



Full Lives Phase 2: Supporting Growers & Connecting Markets Request for Proposals

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FULL LIVES: SUPPORTING GROWERS & CONNECTING MARKETS SUMMARY

Greater Twin Cities United Way (GTCUW) is launching Phase 2 of its Full Lives initiative, *Supporting Growers & Connecting Markets*. The vision for this phase is to expand availability and accessibility of locally grown produce through expanded infrastructure capabilities, enhanced market access opportunities, and strengthened local food distribution channels for small and emerging farmers in the greater Twin Cities region. This phase of Full Lives will advance equity by uplifting historically underserved producers and facilitating access to nutritious, culturally connected foods.

The goals for this phase of Full Lives are to:

- **Strengthen market pathways** for small and emerging farmers by expanding opportunities to reach new buyers and increase participation in the local food economy.
- **Build and enhance infrastructure** - physical, digital, and shared-use - that supports growing, storing, processing, aggregating, transporting, and distributing local produce.
- **Expand community-centered distribution connections** that move local food into neighborhoods through collaborative models and new or improved access points.
- **Advance equity and community leadership** by prioritizing projects that elevate historically underserved farmers and support culturally meaningful food access and shared community ownership.

We anticipate awarding a total of \$900,000 in grants to organizations working collaboratively to address these complex challenges in their community’s food system, with each organization being awarded between \$175,000 - \$275,000. Applications are due **by May 29, 2026 at 5:00 pm CST** in your online grant portal. [Please visit our website](#) to begin your application.

Key Dates for Applicants	
Application is Live	April 20, 2026
Application Q&A Session	April 23, 2026, 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm CST
Deadline to Submit Questions to RFP@gtcuw.org	May 29, 2026, 11:00 am CST
Applications are Due	May 29, 2026, 5:00 pm CST
Review Period Begins	August 2026
Second Round Interviews	September/October 2026
Award Notifications Received By	November 2026
Grant Period	November 2026 – October 2028

BACKGROUND

Greater Twin Cities United Way (GTCUW) exists to fuel lasting change toward our vision of a community where all people thrive regardless of income, race, or place. Because a prosperous future belongs to everyone, our mission is to unite changemakers, advocate for social good, and develop solutions to address the challenges no one can solve alone. Greater Twin Cities United Way seeks to disrupt the extent to which income, race, or place predicts a person's ability to thrive.

GTCUW Impact Areas

COMMUNITY IMPACT AREAS & PROGRAMMING



Innovation Initiatives

Disrupting inequities requires long-term, systemic change. One way that GTCUW works toward that change is through our Innovation initiatives. These initiatives identify urgent gaps in our community and co-create solutions that drive positive, lasting change. To do this, we collaborate with nonprofit partners, people with lived experience, government agencies and donors to create large-scale, time-bound initiatives that accelerate sustainable systems change in our region.

FULL LIVES BACKGROUND

Origins of the Full Lives Initiative

First launched in 2017, the Full Lives innovation initiative emerged as a unique, systems focused effort to advance lasting food security by strengthening community food systems. The first iteration concentrated geographically on North Minneapolis, where GTCUW partnered with General Mills to support local food system transformation. Over the two-year pilot period from 2017 to 2019, Full Lives invested \$1.5 million in a cohort of 11 organizations leading innovative projects designed to improve food access, build local capacity, and catalyze long term systems change within the neighborhood's food ecosystem. For more about Full Lives, [visit our website](#).

Relaunching Full Lives: Phase 1

Insights from the first generation of Full Lives, conversations with community food system actors, and a 2024 landscape analysis confirmed that informal relationships essential to systemic progress remain under-resourced, and that coordinated investment, peer connection, and strengthened organizational capacity were urgently needed. In response, GTCUW relaunched Full Lives Phase 1 in July 2024 to build a community-informed framework centered on collaborative leadership, equity, local ecosystem development, and systems-level solutions. Phase 1 provided unrestricted funding to collaboratives to support organizational development, doing so by deepening relationships that strengthened shared work, increasing capacity across core functions such as program design and governance, and embracing a trust-based partnership approach that enabled flexible, community responsive decision making - laying the foundation for continued systems change in Phase 2. For more on Phase 1, [read the Full Lives Phase 1 Evaluation Report](#).

Transitioning to Phase 2 of Full Lives

Evaluation questions throughout Phase 1 centered on what learnings should carry forward into subsequent phases, and partners consistently emphasized that production capacity is not the limiting factor in our regional food system. Funded partners, the Full Lives Advisory Group and other community food systems leaders overwhelmingly recommended that Phase 2 prioritize local food distribution systems, highlighting the need for investments that improve access to fresh, locally grown food, reduce environmental burdens, and strengthen the economic stability of farmers, growers, and small food businesses.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY OVERVIEW

Full Lives Phase 2 aims to expand availability and accessibility of locally grown foods by **enhancing market access, improving distribution mechanisms, and strengthening infrastructure** for small and emerging farmers across the 9-county Twin Cities metro region. This phase of the Full Lives initiative responds directly to persistent systemic barriers in the regional food system experienced by small growers – especially BIPOC, immigrant, and women farmers – including limited access to markets (retail, wholesale and direct-to-consumer), lack of infrastructure, and transportation challenges.

Through this funding opportunity, Greater Twin Cities United Way will allocate approximately **\$900,000 in grants** to organizations working to increase local food availability through streamlined distribution and enhanced market access. We anticipate funding **3-5 organizations between \$175,000 – \$275,000 each for a period of two years**. Full Lives Phase 2 will advance the following focus areas:

1. **Expand Market Access and Business Development Opportunities for Small and Emerging Growers:** *investing in organizations helping growers access new and more consistent market channels, thereby improving financial stability and expanding access to locally grown foods in communities.*

This focus area is grounded in learnings from Phase 1 that market access is essential for both economic opportunity and food security.

2. **Strengthening Local Food Distribution Infrastructure and Coordination:** *supporting partners working to streamline the movement of local food from farm to market by investing in critical infrastructure and coordination along the supply chain.*

This strategy directly addresses key distribution barriers identified in Phase 1 and responds to the need for under-resourced strategic coordination.

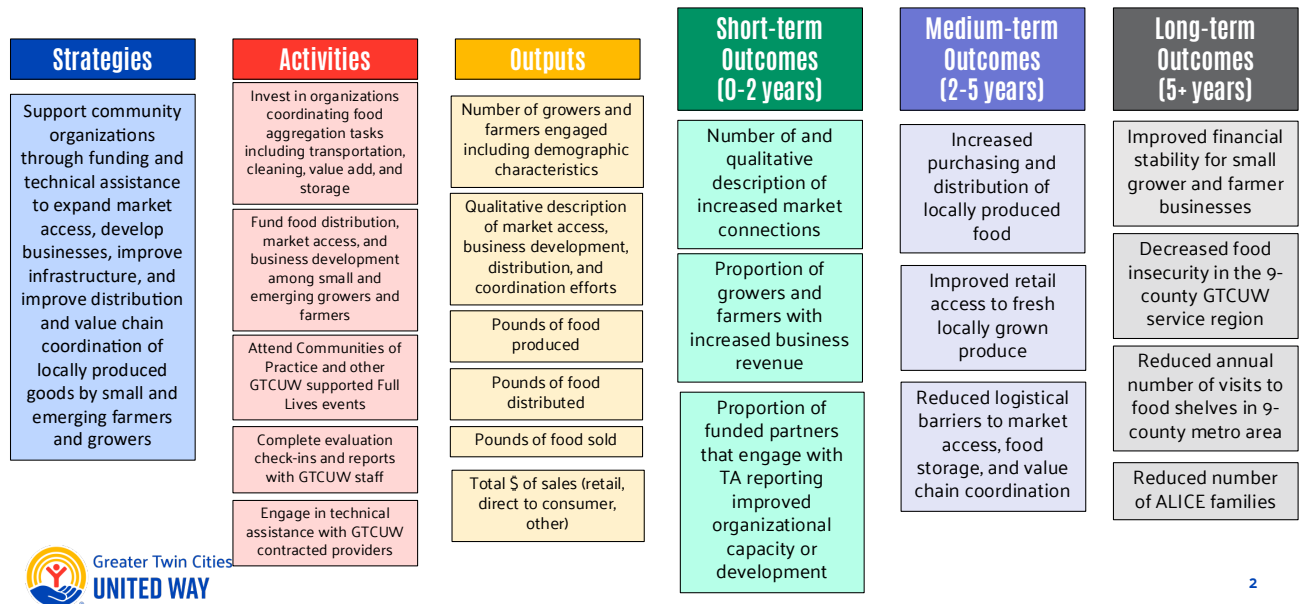
These focus areas are intentionally woven together as **mutually reinforcing components** of Full Lives Phase 2. Together, they create the conditions that allow small and emerging growers to both **reach new markets** and **move food efficiently through the supply chain**, resulting in improved economic stability for growers and increased access to fresh, locally grown foods for communities. GTCUW will host events and opportunities for ecosystem coordination to foster collaboration among growers, distributors, market

partners, and food systems leaders to build a stronger and more interconnected regional food system. Convenings for funded partners continues a key theme from Phase 1 of Full Lives, which focused on strategic relationship development through Communities of Practice and cohort activities.

Full Lives Phase 2 Logic Model

FULL LIVES PHASE 2

Funding Opportunity Goal: expand availability and accessibility of locally grown foods by **strengthening infrastructure, improving distribution systems, and enhancing market access** for small and emerging farmers across the 9-county Twin Cities metro region.



GRANT ACTIVITIES

Full Lives Phase 2 centers on two mutually reinforcing approaches that work together to expand the availability and accessibility of locally grown produce across the Greater Twin Cities region. The table below provides examples of eligible grant-funded activities and proposed measures for annual reporting organized by focus area. Final measures will be co-developed in partnership with funded organizations and GTCUW evaluation staff to ensure alignment and appropriateness with funded activities. These examples are not exhaustive, and applicants may propose activities that are not listed below. **It is not expected that funded projects will include activities in both focus areas. However, applicants that propose work in both focus areas (market access and local food distribution) will be given priority during review.** See “Funding Priorities” for more information.

Table 1: Example Activities and Proposed Measures

Focus Area	Example Activities	Proposed Measures for Annual Reporting
Market Access and Business Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creating or expanding connections with wholesale, institutional, retail, direct-to-consumer, or community-based settings (such as churches or food shelves)• Developing purchase agreements or institutional contracts• Supporting growers in business development, marketing, and operational planning• Supporting buyer readiness and relationship-building between growers and markets• Implementing or scaling proven market access models that increase purchases of locally grown and culturally relevant foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of growers and farmers engaged, including demographic characteristics (ZIP code, race/ethnicity)• Number of new or expanded market channels (e.g., food hubs, food shelves, school districts, restaurants, retail stores) where products are sold.• Qualitative description of market access and/or diversification efforts (for example, relationship development, wholesale training or readiness such as food safety certifications completion, marketing, purchase contracts, training or education provided to growers).• Total pounds of food sold and/or distributed• Qualitative description of the products farmers/growers bring to market (for example, descriptions of fresh food/minimally processed, value-added products, dried or dehydrated, culturally relevant, etc.)• Total dollar amount of revenue and/or total sales (retail, direct to consumer, other)

<p>Local Food Distribution and Coordination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating and facilitating local food distribution efforts • Filling infrastructure gaps such as packing space, storage, refrigeration, and transportation • Utilizing technology to streamline connections between growers and markets • Developing coordinated distribution models that reduce inefficiencies or duplication • Leveraging shared or community-based food distribution infrastructure (e.g., commercial kitchens, warehouses, delivery networks) • Creating or expanding systems that reduce spoilage, transportation burden, or administrative barriers for growers • Purchasing locally grown/raised foods from farmers and partnering with a food shelf to distribute the food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative description of distribution and coordination efforts (for example, infrastructure purchase or investment, technology improvements, new partnerships developed, operations management, packaging improvements) • Number and qualitative description of infrastructure investments (for example, materials purchased or improved including but not limited to coolers, pack sheds, storage facilities, etc.)
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Funded partners will operate within a cohort model, collaborating with Full Lives staff to establish goals and develop a plan for achieving them at the onset of the grant period. In addition, the Full Lives cohort will convene regularly for peer-to-peer learning and strategic planning sessions (Communities of Practice). Partners are expected to attend each Community of Practice and will be invited to co-create these gatherings with GTCUW.

The Full Lives Program Officer will provide comprehensive support to funded partners throughout the grant period, including:

- Bi-monthly learning conversations to offer support and gather qualitative progress and learning information.
- Connection to support and resources.
- Ongoing technical assistance and troubleshooting through in-person or virtual meetings.

LEARNING AND EVALUATION

All funded partners are required to participate in evaluation efforts with GTCUW staff in support of program learning, implementation progress, and information sharing. GTCUW intends to build learning and evaluation plans in a way that minimizes the burden on funded partners and emphasizes our impact. Data collection approaches will be developed in conjunction with funded organizations, and support from GTCUW evaluation staff will be provided, as needed.

A more detailed Evaluation and Learning plan will be shared with funded partners closer to the start of the grant period. Final reporting requirements, including measures (proposed in Table 1 above), and deadlines will be included in the grant agreement. In the meantime, funded partners should expect to engage in the evaluation activities outlined in Table 2 over the course of the grant period.

Table 2: Evaluation Activities		
Evaluation Activity	Frequency	Funded Partner Engagement
Bi-monthly meetings with Full Lives Program Officer	Every two months throughout the funding period	Funded partners will connect with GTCUW staff to share implementation progress updates and challenges in a semi-structured meeting.
Full Lives Communities of Practice post-event survey	At minimum twice a year	Funded partners will attend in-person learning Communities of Practice to strengthen relationships, share resources and strategize on shared work/goals.

Midpoint report	October 2027	Funded partners will submit a report using GTCUW grant software including all required metrics noted in the grant agreement.
Final report	October 2028	Funded partners will submit a report using GTCUW grant software including all required metrics noted in the grant agreement.
Final evaluation key informant conversation	Within the last two months of the funding period	At least one member of the funded partner organization will participate in a semi-structured conversation with GTCUW evaluation staff to gather learnings, successes, and provide context to quantitative measures.

UTILIZATION OF GRANT FUNDS

Grant funds can be utilized to achieve project outcomes and objectives, covering expenses such as project implementation, personnel costs, equipment, training, travel, evaluation, administration, collaboration, outreach, technical assistance, and contingency needs. General operating funds **cannot be** used for lobbying, real estate purchase, or capital development expenses.

Grant funds for allowable expenses may be passed through to other organizations. However, the lead organization or fiscal sponsor would receive and manage grant funds on behalf of the project and take on legal and administrative responsibilities including financial management and reporting. If any grant funds are to be passed through as part of your project proposal, please specify the amount and the recipient organization(s) in the [Project Budget](#). Organizations receiving pass-through funds do not need to meet eligibility criteria if the lead organization/fiscal sponsor does.

GTCUW may ask funded partners to provide additional expense or budget information, including but not limited to, a high-level overview of how grant funds were used over the course of the funding period, to support learning and evaluation and plan future grantmaking.

GTCUW partners closely and intentionally with all funded partners to maintain consistent communication and complete multiple due diligence processes, positioning GTCUW to address concerns early. GTCUW is committed to stewardship of resources in alignment with the intended impact and use of funds. If there are concerns about fraud or misuse, GTCUW implements the following process:

- GTCUW will initiate a conversation with the funded partner and may pause the grant agreement.
- Engage the organization and their board chair to explore the concern and gather additional information.
- When a concern is substantiated, grant payments are immediately terminated, and the organization is asked to repay any GTCUW funds that were misused.
- When a concern is resolved and unsubstantiated, grant payments will resume.

FUNDING PRIORITIES

Full Lives Phase 2 will fund organizations working to strengthen local food distribution systems and expand equitable market access for small and emerging farmers across the Greater Twin Cities region. Priority will be given to proposals that address both sides of the farm to market pathway: how food moves, and where it goes.

Applicants are not required to address every priority below, but proposals should clearly demonstrate how their work contributes to a stronger, more coordinated local food distribution and market access ecosystem.

- **Racial Justice, Equity, and Inclusivity, including Rural Communities** – We prioritize applications with a clear focus on racial justice, equity, and inclusivity, actively working towards addressing disparities and promoting fairness within the community with a specific consideration for the unique challenges faced by historically underserved growers and those in rural communities.
- **Integration of Two RFP Focus Areas** – Given the interconnected nature of regional food systems, we will prioritize proposals that intentionally link market access with distribution capacity, rather than addressing one focus area or the other in isolation.

- **Community-Led Initiatives** – We prioritize proposals that center community-driven approaches and a commitment to building resilience within the local food system, recognizing that ongoing efforts are already underway. Applicants that represent the communities they serve will be given preference during the review process.
- **Strategic Partnerships** – We prioritize meaningful and authentic partnerships to streamline resources, build capacity and reduce duplication of efforts. While formal collaborations are not required to apply, applications should clearly articulate the role of any community partner(s) involved in the project. [Letter\(s\) of Commitment](#) from each key partner listed are required as part of the application.

FUNDING ELIGIBILITY

Organizations must meet the following requirements to apply:

- Your organization or lead organization (for partnerships) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization or has an established fiscal sponsor that is a 501(c)(3).
- Your organization’s current fiscal year budget is at least \$250,000.
- Organizations must operate within the Greater Twin Cities United Way nine-county service region (Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Isanti, Ramsey, Scott, Washington).

Important Note on Financial Review: Your organization (or lead organization for partnerships) must meet the financial standards for Greater Twin Cities United Way funded partners based on a review of financial documents such as your most recent financial statements, Form 990, and audit (if your organization is required by law to complete an audit) to receive funding. **Organizations required to complete an audit are strongly encouraged to demonstrate a “clean” (unqualified) audit opinion to be considered for funding under this RFP.** You will be asked to upload financial documents as part of the application. Please note: **Organizations are eligible to receive a maximum grant size of up to 20% of their overall organizational budget.**

If your organization is not a 501(c)(3) or does not have a budget of at least \$250,000, please consider utilizing a fiscal sponsor who meets all eligibility requirements, and would receive and manage grant funds on behalf of the project and take on legal and administrative responsibilities including financial management and reporting.

You will be asked to upload the following financial documents as part of the application. **Please note that if you are using a fiscal sponsor, upload the following documents from the fiscal sponsor.**

- Last three years of IRS Form 990s (if applicable)
- Most recent organization operating budget or forecast
- Most recent board-approved audit (if applicable or legally required)
- 501(c)(3) determination letter
- Project budget ([please use our budget template](#))

For any special considerations related to these criteria, please contact us at RFP@gtcuw.org to determine your eligibility.

APPLICATION PROCESS

HOW TO APPLY -- GREATER TWIN CITIES UNITED WAY GRANTS PORTAL

Non-profit organizations applying for this RFP must submit an online application by **5:00 pm CST on May 29, 2026.**

IMPORTANT: In order to access this RFP, please use one of the following sets of directions:

To sign up as a ***New User*** of the GTCUW Grants Portal:

1. [Check to see if you have an existing account](#) by entering your work email as your username and your password. If your email is recognized and you need a new password, click *Forgot User ID or Password?* If your email is not recognized and you need to create an account, proceed to step 2.
2. If you need to create an account, [fill out this form to get started](#). *It may take our team 3 business days to get your account up and running.* You can also use this form to sign up to receive access to any open GTCUW RFPs. If you already have an account, please refer to the next set of directions for ***Current Users*** on how to receive access to open GTCUW RFPs.
3. Once your account has been created, you will receive an automated email from RFP@gtcuw.org directing you to log in to your Grants Portal account.
4. After creating your account, [you can log in here](#). **You may want to bookmark this page for future use.**

For **Current Users**, here is how to sign up to access open GTCUW RFPs:

1. [Log in](#) to your online Grants Portal account. If you don't have a login, refer to the above instructions on creating one.
2. First check if you already have access to your desired RFP(s).
 - a. After logging in to your Grants Portal account, navigate to the *Applications/Reports* tab at the top of the web page to check which RFPs you currently have access to.
3. If you don't see your desired RFP(s) available in the *Applications/Reports* tab, navigate to the *Sign Up for Open RFPs* tab and sign up for the Full Lives RFP. *It may take our team 3 business days to process this request and for you to see the requested RFP(s) in your Applications/Reports tab.*

Please refer to our [info sheet](#) for further details on how to navigate your Grants Portal account, and reach out to RFP@gtcuw.org with any questions.

All applicants will submit a written application in their [online Grants Portal](#). To make applications easier to draft, [we are providing a Word template of the application](#). However, applicants MUST submit their application information in their [online Grants Portal](#). A [project budget](#), as well as [letter\(s\) of commitment](#) from any key partner(s) listed in the application are also required. Applications will be scored by a team of Greater Twin Cities United Way staff and community reviewers with knowledge of community food systems against an assessment rubric provided below.

Virtual conversations: Top-scoring organizations will be invited to participate in a virtual conversation to discuss their work in more detail and learn more about the Full Lives initiative. Prior to these calls, detailed agendas, discussion points, and insights into the selection process will be provided to ensure transparency and facilitate productive discussions. Applicants that do not score highly on their application will be notified in September 2026 that they are no longer being considered for this funding opportunity.

PROPOSAL ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

The written application and virtual conversation will be scored against the following proposal assessment rubric:

Area of Assessment	% of Total Score
Proposed activities and implementation plan	30%
Focus on underserved and/or rural communities; community informed, equity-driven approaches to proposed project	20%
Organizational history and demonstrated capacity to implement integrated proposed activities	15%
Evaluation capacity	15%
Strength of collaborations/partnerships	10%
Project budget	10%
Total	100%

Greater Twin Cities United Way reserves the right to make awards that support our cultivation of a balanced grant portfolio that most effectively advances our mission, goals, and priorities. Toward this end, and in addition to criteria identified in this RFP, funding decisions may include considerations of geography, scale and ecosystem factors, among other factors. Following virtual conversations, Greater Twin Cities United Way staff will recommend final grant decisions to the Greater Twin Cities United Way Executive Team. Applicants will be notified of funding decisions via email in November 2026.

GRANT TERMS AND PAYMENTS

- Grants are anticipated to be between \$175,000 - \$275,000. The grant term is November 2026 - October 2028.
- Grant awards will be made in installments throughout the grant period, with the first installment being disbursed upon signature of the grant agreement. Exact payment terms will be outlined in the grant agreement.

- Funded partners will be asked to provide direct deposit information for payment.
- All funded partners will be required to participate in the following:
 - Working directly with farmers, growers, and/or aggregators to expand market access through business development, infrastructure support, training, or other coordination and distribution efforts
 - Bimonthly meetings with GTCUW Program Officer
 - Invoice submission at established time periods
 - Annual reports on implementation progress, required metrics, and assessment of success
 - At least one conversation with GTCUW evaluation staff
 - GTCUW coordinated events (such as Communities of Practice)

APPLICATION RESOURCES AND OTHER QUESTIONS

During the application period, Greater Twin Cities United Way staff are available to answer your questions and assist with your application.

- The Full Lives Team will hold a live [Q&A session](#) on **Thursday, April 23, 2026 from 1:00 – 2:00 pm**, [which you can register for here](#). We will also upload the video recording of the session and the slide deck [to the RFP landing page](#) following the session.
- If you'd like to sign up for a meeting with the Full Lives Team to discuss potential project proposals, you can use the Bookings links below. Please note that we are unavailable to hold these meetings during the final week of the application period (May 22nd through May 29th).
 - [Set up a meeting with the Full Lives Team between April 20th and May 8th](#)
 - [Set up a meeting with the Full Lives Team between May 11th and May 21st](#)
- Please refer to our [info sheet](#) for further details on how to navigate your Grants Portal account, and reach out to RFP@gtcuw.org with any questions.
- Please note that when you contact us at RFP@gtcuw.org, a Greater Twin Cities United Way staff person will respond to your question within 3 business days.