



Food Security Planning Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. *What is the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA or the Authority)?*

The NJEDA is the State's principal agency for driving economic growth, working to carry out Governor Phil Murphy's vision for a stronger and fairer economy. The NJEDA is committed to making New Jersey a national model for inclusive and sustainable economic development by focusing on key strategies to help build strong and dynamic communities, create good jobs for New Jersey residents, and foster innovation.

2. *What is a Planning Grant?*

A Planning Grant is awarded to establish long-term solutions that can help alleviate some of the challenges faced by a community. A planning grant leads to a development of a product or a plan of action that is well-reasoned, broadly accepted, and designed to address factors that are causing the problem. The plan of action should be based on facts so that the proposed approach is likely to succeed.

3. *What is the Food Security Planning Grant Program (FSPGP)?*

The Food Security Planning Grant Program (FSPGP) is the Authority's first pilot program aimed at addressing food insecurity in the state of NJ. It is also aligned with the goals of the Food Desert Relief Act and the economic planning services funds providing grants between \$75,000 to \$125,000 to support the development of plans improve food access within [Food Desert Communities](#) (FDCs) by leveraging distressed assets (see Question 5). FSPGP will equip municipalities with the tools to think about how to repurpose distressed assets, while allowing EDA to leverage the findings and outcomes from local plans to inform future economic development and food security strategies across the state.

4. *What are Food Desert Communities (FDCs)?*

Communities with limited to no access to healthy food options are considered as food desert communities.

The Authority recently designated 50 FDCs across the state of New Jersey. The FDCs were designated based on a comprehensive analysis of multiple variables. To learn more about New Jersey food desert designation methodology, please click [here](#).

5. *What is a distressed asset?*

For FSPGP, a distressed asset is defined as a commercial building or series of buildings, its attachments, and appurtenances; or vacant land that is fully or partially vacant for at least one year, that due to deteriorated condition or appearance of its exterior (because of deferred maintenance such as deteriorated paint or overgrown vegetation, boarded up door and/or windows), that can be leveraged to improve food access and food security.

To qualify for this program, distressed assets must be located within the borders of an FDC as defined by the Authority. To see if a potential property falls within an FDC, you may search the address on the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs [FDC mapping tool](#).

6. *What funding is available?*

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority board approved up to \$1,500,000 in grant funding through the Economic Recovery Act for the Food Security Planning Grant program. Awards ranging from \$75,000 to \$125,000 will be made to qualifying grantees. Awards will be made on a competitive basis (see question 14 for detailed information).

7. *Who can apply?*

Qualified applicants include the follow entities whose geographic catchment areas include an FDC:

- New Jersey Municipal Governments
- New Jersey County Governments
- New Jersey Redevelopment Agencies

All applications must be from a public entity type listed above. Please refer to additional eligibility criteria outlined on the program web page ([Food Security Planning Grant Program - NJEDA](#)).

8. *When will the application open?*

The application is currently under development and set to open the week of September 27, 2022. Sign up for the [NJEDA newsletter](#) to be notified of program

announcements and updates. The application will be available at <https://www.njeda.com/food-security-planning-grant/>.

9. What system will the application be released in?

The application will be in a system called Microsoft (MS) Portals. It is a web-based system and can be accessed through your preferred web browser.

10. Where can I access the application?

You can access the application through the link on the webpage, [Food Security Planning Grant Program - NJEDA](#) using the “Apply Here” button. Applicants will be required to create an account before accessing the application.

A checklist of the required application documents can be accessed here.

11. Can I create an account before the application opens?

Yes. Application will be available at the NJEDA Online Application Center. Applicants can create an account at the NJEDA Online Application Center [here](#).

12. How can I create an account?

You can access the application through the link on the program webpage (see question 10). This will bring you the [NJEDA Application Center Sign-In Page](#). If you have an existing account, please use your username and password to log in.

If you do not currently have an active username and password, please follow the steps below:

- 1) Click the Register tab at the top to create a new username and password
- 2) If you have a username and password but have forgotten it, click the Forget Password/Username button to email yourself an invitation code
- 3) Make sure you write down the username and password as you will need it any time you need to access the portal
- 4) Once you create your username and password, you will receive an email from crmnoreply@njeda.com. Please be sure to check junk/spam for this email. This email will contain the invitation code to create your profile in the application portal
- 5) Once you receive the invitation code, please click the link to be returned to the portal.
- 6) Please click Register. Doing this should allow you to complete the registration process.
- 7) You can now access the Food Security Planning Grant Program application within the NJEDA Application Center.

13. What is the deadline for the application submission?

An online application must be submitted by eligible entities, which will be launched in the week of September 27. The Food Security Planning Grant Program application will remain open for 60 calendar days. Applications can be accessed by clicking [here](#). This is **not** a first-come, first-served program. All applications submitted by the deadline will be reviewed after the application period is closed.

14. What documents are required for FSPGP application?

Each applicant must submit the following documents with their application.

A. Required Application Information

1. A full completed online application
2. Religious Activities questionnaire, if applicable
3. Signed Letter of Support from the Office of the Mayor or Chief Executive of the municipality where the asset is located
4. Signed Letter of Support from at least one stakeholder located within the boundaries of the FDC
5. Signed Letter of Support from property owner of distressed asset
 - a) For a property owned by a New Jersey County, municipal government entity, independent agency, or authority, the applicant must provide a letter of support from the property owner or their designee for the proposed project; this must be signed by the Chief Executive of the government entity, independent agency or authority or their designee
 - b) For a property owned by a private individual or by a non-governmental for-profit or non-profit entity, the applicant is required to provide a letter of support signed by the owner, co-owner, corporate officer, or their designee
6. Completed Legal Questionnaire
7. Application Fee or Fee Waiver request

B. Required Proposal Component of Application

1. Distressed Asset Description
2. Plan Description/Specification/Statement of work
 - a) Must identify current food security need and challenges in the FDC
 - b) Must identify opportunities for creating a viable and sustainable solution to improve food access and food security in the community

- c) Must include emphasis on long term viability and adaptability of a given concept
 - d) Must identify and collaborate with other key stakeholders to create an inclusive plan
3. Workplan
- a) Must provide Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant Time-bound (SMART) objectives in the work plan with a timeline
 - b) Must identify appropriate staff responsible for implementing each activity
 - c) Must describe goals/outcomes for each activity
 - d) Must clearly describe the timeline needed to implement each activity within the grant period
4. Organizational Capacity
- a) Demonstrate their ability to work effectively on a collaborative project with a state or federal agency or on a multi-stakeholder project
 - b) Must provide at least one example of working successfully within the FDC and with other collaborators
 - c) Must clearly state how this project aligns with and will impact applicant's overall efforts to address the diverse food security and food access needs within the FDC they serve
5. Community Engagement
- a) Must demonstrate partnership and engagement with various stakeholders across different sectors to address community needs. This will be supported by a letter of support from community stakeholders
 - b) Must demonstrate prior experience working with community members, stakeholders, and/or advocates in addressing food insecurity
 - c) Must demonstrate efforts to ensure programs are built to promote social and economic equity
 - d) Must be able to consider and mitigate any past difficulties that created challenges for the asset selected
 - e) Should demonstrate experience in community redevelopment with focus on equitable redevelopment projects, community focused adaptive reuse or innovative food distribution concepts
6. Budget and Budget Justification
- a) Requested level of funding must be broken down line by line and its uses clearly illustrated in the budget narrative

- b) Requested level of funding must be reasonable for proposed activities within the timeline
- c) 20% match requirement must be included

Eligible entities are encouraged to submit a [Tax Clearance Certificate from the New Jersey Division of Taxation](#) at the time of application.

Applications selected for an award will be required to provide a Tax Clearance Certificate from the New Jersey Division of Taxation before the grant agreement is fully executed.

15. Are matching funds/contribution required for the FSPG?

Yes, to be considered eligible for the FSPG, applicants must demonstrate the ability to provide 20 percent matching contribution of the total grant amount, to be reinvested back into the planning project. The 20 percent match can be in the form of a financial contribution or a contribution of in-kind resources. In-kind resources are defined as non-monetary resources that will add value and help advance the planning project.

Please note that the 20% matching funds/contribution should be reflected in the total program budget.

16. Are there other forms that an applicant will need to complete while applying?

Yes. The Authority requires each applicant to fill out a

1. [Religious Affiliation Form](#) (if applicable),
2. [Legal Questionnaire](#) and
3. [Certificate of non-involvement in prohibited activities in Russia or Belarus](#)

17. How can a distressed asset be utilized for FSPG?

Proposals must demonstrate to what extent the utilization of a distressed asset will improve, and how development this asset will benefit the FDC. Proposals should demonstrate a strong connection to the State's development objectives through project elements, such as:

- Creating or catalyzing a new business or community-based initiative/program or resource that improves access to affordable, fresh, and healthy produce and other food items
- Innovative land use, or improving land use efficiency and sustainability to increase food access
- Determining cost-benefits of retrofitting, redeveloping, or regreening the distressed asset as it relates to food access and food security

- Developing a plan to drive economic growth for the locality by implementing innovations around food access and food security solutions
- Creating greater social, economic, and environmental sustainability by identifying ways to grow, process and sell fresh produce utilizing the area of the distressed asset
- Stakeholder engagement and facilitation to identify community desires and needs pertaining to food access and food security
- The identification of appropriate additional funding sources to support community-led re-use of one or more properties to support food access and food security
- Feasibility study for a full-service grocery store or food retailer that meets the needs of the community utilizing the distressed asset

18. How are awards made in the Food Security Planning Grant Program?

All complete applications will be scored by an internal EDA scoring committee based on the rubric identified in the program specifications approved by the Authority's board, available [here](#). Applications must score at least 55 points out of 100 points to be considered for award.

Applications will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Composite Food Desert Factor Score (5 to 10 points)
- Plan Description/Specifications/Statement of Work (up to 20 points)
- Work Plan (up to 20 points)
- Organizational Capacity (up to 20 points)
- Community Engagement (up to 20 points)
- Budget and Budget Justification (up to 10 points)

The highest scoring applications (above 55 points) will be recommended for award until all funds are exhausted. Awards will be made directly to the highest scoring applicants. Grant amounts will range from \$75,000 and \$125,000 and will be solely determined by the [FDC's Composite Factor Score](#) where the distressed asset is located.

19. How long will it take for my application to be approved?

NJEDA staff will be reviewing applications for completeness and alignment with eligibility criteria once the application period closes. Upon completion of the initial review, NJEDA staff will notify applicants if the application has been deemed complete. If NJEDA staff have questions during this initial review phase, they will follow up with the applicants, who will have up to 5 business days to respond and/or

submit any needed materials or documentation. This 5-day period is referred to as cure period.

Applicants failing to provide the requested documents within this 5-day period will be declined for unresponsiveness to NJEDA's request(s) for additional information. This declination is referred to as a non-discretionary decline.

Applications that are complete and can successfully demonstrate eligibility will further be evaluated and scored by NJEDA staff. The highest-scoring applications that meet or exceed a minimum score of 55 points (out of 100 points) will be recommended for an award.

20. How will I be notified of my award?

Applicants will receive an email notification of their approval and funding level (as a not-to-exceed amount) available for the proposed project. This will be followed by an electronic grant agreement which the applicant will have to sign and email back to NJEDA.

21. Is there an application fee?

Yes. A standard, non-refundable application fee of \$1,000 must be submitted to complete the application, unless an applicant requests a fee waiver as described below.

Fees can be paid either via a valid credit card or via check.

Please be advised that NJEDA must confirm receipt of check before any review of the application may begin. Payment by credit card, if possible, is recommended as it will help expedite NJEDA's review process.

Check details:

- Payable to: New Jersey Economic Development Authority
- Amount: \$1,000.00 (One thousand dollars and no cents)
- Notes field: [Applicant Name], Food Security Planning Grant Program
- Mail to: New Jersey Economic Development Authority
36 West State St
PO Box 990
Trenton, NJ 08625-0990

An Application Hardship Fee Waiver may be requested at the time of application for proposals led by municipalities or municipal authorities, boards, commissions,

or other municipal entities ranked in the top 10 percent of the Municipal Revitalization Index (MRI). To determine if your municipality qualifies for a fee waiver, please consult the 2020 MRI rankings [here](#) (municipality must have an MRI rank between 1-57).

Applicants will self-identify in the application as a municipality or municipal government entity requesting a waiver. Staff will determine if the entity meets the criteria for a waiver. Eligible entities will be granted a waiver for the program. Ineligible entities will be notified and a cure in the form of fee payment will be requested to complete the application. For more information, see the Fee Waiver Policy for Food Security Planning Grant Program by clicking [here](#).

22. What is a tax clearance certificate? How can I access my tax clearance certificate?

A tax clearance certificate is a document created by the Department of Taxation that demonstrates you are in good standing with the New Jersey Division of Taxation and are registered to do business in NJ. It is a mandatory document for executing a grant agreement with the EDA. While not required as part of the application submission, the Authority recommends beginning the process of requesting a tax clearance certificate at the time of application to prevent delays in grant agreement, if selected for award.

To learn more on how to acquire a tax clearance certificate please click [here](#). Municipal government entities generally must apply for a tax clearance certificate by mail.

NOTE: Please select the correct entity in the drop-down menu when you print your certificate, "New Jersey Economic Development Authority". Do not select just the first option.

23. What makes an applicant ineligible for the grant funding?

Applications may be found to be ineligible for reasons including, but not limited to:

- Incomplete application
- Application not submitted by the end of the application period
- Applicant is not an eligible entity (see Question 7)
- Distressed asset is not within an FDC
- Proposed location does not meet the definition of a distressed asset (see Question 5)

- Failure to provide signed letter(s) of support from community stakeholder(s), owner of the distressed asset, and/or municipality executive along with the application
- Proposal is for directly New Jersey state owned land

24. How many applications can be submitted for an FDC?

A municipality, a county, or redevelopment agency may submit multiple applications in a lead role and can be included as a partner in additional applications where they play a non-lead role.

A municipality, county, and redevelopment agency whose geographic catchment areas include an FDC can each submit a proposal but are strongly encouraged to coordinate their applications.

Please note that there will be a limit of 1 grant award per qualifying FDC. However, if there is still funding available after the above restriction is satisfied, the Authority may award the remaining funding to additional applications within an already funded FDC based on the overall score of the applications, until all funds have been exhausted or until all eligible applicants have received a grant.

25. If there are multiple distressed assets in an FDC, can I submit applications for each distressed asset?

Applicants must identify one distressed asset within a FDC that matches the definition provided in question 3 and apply for that distressed asset.

26. What is the duration of this grant program?

FSPG grantees must submit their deliverables within nine months after the effective date of the grant agreement between EDA and the grant recipient. Upon written request, the Authority may authorize a three-month extension to the grant recipient.

27. When can I start the planning process?

After the grant agreement has been fully executed between the selected applicant and the Authority.

28. What reporting will be required and at what frequency?

To demonstrate compliance with program requirements, FSPG awardees will need to provide a mid-grant program report and a final report/plan at the end of the grant period.

29. How will the grant award amount be disbursed?

The full amount of the grant award will be made over the course of two disbursements. The first disbursement, equal to 50% of the grant award, will be disbursed upon the effective date of the grant agreement.

The second disbursement, equal to the remaining 50% of the grant, will be made upon receipt of and review of a final plan and final report by the Authority. Second payment is also contingent upon submission of a second Tax Clearance Certificate by the awardee.

30. What happens if my planning process exceeds the project costs?

The Authority will not provide additional funding for any project. All planning projects must submit a budget for their planning grant. Award amount is based on the composite food desert score for each FDC.

31. Who do I contact for additional information if I have more questions before I apply?

Potential applicants may reach out to CustomerCare@njeda.com, call (844) 965-1125 or use the Customer Care chat feature found on the NJEDA website. Additional questions, comments, and inquiries can also be directed to fooddesertrelief@njeda.com.

32. Will there be any informational sessions or webinars for applicants outlining the program and application process?

Yes. NJEDA will be hosting two webinars:

1. Monday, October 3, 2022, from 2:00 pm to 3:00 pm and
2. Thursday, October 13, 2022, from 11:00 am to 12 noon

Registration links will be soon available at <https://www.njeda.com/events/>