this project. The Food System Policy Division has accomplished a lot in their short tenure with limited resources. Through this collaboration, FSPD will grow their farm to institution work with New Haven institutions, including the public school system and community colleges. As a cohort member they bring a unique city government perspective as well as extensive experience with community-driven decision-making.

Cumberland County, ME and the Cumberland County Food Security Council (CCFSC)

Cumberland County (pop. 294,500) in southern Maine includes the coastal city of Portland along Casco Bay and the lakes region to the northwest. The residents are predominantly white (89%),⁹ but there is a growing immigrant and refugee population settling in the county.¹⁰ Portland Public Schools is the largest (6,515 students) and most diverse school district in Maine. Nearly 48% of students have families whose income qualifies them for subsidized meals. In 2020, the Maine legislature developed a Resolution to End Hunger by 2030, with a priority to ensure access to healthful, culturally connected food.¹¹ Through this effort, CCFSC will build on their work to increase the amount of local, culturally connected food

⁶ Census profile: Springfield, MA. (n.d.). [Interview]. In *Census Reporter*. <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US2567000-springfield-ma/>

⁷Williams, D. R., Neighbors, H. W., & Jackson, J. S. (2003). Racial/Ethnic discrimination and health: Findings from community studies. *American Journal of Public Health, 93*(2), 200–208. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.93.2.200>

⁸ Census profile: New Haven, CT. (n.d.). Census Reporter. <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US0952000-new-haven-ct/>

⁹ Census profile: Cumberland County, ME. (n.d.-b). Census Reporter. <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US23005-cumberland-county-me/>

¹⁰Statistics. (n.d.). IMMIGRANT RESOURCE CENTER OF MAINE. Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://www.ircofmaine.org/statistics.html>

¹¹Morrissey, J. L. Ending Hunger in Maine by 2030. (n.d.). https://www.cfoodsecurity.org/uploads/9/7/0/5/97051956/ending_hunger_in_maine_ld1159_v3.pdf

served in Portland Public Schools while expanding impacts into neighboring school districts and colleges. As a cohort member, they bring experience with community and parental outreach, immigrant farmers, and values based procurement.

New England and Farm to Institution New England (FINE)

The New England region is home to 14.8 million people,¹² 4,628 schools, 190 colleges with food operations, 61 correctional facilities, 270 hospitals, and more than 30,000 farms.¹³ Research shows that New England institutions spend nearly \$1 billion on food every year, and about ¼ of the population spent time in institutions every day, prior to COVID.¹⁴ Institutions are employers, educators, and service providers within their communities, offering myriad opportunities to invest in an equitable, regional food system while also ensuring that New Englanders have access to reliable, nutritious, culturally connected food. The six New England states have a long history of working collaboratively on food systems issues including New England Food Vision which imagines a New England that produces 50% of its food by 2060¹⁵ and an interim effort “New England Feeding New England” to identify key strategies for producing 30% of the food New Englanders eat by 2030, with institutions as a key market channel. Farm to institution work in New England is often looked to as a national model for innovation and cross state collaboration. As a regional network backbone organization for the past eleven years, FINE supports and facilitates cross-sector, cross-state FTI work. Regional goals around FTI have shifted over the last decade and the FINE network is actively prioritizing this community-driven approach to FTI in New England.

History of collaboration: FINE has worked with each community and each lead organization in previous years: community leads spoke and participated at the biennial Northeast Farm to Institution Summit; they are formal and informal advisors; they participate in and lead collaborative projects. FINE, City of New Haven, Springfield FPC, and CCFSC share many common partners including state departments of agriculture, funders, institutions, and network organizations. With this new partnership, the lead community organizations and FINE see an opportunity, in a time of catastrophic loss and promise, to design a more equitable approach to our collaborations and farm to institution systems. Three organizations, led by and representing communities of color, are partnering with a white-led convenor and other white-led organizations with governing and buying power, which reflects norms in our region; we are working internally and regionally to shift power dynamics in these relationships and in farm to institution work. This equity and relationship work is part of the work to change systems and consciously create equitable, lasting farm to institution relationships and impact.

Producer or Food Business Benefits

Describe the intended benefits (direct and indirect) for producers or food businesses resulting from partnership activities. How will they be impacted, and how will beneficiaries also be engaged in the partnership as service providers? (NOT required if the application is solely for a planning or feasibility project)

Intended benefits: Institutions provide a significant market that can help existing producers scale their

¹²New England population 2022. (n.d.). <https://worldpopulationreview.com/regions/new-england-population>

¹³New England Farm to Institution Metrics Dashboard. 2021. Farm to Institution New England.

¹⁴Nessa Richman, Peter Allison, Hannah Leighton. “Farm to Institution New England: Mobilizing the Power of a

Region’s Institutions to Transform a Region’s Food System.” In Institutions as conscious food consumers leveraging purchasing power to drive systems change. Ed. Sapna E. Thottahil, Annelies M.

Goger. (Academic Press, 2018), 175-194. <https://bit.ly/2UWYODP>

¹⁵New England Food Vision. <https://www.nefoodvision.org>

farms and help new farmers build businesses based on wholesale demand. FINE’s 2016 survey of 200 New England producers showed that 61% of producers not yet selling to institutions were interested in doing so. FINE also learned that median acreage in production increased three acres for producers selling direct-to-institution— a statistically significant change — while it stayed the same for other respondents. Producers selling direct-to-institution had higher total gross sales than those who did not.¹⁶

Despite these potential benefits, producers noted barriers to institutional markets including price, volume, insurance requirements and costs, processing capacity, and bidding processes. There are also not enough acres in sustainable production and a lack of culturally connected foods being grown to meet the needs in New England. These barriers often disproportionately impact small farms (which are a majority of farms in New England) and BIPOC-owned farms. Producers in this partnership have also noted that they often do not have time and resources to build relationships with institutional buyers.¹⁷

This partnership will benefit producers and food businesses by developing lasting value chains and strengthening connections to institutional markets. The partnership will identify shared goals between farmers, supply chain businesses, institutions, and community organizations that help build those value chains. Communities (including local producers) will identify areas where peer-learning and technical assistance from our partners can provide additional solutions. We will incorporate the farm-impact metrics developed by the National Farm to Institution Metrics Collaborative¹⁸ into our evaluation to measure direct benefits to farms. By rooting farm to institution in community needs, improving communication across the value chain, and drawing in resources from across the region, we intend to address existing barriers and create lasting relationships.

How they will be engaged: The partnership will build upon the collaborative history of the community organizations and local producers. As value chains develop and additional markets are identified, we will expand engagement with more producers to create both local and regional opportunities. The partnership will enable stronger participation from producers and food businesses (especially those led by people who identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color) with stipends, and convening logistics (e.g., time, location, child care, translation) that work with producer availability. In addition to Liberation Farms (part of this partnership), if funded, this project will specifically engage a number of farmers across the region in FTI planning including: World Farmers (a farming cooperative in MA that works with 300 immigrant and refugee farmers); Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA, serving 250 farmers in western MA), Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust (NEFOC, securing land tenure in the Northeast US with and for Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and Asian farmers and land stewards); The New Haven Urban Ag Committee (60 farmer-members).

TECHNICAL MERIT

Partnership Preparation

Describe any prior activities the partnership has engaged in, any current or future activities the partnership plans to engage in, and how the proposed project fits into those plans.

Prior activities: The partners have worked together in various ways over several years. SFPC, New Haven’s FSPD, and CCFSC have worked with local and state partners on projects in their communities,

¹⁶ Producer Perspectives: The New England Farm-to-Institution Market. (Hartland, VT: Farm to Institution New England, 2017). <https://bit.ly/3Ac9vTb>

¹⁷ Farm to Institution New England listening sessions, informal interviews with stakeholders

¹⁸ National Farm to institution Metrics Collaborative. <https://ftimetrics.localfoodeconomics.com/>

such as the creation of Springfield’s Culinary & Nutrition Center,¹⁹ the relationship-building between the FSPD and local colleges and schools in New Haven, and the effort to bring culturally connected foods to Portland public schools.²⁰ FINE and each community partner also have on-going connections through events, dialogues, and FINE’s network advisory committee. The state agencies provided support to and received input from the partners on various initiatives. As noted above, each organization has extensive experience addressing food system needs in their communities and working with community partners. Each partner is committed to bridging the gap between local producers and limited resource consumers through a variety of strategies including food access through institutions. The organizations have identified an opportunity for a more unified approach to working together in these areas of alignment: USDA RFSP funding would enable this work to move forward and to meet that need.

Future collaborations: We intend to create strong and long lasting value chains as a result of this partnership. We also envision the cohort will continue to learn from each other beyond the life of this grant, and will share their learnings with other communities and cohorts, creating a ripple effect outwards from each community into their neighboring cities and towns. FINE’s biennial Northeast Farm to Institution Summits²¹ in 2023 and 2025 will serve as a regular gathering point for further collaboration and connection, and additional funds will be sought to invest in this strategy with other communities in the region.

Work Plan

Describe the activities planned in order to achieve each Objective listed in the Alignment and Intent section above. Include the information requested below for each planned activity.

These definitions are used in the table below: Community Coordinators (Coordinators); Community Residents (Residents); Community Stakeholders (Stakeholders), which may include Partners, other food system collaborators; Research & Evaluation (R&E).

List and describe each planned activity	Anticipated completion	Required resources <i>For completion of each activity</i>	Milestones <i>For assessing progress and success of each activity</i>	Who will do the work? <i>Include collaborative arrangements or subcontractors</i>
OBJECTIVE 1: Community level: Plan and implement multi-sector community-driven farm to institution initiatives in three New England communities, ensuring authentic engagement with residents who are most affected by this work and prioritizing disinvested communities.				
Activity 1: Onboard Community stakeholders; build relationships and trust	Nov 2022 -Jan 2025	Hire Coordinators, issue stipends, virtual communication platforms,	1a) Hire/identify 3 Coordinators to prioritize shared values around regional food systems, racial equity, and food sovereignty (Nov 2022) 1b) Establish Stakeholders (businesses, institutions, agencies, farmers, value chain, local	1a) Springfield Food Policy Council, Cumberland County Food Security Council, City of New Haven Food System Policy Division,

¹⁹Food is Wellness: Springfield’s Culinary and Nutrition Center. (2020, October 16). Henry P. Kendall Foundation. <https://www.kendall.org/food-is-wellness-springfields-culinary-and-nutrition-center/>

²⁰PPS developing culturally important menu. (n.d.). Portland Public Schools.

https://www.portlandschools.org/news__calendars/news/p_p_s_developing_culturally_important_menu

²¹2021 Northeast Farm to Institution Summit. (n.d.). 2021 Northeast Farm to Institution Summit. <http://www.f2isummit.org>

		physical work space, transportation, staff time	governments) who will engage in collaborative FTI work (Dec 2022) 1c) Identify and launch strategy for engaging Residents in decision making (e.g., committees, accountability boards, focus groups, and surveys) (Jan 2023) 1d) Facilitate 3-5 site visits in each community: Stakeholders visit food sites (e.g., institutions, farms, community kitchens, gardens) to understand the landscape, key players, and opportunities (Apr 2023). 1e) Convene Stakeholders for 1 in-person and 2 virtual workshops/yr	FINE Programs and Communications staff 1b) Coordinators and support teams, FINE Programs team, State ag depts. 1c) Coordinators, Residents 1d) Coordinators, Stakeholders, FINE Programs team 1e) Coordinators, Stakeholders, Residents
Activity 2: Implement community-driven visioning and baselining	May 2023	Virtual workspace, physical work space, staff time, stipends	2a) Collate, create, share suite of multilingual and multi-modal farm to institution 101 resources with Stakeholders (Feb 2023) 2b) Each community establishes a vision and set of goals for collaborative work (e.g. procurement, tracking and traceability, food access and justice, capacity, efficiency, racial equity, network) (April 2023) 2c) Develop baseline of FTI work in each community through surveys, secondary research, data collection, purchasing records) (May 2023)	2a) FINE R&E, Programs, and Communications teams; Stakeholders; State ag depts. 2b) Coordinators, Stakeholders, Residents, FINE Programs and R&E teams 2c) FINE R&E team, Coordinators
Activity 3: Identify and implement community-driven FTI strategies	Aug 2025	Virtual workspace, physical work space, staff time, stipends as needed	3a) Develop/refine community-driven strategies for reaching FTI goals and vision (Jun 2023) 3b) Develop value chains to increase regional, equitable, sustainable food in institutions (Aug 2025) 3c) Outreach efforts completed, including door-to-door canvassing, flyer local businesses, emphasizing disinvested neighborhoods (Ongoing)	3a) Coordinators, Stakeholders, FINE Programs team 3b) Coordinators, Stakeholders, FINE Programs team 3c) Coordinators, Stakeholders, Residents
Activity 4: Implement learning and evaluation across	Aug 2025	Virtual workspace, staff time, development of FINE's	4a) Using FINE's <i>Impact and Story Center</i> , measure progress from baseline through surveys of Stakeholders, and Residents, secondary research, data collection,	4a) FINE R&E team, Coordinators 4b) Coordinators, FINE Communications team

communities; develop feedback loops		<i>Impact and Story Center</i> , stipends as needed	and purchasing records (May 2024, May 2025) (See also objective 11a) 4b) Project information featured on websites of community lead orgs and FINE (May 2023) 4c) 1 webinar/year/community in which additional Stakeholders are invited to learn and provide feedback (Nov '23, Nov '24, Aug '25) 4d) Updates made to policy makers and funders in each community (Nov '23, Nov '24, Aug '25) 4e) Communities gather lessons learned, promising practices, challenges, requests for resources and tools (Ongoing)	4c) Coordinators, FINE Communications and Programs teams 4d) Coordinators, State ag depts. 4e) Coordinators, Stakeholders
OBJECTIVE 2: Cohort level: Establish cohort among three communities for peer-to-peer learning, capacity building, and cross-cohort leveraging.				
Activity 5: Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and support among Cohort	Aug 2025	Communication platforms, virtual workspace, physical workspace, staff time	5a) Establish communication channels for cohort to request and offer support, ideas, and connections within and across sectors (e.g., Slack, Google groups, Asana) (Nov 2022) 5b) Host 1 full day in-person & 2 half day virtual gatherings/yr for strategy and capacity building amongst Cohort and Partner Council (TBD)	5a) Coordinators, Stakeholders, FINE Communications team 5b) Coordinators, FINE Programs and R&E team, Partner Council
Activity 6: Cohort determines shared priorities for new resources, tools, and support	May 2024	Communication platforms, virtual workspace, physical workspace, staff time	6a) Cohort identifies most useful resources and tools 6b) FINE supports connection to existing tools within Cohort and across region 6c) Cohort and FINE identify new suite of tools that will support communities and regional FTI work over the next decade.	6a-6c) Coordinators, Stakeholders, FINE Programs and R&E teams, Partner Council.
OBJECTIVE 3: Regional level: Reinforce and grow New England's farm to institution movement by creating a dynamic and multi-directional exchange of promising practices, success stories, and relationship-building opportunities between the community cohort and the broader New England network.				
Activity 7: Cohort connects with	Aug 2025	Summit and event registrations,	7a) Cohort learns, networks, and presents community work at the	7a- 7c) Coordinators, Stakeholders, FINE Programs team

regional network of FTI stakeholders through regional events		transportation, staff time, stipends	2023 and 2025 NE FTI Summit (April 2023, 25) 7b) 3 Community representatives and 1 FINE staff attend 6 regional food system/FTI events (TBD) 7c) Cohort attends 3 regional FTI webinars annually (TBD)	
Activity 8: Facilitate technical assistance and trainings between Cohort and regional TA providers	Aug 2025	Staff time, hire TA providers and racial equity consultants, virtual workspace, physical workspace	8a) Content experts contracted to provide 15 hrs of TA / community / year (e.g., purchasing, marketing, tracking, community engagement, food justice). 8b) Each community completes 2 racial equity trainings (2022-25)	8a) FINE Programs and R&E teams, TA providers from across the region, racial equity consultant, Coordinators, Stakeholders, Partner Council
Activity 9: Create opportunities for cross-sector communication and collaboration between the Cohort and regional stakeholders	Aug '25	Virtual workspace, staff time, Summit registrations, stipends	9a) Host 3 annual listening sessions open to all regional stakeholders to share project learnings, discuss new promising practices, and build new relationships (Apr, Aug, Dec '23, '24; Apr, Aug '25) 9b) Facilitate connection and collaboration between Cohort and network orgs (e.g. Northeast Farm to School Collaborative, Center for Good Food Purchasing, Health Care Without Harm, Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, New England Farm & Sea to Campus Network) (ongoing) 9c) Coordinators advise 2025 NE FTI Summit, hosted in a partner community (April '25) 9d) Utilize FINE network to connect communities to resources, tools, stories, promising practices (ongoing)	9a) FINE Programs and Communications teams, Coordinators 9b) FINE Programs and R&E Team, Coordinators, regional network orgs 9c) FINE Programs team, Coordinators 9d) FINE Programs, Communications, and R&E teams, Coordinators, Partner Council
Activity 10: Develop resources and tools to support ongoing regional FTI work, driven		Staff time	10a) Complete development of revised, enhanced, and/or newly created tools for supporting FTI activity over the next decade, based on feedback and experiences of Cohort, discussions at the Summit, and regional listening sessions. May include: tools for food service (e.g.	10a) FINE R&E, Programs, Communication Teams

by learnings from the Cohort			contract templates, local food tracking tools and guidance, guides for developing culturally connected menus); ongoing mechanism to connect producers/foodmakers and value chain stakeholders, emphasizing BIPOC producers	
Activity 11: Implement learning and evaluation across communities; develop feedback loops		Staff time, contracted Website developer	<p>11a) Develop the <i>New England FTI Story and Impact Center</i> to collect, house and disseminate regional data, stories, progress, and resources; built on foundation of <i>New England Farm to Institution Data Center</i> (May '23)</p> <p>11b) Produce 3 stories/case studies each year demonstrating activities, progress, promising practices from community and Cohort; Disseminate through <i>Story and Impact Center</i>, FINE's network of 2500+ regional stakeholders, and back into communities (Ongoing)</p> <p>11c) Produce series of short videos on community work (May '24)</p>	<p>11a) FINE R&E, Programs, Communications Staff, Website Developer</p> <p>11b) FINE R&E, Programs, Communications teams, Coordinators, Stakeholders</p> <p>11c) FINE Communications team</p>
Activity 12: Ensure sustainability of FTI work	April '25	Staff time, virtual workspace, physical workspace, scheduling with donors, Summit registration	<p>12a) Develop spreadsheet to track fundraising (ongoing)</p> <p>12b) Create a pitch plan about community-driven FTI model, present to 3-5 donors across the region (Dec '23-Jan '25)</p> <p>12c) Each lead organization and FINE applies for at least 1 funding opportunity each year to continue this work beyond 2025 (ongoing)</p> <p>12d) Work with local governments to establish policies to secure permanent investment in FTI (ongoing)</p> <p>12e) Coordinators positions funded for ongoing work (Jan '25)</p> <p>12f) Funding obtained for continued TA services for Stakeholders (Jan '25)</p> <p>12g) New Cohort launched at 2025 NE FTI Summit (April '25)</p>	<p>12a) Coordinators, FINE R&E team</p> <p>12b) Coordinators, FINE Programs team</p> <p>12c) Coordinators, FINE staff</p> <p>12d) Coordinators, FINE Programs team, local policy makers, State ag depts.</p> <p>12e) Coordinators</p> <p>12f) TA providers, FINE staff</p> <p>12g) FINE staff, new cohort of Stakeholders</p>

Has the partnership received previous funding, Federal or non-Federal, to support partnership activities or projects?

Yes No

If yes, how will RFSP funds contribute to the overall partnership, if received?

Has this project been submitted to another Federal grant program, including [AMS grant programs](#)?

Yes No

If yes to either question, provide the information below. Provide the AMS agreement number for any AMS grants received in the past 5 years. Add additional rows as needed.

Year	Funding source Program Name, Type of Award (if applicable) and/or AMS Grant Agreement # (if applicable)	Description
------	--	-------------

--	--	--

If the applicant received previous Federal funding to support partnership activities or projects, describe how the proposed project, if funded, would not duplicate that work. Include lessons learned, what can be improved, and how these lessons and improvements will be incorporated into this project.

Community Engagement

Describe the community engagement process that the partnership uses to ensure inclusivity, including non-traditional entities such as housing authorities, transportation providers, etc. Include any partners that may have limited resources and describe the value that such partners bring to the partnership. Identify any challenges to partner recruitment or engagement and describe possible strategies to address them. What specific types of technical assistance will the partnership provide using RFSP funds? (NOT required if the application is solely for a planning or feasibility project)

Challenges and strategies to maximize community engagement: Each community partner has a history of values-driven, community-led work based on authentic and deep engagement. Engagement strategies which will continue in this partnership include: paying fair stipends for otherwise uncompensated time; offering interpretation and translation; providing childcare and meals for in-person events; using multiple modes of communication; decision-making by community members; and creating mechanisms to remain accountable to community members. These strategies require additional time, money, and effort. When they are sacrificed to meet deadlines and budgets, it prevents some from fully participating. The funds for and structure of this partnership enable us to prioritize inclusivity.

Technical Assistance (TA): Community members and partner organizations will all help identify and engage appropriate TA providers that can offer expertise for topics such as language translation, local food procurement strategies, culturally connected menus, marketing and communication, regulatory compliance, equitable evaluation, racial equity in food systems, network weaving, and contract development. Each community will have access to up to 15 hours of TA each year.

ACHIEVABILITY

Outcomes and Indicators

Complete all applicable project Outcomes and Indicators with baseline and/or estimated realistic target numbers. Applicants should note that Outcomes/Indicators are designed to represent Local Agriculture Marketing Program (LAMP) priorities which

include other USDA grant programs. If an indicator does not apply, check N/A (Not Applicable). Applicants must choose at least one Outcome and Indicator(s) from 1-6 and are strongly encouraged to select Outcome 7.

Outcome 1: To Increase Consumption of and Access to Locally and Regionally Produced Agricultural Products.

Indicator	Description	Estimated number	N/A
1.a.	Total <u>number</u> of project beneficiaries/stakeholders to be reached	154,942	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.b.	Of the number in 1.a., the number that will report buying, selling, aggregating, storing, producing, and/or distributing locally or regionally produced agriculture products	147	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.c.	Of the number in 1.a., the number that will gain knowledge on how to access, produce, prepare, and/or preserve locally and regionally produced agricultural products	1,296	<input type="checkbox"/>

Outcome 6: To Increase Capacity and Efficiency of the Local or Regional Food System.

Indicator	Description	Estimated number	N/A
6.a.	Total number of relevant partners engaged, including those representing diverse, non-traditional eligible entities and eligible partners	43	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.b.	Of the total number of food system collaborators engaged, the number that:	1,296	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gained knowledge on how to access resources 	16	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provided technical assistance or training to partners ● Secured additional funding as a result of partnership involvement 	10	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.c.	Amount of non-Federal financial, professional, and technical assistance measured in dollars secured as a result of partnership activities.	\$325,000	<input type="checkbox"/>

AMS is interested in developing Outcomes and Indicators for RFSP as the program continues to develop. As such, applicants are strongly encouraged to add at least one Outcome and Indicator(s) based on relevant partnership efforts not covered above. Creativity is highly recommended, particularly regarding any metrics measuring systemwide planning efforts, and reflecting coordination, learning, and responsiveness to regional realities.

Outcome 7: To advance community-driven and racially equitable farm to institution work in New England

Project Specific Outcome Indicator(s): Add more rows as needed.

Indicator	Description	Estimated number
7.a.	Number of knowledge products that are multilingual and multi-modal	25
7.b.	Number of trainings around racial equity offered to project stakeholders	6
7.c.	Number of bids, contracts, and institutional policies that include language around local food procurement and racial equity	3

7.d.	Number of community baseline assessments that include indicators of racial equity in FTI (e.g., purchases from BIPOC farmers, % of culturally connected foods served)	3
7.e.	Number of community residents whose knowledge of and engagement in the food system increases over three years	810
7.f.	Number of opportunities for connection between community stakeholders/institutions and BIPOC-led farming organizations	10

Outcome Indicator Measurement Plan

For each selected indicator above, describe how you derived the numbers, how and when you intend to evaluate your progress, and any potential challenges to achieving the estimated targets and action steps for addressing them. Add more rows as needed.

Outcome and indicator	How did you derive the estimated numbers?	How and when do you intend to evaluate? <i>I.e., surveys, 3rd party assessment</i>	Anticipated key factors predicted to contribute to and restrict outcome <i>Including action steps for addressing identified restricting factors</i>
1.a.	Public K-12 and college enrollment data with average meal participation rates, public data on hospital beds and visitors, institutional food service employees who will be involved in trainings, farmer and distributor network numbers, community enrollment in committees and in 1 case, the full population	Baseline assessment and annual surveys of institutional partners in each community (using <i>Story and Impact Center</i>). Annual survey of distributors. Annual analysis of new markets, educational materials shared, and new relationships formed between producers, community stakeholders, and institutions. Attendance at events, trainings, meetings; population statistics in cities where local government partners make resources available to <i>all</i> residents.	Partners are strongly rooted in their communities and prioritize relationship and trust building which will lead to many beneficiaries. Number represents subgroups of community members in Springfield and Cumberland County and the full population of New Haven where the local government is actively making services and information available to all residents.
1.b.	Participating food service staff, 10% of farmer network, 100% of distributor network	Annual survey of foodservice staff, farmer networks, and distributors involved in project (Using <i>Story and Impact Center</i>)	FINE and Stakeholders have strong relationships with institutions, farms, and distributors that will contribute to this outcome; unanticipated issues with staff, supply chain shortages, or the pandemic could cause disruptions.
1.c.	Foodservice staff, 50% of farmer network, 100% of distributor network, subgroup of community participants	Annual survey of foodservice staff, farmer networks, and distributors involved in project. Annual survey of community members involved in project via committees, boards, & trainings.	11+ years' experience sharing resources and tools to support access, production, and preparation of local foods prepare us to do this work. Unanticipated disruptions from COVID-19 could

		Public survey distributed by community committees.	impact reach but we will plan virtual alternatives y. We will offer stipends for participation.
6.a.	Community lead orgs, average of 6 stakeholders in each community, at least 8 regional TA providers, 4 regional networks, 3 Ag Depts	We will track partner participation in all meetings, gatherings, and trainings	Partners are already actively engaged in this work and have a history of collaboration. We are paying partners for their time and creating opportunities for partners to gain resources, connections, and funding
6.b.	Food service staff, 50% of farmer network, 100% of distributors, subgroup of Residents 8 TA providers, 4 regional network orgs, 3 Ag Depts, FINE 3 community leads, 2 organizational partners in each community, FINE	Annual survey of food service staff, farmer networks, and distributors involved in project; Annual survey of community members involved in project (committees, boards, trainings); Public survey distributed by community committees Google Sheet updated regularly with TA engagement Google Sheet with fundraising opportunities and successes	Partners are strongly rooted in their communities. FINE's relationships with content experts will support facilitation of TA and trainings.
6.c.	50% success rate on additional grants from partners, additional funds: \$325,000	Create Google Sheet for identifying funding opportunities and tracking funds raised as a result of this project	Funding uncertainty will impact this outcome; however the partners have strong fundraising experience and this project has clear sustainability activities.
7.a.	5 specific to each community and 10 regional facing	We will track this on each agenda and aggregate the information	Community partners and FINE have created multilingual multi-modal materials in the past, will hire translation services
7.b.	Two trainings per community	We will create a Google Sheet for identifying and tracking trainings in each community	This is a project priority. Past experiences by all partners with racial equity training will help bring trainings to stakeholders.
7.c.	At least one institution per community	Baseline assessment and annual surveys of participating institutions	FINE has extensive experience working with institutions on bid and contract language and will leverage past tools to support this work. Bid cycles, contract timelines, and admin challenges can cause complications.
7.d.	One in each community	Baseline assessment	Cooperation from value chain stakeholders around sharing data will be essential in developing baseline assessments

7.e.	Number of Residents directly involved in committees, accountability boards, focus groups, listening sessions, surveys	Annual survey of community members through committees, boards, and trainings and public survey distributed by community committees	Partners are strongly rooted in their communities and prioritize relationship and trust building: we anticipate will lead to residents feeling empowered and engaged in their food system
7.f.	2 farm tours per community, materials produced for residents, creation of list of farmers, emphasizing BIPOC farmers working with institutions	Storytelling about farm tours, catalog of materials produced, including list of farmers serving the three communities	The farming season and schedules of farmers will impact this outcome

Dissemination of Project Results

Describe how you plan to share the project's results (positive and negative) and with whom.

Each partner has multiple communication tools, and brings connection to different audiences who share geographic location, content area expertise, or community mission —and will amplify one another's work and perspective.

FINE's FTI network in New England includes people in food service, food hubs, farmers and fishermen, food justice advocates, researchers, foundations, policy makers and more. This audience crosses sectors of health care, K-12 schools, colleges and universities, early child care, and the carceral system. FINE will share project progress through its website and blog (50,000+ annual pageviews), e-newsletter (2,650+ subscribers), YouTube channel (100+ videos with 7,700+ views), social media (1,700+ followers), resource database (400+ resources) and dining operators listserv (100+ users).

In New Haven, outreach includes door-to-door canvassing, flyering businesses, all mostly in disinvested neighborhoods, and in multiple languages. They prioritize translation services, and multimodal (written, audio, visual, etc) information. In Cumberland County, project results will be shared through network partnerships including the ME Farm to School Network, ME FTI Leadership team, ME Food Convergence Network, and ME Farm and Sea to School Institute. This project will also leverage Cumberland County Food Security Council's extensive newsletter and listserv. Springfield's mailing lists, events, and state-wide contacts, as well as their experience with bilingual visual and graphic storytelling will also be leveraged. We will also utilize the outreach resources of the State Depts of Agriculture.

FINE will develop the *Farm to Institution New England Story and Impact Center (Impact Center)*, an interactive digital hub to collect and visualize institutional data, survey food system stakeholders, and tell the story of FTI in New England. Building on FINE's existing New England FTI Data Center, and leveraging National FTI Farm Impact Metrics, the *Impact Center* will facilitate consistent data collection and shared metrics for higher education, K-12, early care, health care, and correctional facilities. The *Impact Center* will allow user-driven visualization, uploading and sharing stories, and embedding data on partners' websites.

Other dissemination methods include targeted media outreach in Springfield, New Haven, and Cumberland County; media and social media toolkit to support partner sharing; blog articles to

broadcast case studies and promising practices; presentations and webinars at FINE and partner events; and short videos on this project’s process and to support emergent FTI work in the region.

More than 50 organizations are represented between this project’s partners, FINE’s Network Advisory Council and advisory committees, and their connected networks, and we expect more to engage as this project grows. These organizations will greatly amplify the messages and learnings of this project in their own channels, and in a manner meaningful to their own stakeholders.

Sustainability

Describe how the partnerships and collaborations established through the project will be sustained beyond the project’s period of performance.

Partners will work together to assess which project elements would be best to continue and how to replicate our 3 stage model. We expect that the Community Coordinator role will be of particular value, and we will assess ways to fund these positions in the future. This cohort organizing model has potential to generate support from other funders, private sponsors, and state agencies. FINE envisions this model becoming the focus of our work - rooting in communities to mobilize the regional movement. As such, we are committed to developing a funding strategy to continue the work in the original cohort and lay the groundwork to build additional cohorts over time, catalyzing a generative cycle.

The partners are already connected via a “network of networks” which will be strengthened through this project. The communication channels established through the partnership will bolster additional information sharing and open new avenues for collaboration. Community Coordinators will develop lasting value chains over the course of the project by focusing on buyer-supplier relationships with shared interests, mutual benefits, and support in problem-solving. This will lay the groundwork for cross-state value chains that can serve thousands of others. Each community has the opportunity to share their results with neighboring communities, who will in turn continue to share their knowledge with *their* neighbors, creating concentric circles of knowledge and impact.

FINE envisions a second cohort of communities coming together as the first cohort concludes in 2025. FINE will use the 2025 NE FTI Summit to present the findings of this first cohort and promote the opportunity for other communities — ideally from the New England States not directly represented in this initial project — to form a second cohort. To support the expanded work FINE will develop and implement a fundraising plan, focusing on state-level foundations for support, and including other private and public sources.

EXPERTISE AND PARTNERS

Key Staff (Applicant Personnel and External Partner/Collaborators)

*List key project partner staff that comprise the Project Team, their roles, and **provide a one- to two-page resume or summary of relevant experience and/or qualifications for each of the participants listed.** Longer resumes or summaries will be disregarded. Applicant must include Letters of Commitment from Partner and Collaborator Organizations to support the information (see Section 4.2.6 in the RFA). Add more rows as needed.*

Key staff		Role
Name and Title		
Tania Taranovski	Director of Programs, FINE	Project lead, cohort coordination, fundraising, resource development, regional matchmaking

Hannah Leighton	Director of Research and Evaluation, FINE	Lead FTI Story Center Development, evaluation and tracking support, resource development
Sarah Lyman	Communications Manager, FINE	Content creation, communications, and dissemination of resources, stories
Peter Allison	Executive Director, FINE	Strategic leadership and top-level network coordination, fundraising
Dana Stevens	Event and Project Manager, FINE	Summit planning, meeting & event coordination, Farm to School and Early Care sector lead
Brittany Florio	Program Coordinator, FINE	Support project lead, Farm to Campus (higher ed) and Carceral (prison and jail) sector lead
Elizabeth Wills O'Gilvie	Director, SFPC	Oversee SFPC's participation, hire and supervise Community Coordinator
Latha Swamy	Director of Food Policy, City of New Haven	Oversee City of New Haven's participation, supervise the Community Coordinator
Alexia Basile	Food Policy Analyst, City of New Haven	Community Coordinator
Kristina Kalolo	Farm to School Project Director, CCFSC	Oversee CCFSC's participation, serve as Community Coordinator

Provide the information below for each partner under the partnership agreement at the time of application. The partnership must have at least one eligible entity and at least one eligible partner, as described in Sections 3.2 and 3.3 of the RFA. Add more rows as needed.

Name	Entity or partner	Type	Role
<i>Ex – XYZ Organization</i>	<i>Entity</i>	<i>Nonprofit</i>	<i>RFSP Grant administrator</i>
Farm to Institution New England	Entity	Nonprofit	RFSP grant administrator
Springfield Food Policy Council	Entity	Nonprofit	Community lead/partner
City of New Haven Food System Policy Division	Entity	Local government	Community lead/partner
Cumberland County Food Security Council	Entity	Nonprofit	Community lead/partner
MA Dept of Agricultural Resources	Partner	State agency	Partner and TA provider
CT Dept of Agriculture	Partner	State agency	Partner and TA provider
ME Dept of Agriculture, Conservation, & Forestry	Partner	State agency	Partner and TA provider
Somali Bantu Community Assoc. of Maine	Entity	Nonprofit & Producer Assoc.	Producer partner
Maine Farm to Institution Network	Entity	Nonprofit	Partner and network connector
Portland Public Schools	Entity	Local government	Institutional buyer
Native Maine	Partner	Private corp.	Buyer/distributor

If your project includes mid-tier value chain coordination activities, provide details of the value chain entities that will be engaged and what their respective roles will be.

Project Management Plan

Describe your management plan for coordination, communication, and data sharing and reporting among members of the Project Team and stakeholder groups, including both internal applicant personnel and external partners and collaborators.

Three teams, each composed of an organizational lead and a community coordinator, will manage the work within each of the three communities. The community teams and FINE will receive input on project milestones from a Partner Council that includes representatives from each Partner. FINE's Director of Programs, Tania Taranovski, will serve as project lead and coordinate the Partners. Sarah Lyman, FINE's Communications Manager, will lead external communications and outreach. Evaluation and data collection will be led by FINE's Director of Research and Evaluation Hannah Leighton. FINE's Executive Director, Peter Allison, will provide strategic leadership and coordination with regional FTI network leaders, and focus on fundraising to build upon the initiative. Dana Stevens, FINE's Event and Project Manager, will organize events and meetings at the cohort/regional level, and serve as liaison to K-12 and early care sectors. Britt Florio, FINE's program coordinator will serve as liaison to the campus and carceral sectors.

FINE's project management and evaluation system is based on eleven years of experience developing strategic evaluation plans to set goals, measure progress, pivot, and remain outcome-focused. FINE also has over a decade of experience managing a remote team working across numerous projects. FINE uses project management software (Asana) to track activities, timelines, staff delegation, and deliverables. The team's project-based work plan model includes a two week sprint system to adapt projects to changing circumstances. The partnership team will discuss progress and adjust our work plan as needed.

Community coordinators will communicate progress and other information to their respective community members. FINE's existing evaluation tools integrate with research, implementation, and outreach protocols which will be leveraged to evaluate the success of this project. Quantitative and qualitative metrics will be collected incorporating equitable evaluation principles, using a combination of interviews, surveys, and storytelling.