



Request for Proposals (RFP): Western Pennsylvania Local Food Infrastructure Study

Issued by: Grow Pittsburgh

Issue Date: January 5, 2026

Proposal Due Date: February 8, 2026

Anticipated Project Period: 12 months from contract execution

Total Project Budget: Not to exceed \$54,000

1. Introduction and Organizational Background

Grow Pittsburgh is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to teach people how to grow food and promote the benefits that gardens bring to our neighborhoods. Since its founding in 2005, Grow Pittsburgh has worked to strengthen the regional food system in Western Pennsylvania through urban agriculture, hands-on education, workforce training, school garden programming, and technical assistance to small and emerging growers.

Grow Pittsburgh operates multiple production farms producing more than 30,000 pounds of food annually, supports over 100 community gardens and urban farms, and reaches students and community members each year through educational programming. The organization collaborates with more than 80 partner sites—including municipalities, schools, healthcare providers, and grassroots organizations—and is recognized as a trusted partner in advancing food access and community resilience across Western Pennsylvania.

Through this project, Grow Pittsburgh is not positioned as the sole or permanent leader of future regional food aggregation efforts, but rather as a convener and collaborator seeking to better understand what organizational structures, partnerships, and models can most effectively improve food availability in the region.

Grow Pittsburgh seeks proposals from qualified Food Systems Consultants to support the **Western Pennsylvania Local Food Infrastructure Study**, an assessment focused on improving food availability across Western Pennsylvania by strengthening market access for small and mid-sized food producers.

2. Community Need and Context

Western Pennsylvania faces persistent challenges in ensuring equitable access to fresh, locally grown food and in sustaining viable markets for small and mid-sized growers. Across both Southwestern and Northwestern Pennsylvania, food insecurity affects between 11–13% of



residents, with disproportionate impacts on low-income communities, communities of color, households with children, and rural populations lacking access to full-service grocery stores.

Small and mid-sized farms dominate Western Pennsylvania's agricultural landscape but often lack reliable aggregation points, processing facilities, and distribution infrastructure. These gaps limit growers' ability to access institutional and retail markets, increase dependence on long-distance supply chains, and heighten vulnerability to economic and environmental disruptions.

The *Pennsylvania Agriculture Economic Analysis 2025* report emphasizes the need for targeted investment in aggregation points, regional logistics, and urban agriculture hubs to support farm viability and food security. Strengthening localized food systems presents an opportunity to improve economic opportunity and community resilience across Western Pennsylvania.

3. Project Overview and Purpose

Grow Pittsburgh will lead the Western Pennsylvania Local Food Infrastructure Study to assess regional needs, feasibility, and capacity for **small-scale regional food hub models** that can improve food availability by strengthening market access for small and mid-sized food producers.

The assessment will focus on identifying **food hub, cooperative, or hybrid aggregation and distribution models that are appropriately scaled, flexible, and easily replicable across Southwestern Pennsylvania**, rather than a single centralized facility. Emphasis will be placed on models that can function in urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts and that respond to the logistical realities of growers and communities throughout the region.

The study will examine how these small-scale regional food hubs can:

- Aggregate, distribute, and market food products from local and regional producers
- Expand market opportunities for small and mid-sized farms
- Improve the consistent availability of fresh, locally produced food across communities
- Strengthen regional supply chain coordination and resilience
- Inform future investment and partnership strategies

Consultants selected through this RFP will play a lead role in benchmarking existing models, supporting advisory committee coordination, managing research-related logistics, and helping translate national best practices into replicable, regionally appropriate approaches for Southwestern Pennsylvania.



4. Scope of Work

The selected Food Systems Consultant will serve as a strategic partner to Grow Pittsburgh and play a lead role in coordinating, researching, and supporting implementation of the Western Pennsylvania Local Food Infrastructure Study. The consultant will not be expected to implement a food hub, but rather to guide research, benchmarking, coordination, and logistics that inform future investment and development.

The scope of work includes:

A. National Benchmarking and Best Practices Analysis

- Synthesize and evaluate existing regional food systems research, including the Pennsylvania Agriculture Economic Analysis 2025, to integrate relevant findings into the benchmarking study.
- Lead a national benchmarking study of food hub, cooperative, and hybrid aggregation and distribution models relevant to Western Pennsylvania
- Conduct desk research and interviews with peer organizations and initiatives that reflect a range of small-scale, regional food hub, cooperative, and hybrid aggregation and distribution models relevant to Western Pennsylvania
- Identify best practices related to governance, logistics, staffing, equity, financial sustainability, and community impact
- Synthesize lessons learned into clear, accessible findings applicable to Western Pennsylvania's urban and rural contexts

B. Advisory Committee Coordination and Logistics

- Support Grow Pittsburgh in organizing, coordinating, and managing a **seven-person project Advisory Committee**
- Assist with meeting planning, agenda development, facilitation support, and documentation
- Coordinate meeting logistics, including scheduling, virtual or in-person formats, materials preparation, and follow-up summaries
- Support **travel coordination** for committee members, including scheduling, reimbursements, and logistics for site visits or in-person meetings

C. Travel and Site Visit Logistics

- Assist with planning and logistics for site visits, learning exchanges, or interviews related to benchmarking efforts
- Coordinate travel schedules, site visit agendas, and background briefing materials for Grow Pittsburgh staff and Advisory Committee members, as applicable
- Support documentation of site visit findings and integration into overall analysis



D. Regional Context and Market Insights

- Provide high-level insights into Western Pennsylvania's local food landscape, including infrastructure gaps and operational considerations
- Conduct and facilitate **focus groups with aggregators, distributors, growers, and food producers, including value-added producers**, to inform market research and capture local perspectives
- Help translate national best practices into regionally appropriate options

E. Organizational Structure and Governance Considerations

- Examine organizational structures commonly used to support regional food hubs, cooperatives, and hybrid aggregation models, including nonprofit-led, cooperative-led, fiscally sponsored, and multi-stakeholder governance arrangements
- Analyze the roles typically played by anchor institutions, coordinating entities, growers, and community partners within these models
- Identify structural advantages, limitations, and capacity requirements associated with different organizational approaches
- Clarify that Grow Pittsburgh is not presumed to be the lead or permanent coordinating organization, but may be one of several potential partners or anchors
- Provide considerations for what types of organizations, partnerships, or governance models may be best suited to lead or house future aggregation and distribution efforts in Western Pennsylvania

5. Deliverables

1. **National Benchmarking Summary** synthesizing existing regional food access related research and outlining relevant models, best practices, and lessons learned.
2. **Stakeholder Engagement Summaries** capturing input from growers, community organizations, and food system participants
3. **Regional Market and Infrastructure Analysis** identifying key gaps, needs, and operational considerations
4. **Capacity Assessment for Proposed Models** evaluating the staffing, governance, and organizational resources required for the recommended food hub, cooperative, or hybrid models
5. **Final Comprehensive Assessment Report** synthesizing findings, stakeholder input, feasibility evaluations, and early-stage opportunities and recommendations for future development



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6. All deliverables should be provided in accessible, professional formats suitable for sharing with funders, partners, and community stakeholders.

6. Project Budget

The total project budget for this engagement is **not to exceed \$54,000**. Proposers should submit a detailed budget and fee structure that reflects the scope of work described in this RFP, including labor, travel, facilitation, and any other anticipated costs.

Grow Pittsburgh anticipates awarding a single contract; however, proposals from small teams or partnerships are welcome, provided a single lead entity is identified.

7. Project Timeline and Milestones

- **Month 2:** Advisory Committee established and activated
- **Month 5:** Completion of national benchmarking analysis
- **Month 7:** Completion of regional market, infrastructure, and organizational structure assessments
- **Month 9:** Draft findings and feasibility options presented
- **Month 10:** Final assessment report completed and disseminated

Proposers may suggest refinements to the timeline while maintaining alignment with these milestones.

8. Evaluation and Performance Monitoring

- Participate in periodic progress meetings
- Incorporate feedback from Grow Pittsburgh and the Advisory Committee
- Support a transparent, community-informed evaluation process

9. Proposer Qualifications

- Strong experience in food systems consulting, particularly food hubs, aggregation and distribution models, or grower cooperatives
- Demonstrated expertise in benchmarking, qualitative research, and synthesis of complex food system models
- Experience coordinating multi-stakeholder advisory groups or steering committees



- Proven ability to manage logistics, scheduling, and coordination for meetings, travel, and site visits
- Excellent facilitation, communication, and documentation skills
- Familiarity with equity-centered, community-based, or values-driven food system initiatives
- Knowledge of Pennsylvania, Appalachian, or Midwestern food systems is preferred but not required

Individual consultants or small teams are encouraged to apply.

10. Proposal Submission Requirements

1. Cover Letter summarizing interest and qualifications
2. Organizational or Team Overview
3. Proposed Approach and Methodology aligned with the Scope of Work
4. Project Timeline and Work Plan
5. Relevant Experience and Case Studies
6. Key Personnel and Roles
7. Proposed Budget and Fee Structure
8. References (at least two)

Proposals should be submitted electronically in PDF format to: Denele Hughson at denele@growpittsburgh.org

11. Selection Criteria

- Alignment with project goals and scope
- Demonstrated relevant experience and expertise
- Quality and feasibility of proposed approach
- Understanding of regional food system challenges
- Budget clarity and cost-effectiveness
- Commitment to equity and community engagement

Grow Pittsburgh reserves the right to request additional information, conduct interviews, or negotiate scope and budget prior to final selection.



12. Additional Information

Grow Pittsburgh is committed to equity and inclusion. Consultants from historically underrepresented communities and those with demonstrated commitment to food justice are strongly encouraged to apply.

Grow Pittsburgh reserves the right to reject any or all proposals and to award contracts in the best interest of the organization.

Questions regarding this RFP may be directed to: Denele Hughson, denele@growpittsburgh.org