

Virginia Food Access Investment Fund

How to apply and other important things!

w/Sara Santa Cruz
VFAIF Program Coordinator

VFAIF Overview

What is VFAIF?

- Created by the General Assembly in 2020
- Statewide program focused on **equity** and **justice** in local food systems by investing in new or expanding food retailers that address food access issues
- Rooted in community
- Funds can be used for:
 - business development
 - construction & rehabilitation
 - equipment upgrades
 - expansion of grocery stores, small food retailers, and innovative food retail projects in low income/low access communities

Equitable Food Oriented Development (EFOD)

- A development strategy that uses food and agriculture to create economic opportunities and healthy neighborhoods, and that explicitly seeks to build community assets, pride, and power by and with low-income, low-access communities.

Equitable Food Oriented Development (EFOD)

What does EFOD look like?

- Community-led decision making and ownership of solutions
- Businesses are supported to stay in the community over time
- Community economic security is developed
- Community culture is maintained and promoted

What doesn't EFOD look like?

- Nutrition- or health-focused food access
- Charity model, with little personal agency
- No long-term community assets built
- Outside-owned development or project

Example Projects

What does EFOD look like?

- Convenience store adding refrigeration and freezer capacity to store fresh produce and add SNAP/Fresh Match
- Market adding a mobile component
- Café expanding to include fresh products in addition to pre-prepared foods

What doesn't EFOD look like?

- Food pantries
- School meal programs
- Community food donation boxes
- Purchase of land
- Anything “for” a community without the community’s input

Example Projects from 2021

- Shalom Farms and Richmond Food Justice Alliance (RFJA)
 - Partnership between two non-profits
 - Shalom Farms has capital and capacity to assist RFJA in setting up their food access program, and Shalom Farms will slowly phase out of the programming when RFJA is ready to run independently
 - Overall, one has more capital and is serving as a bridge until the other can fully implement pop-up markets in low-income/low-access areas
- Youth Earn and Learn
 - Programming is focused on teaching youth entrepreneurial skills
 - Youth-led pop-up markets in low-income/low-access neighborhoods
 - By a community member for their community

Example Projects from 2021 continued...

- Honaker Wholesale
 - Received funding to purchase more coolers for their small store
 - Sells fresh produce in low income/low access rural area
 - Reported that since implementing Virginia Fresh Match, their sales have tripled!
- Dona Fer Grocery Store
 - Received funding to purchase a new cooler and repair an existing cooler
 - Sells fresh produce in low income/low access and primarily Latinx neighborhood
 - The community wanted these equipment upgrades and their letters of support demonstrated that

VFAIF – Award Details

- Individual award amounts will range from \$5,000 - \$50,000
- No match requirement (YAY!)
- Reimbursable grant
 - This means that you must pay for budget items prior to receiving the reimbursement funds, so be sure you can cover those expenses before applying or talk to us about additional funding resources!
- Some funds can be awarded up front on a case-by-case basis

VFAIF Eligibility

Applicants may be individuals, farms, nonprofits, organizations (including faith-based), or for-profit businesses

- Grocery stores
- Innovative food retail projects, such as mobile markets
- Small food retailers, such as convenience stores or farmers markets
- Small, limited resource or socially disadvantaged farmers
- Co-ops, community gardens, restaurants or cafes, provided there is a retail component

VFAIF – Criteria

- 2 types of criteria:
 - Mandatory = must meet
 - Additional = encouraged to meet
- Applicants do not need to meet all of the criteria at the time of application (i.e. you can be in the process of accepting SNAP/EBT)
- Must include a plan and timeline for meeting mandatory criteria
- VFAIF program staff can provide technical assistance

VFAIF – Mandatory Criteria

Projects must meet the following criteria:

- Have a retail component
- Accept SNAP benefits and offer Virginia Fresh Match incentives
- Purchase 25% of fresh products from Virginia's small, beginning, limited resource, Veteran, and/or socially disadvantaged farmers
- Directly serve residents within low-income, low-access communities
- Demonstrate a history of community engagement

Side note: What is low-income, low-access?

You may be wondering what this means and how to determine if your project serves those in a low-income, low-access community.

- USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) defines this as:

“Low-income and low-access tract measured at 1 mile and 10 miles

Definition: A low-income tract with at least 500 people, or 33 percent of the population, living more than 1 mile (urban areas) or more than 10 miles (rural areas) from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store.”

You can view the atlas here: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>

VFAIF – Additional Criteria

Projects are encouraged to meet the following criteria:

- Owned or substantially led by/working in active partnership with individuals from low-income/low-access communities
- Provide customer access – bring the customer to the market or the market to the customer (a.k.a. assess and understand transportation barriers)
- Integrate community culture and artistic expression in the business model

VFAIF – Additional Criteria

Projects are encouraged to meet the following criteria:

- Provide a path for financial sustainability and positive outcomes to the community, such as workforce development or employment opportunities
- Demonstrate success in creating partnerships and/or efforts to leverage additional funding/resources



So...what are we looking for in a project?

- **LOTS of community input**

- Equity and ownership in design
- This means projects that are for the community and by the community
- If you have any questions about this, please ask!



VFAIF – Application Process

- Steps to apply
 - Submit a pre-proposal and talk to program staff (use [Calendly link](#) on VFAIF site to schedule your appointment)
 - Develop full application and budget
 - Receive technical assistance (this is up to you, but encouraged)
 - Submit application packet by deadline via [Foundant](#)
- Iterative process working with the Program Coordinator

VFAIF – Components of Application

Overview

Project Summary

Project Description

Project Goals

EFOD Outcomes

Required Criteria

Optional Criteria

Budget and Budget Narrative

Work Plan

Community Support

Resume

Applicant Bios

VFAIF – Budget and Eligible Expenses

- Personnel
- Travel
- Infrastructure
- Equipment
- Supplies/Materials
- Contractual
- Purchase of Virginia-Grown Products
- Other



Timeline

- **December 1st, 2021-January 21st 2022:** pre-proposal round opens
 - Pre-proposals can be submitted anytime within the 45 day window
- **Technical assistance window:** 31 days from closing of pre-proposal window.
 - Once the pre-proposal has been discussed with program staff, you can request technical assistance **anytime until February 14th, 2022** by scheduling via [Calendly](#)
- Final apps are due by 10 pm on Friday, **February 22nd, 2022**
- **Funding will be announced in April 2022**

Application and Supporting Document Submission

- Once you have had a pre-proposal call with staff and determined your project's eligibility, you will be asked to submit your application and supporting documents via [Foundant](#), a grant management platform.
- You will be able to upload your documents, remove them, make necessary edits, etc.
- Further instructions will be provided regarding Foundant

Grant Administration

- Grant period of up to 2 years
- 2 years of annual reports are required, even if you use all the funding in the first year (this is to show project impact and collect important data)
- Reporting will be required midway through the period
- VDACS will be available throughout the period to provide assistance to help meet goals and objectives
- Grant recipients are eligible to apply for future grant rounds

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<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing-food-access-investment-fund>