



2026 Community Food Systems Fellowship
an initiative of Vital Village Networks at Boston Medical Center

Frequently Asked Questions

1) What are the eligibility criteria?

All applications will be screened for eligibility prior to their review.

- The fellow must be based in the United States or one of the US territories
- The fellow must have an established partnership with a nonprofit organization, coalition, network, group, cooperative, business, or institution that has a strategic focus on local food systems.

2) What criteria will be used to select fellows to advance to the final round of the process?

Applicants will advance to the final round of the application process based upon how clearly their application and recommendation can articulate details of the categories outlined below:

- Commitment to developing resilient and equitable local food systems
- Commitment to community leadership, engagement, and the leadership of caregivers and families
- Commitment to food justice, nutrition justice, racial equity and social transformation
- Commitment to addressing inequities, e.g. racial, ethnic, geographic and economic, in your community or state.
- Interest in developing skills to measure impact and success of local food systems
- Interest in developing collaborative leadership skills
- Ability to leverage the Fellowship Cohort experience to build community capacity
- History of effective collaboration and partnership with organizations, groups, or cooperatives within local food systems.

2) What is the deadline for applications?

The Fellowship application period ends on November 10, 2025 at 5:00pm ET.

3) When will Community Fellows be selected?

Applicants will be notified of their status by December 2025. We ask that applicants please hold the program calendar dates as listed in the [Request for Applications](#).

4) Do fellows receive a stipend?

Community Fellows will receive a \$2,500 fellowship stipend to honor time for participating in fellowship meetings and activities, including participation and presentations at Vital



Village's annual National Community Leadership Summit. Fellows also have the ability to apply for \$2,500 of innovation pilot project funds, which would be dispersed after the first 12-month of the fellowship program, after a proposal development and action planning period that would take place in the first half of the program

5) What should finalists expect from the virtual interview?

If selected to the final round, applications will be invited to participate in a brief virtual interview from December 8-12, 2025. The finalist interview will be no longer than 45 minutes and will take place virtually on Zoom.

6) What will be discussed in the virtual interview?

An overview of the goals of the interview will be shared with applicants moving into the final phase of the application process.

7) Is there a budget required for the innovation pilot funding or a template we should use?

Fellows are not required to submit a budget for the pilot funds at this time. If awarded, there will be an opportunity to submit a proposal and budget during the fellowship program.

8) What will participation in the Community Food Systems Fellowship include?

Participation in the Community Food Systems Fellowship will include:

- **In-Person Fellowship Program Launch (2 days):** Formal kick off of the fellowship program, tentatively scheduled between February 11-13, 2026, final dates/times and location to be confirmed with finalists in December 2025. Fellows will have an opportunity to meet and get to know other fellows in the cohort and introduce the program goals, structure, and learning opportunities. Fellows will also participate in the first of two Community Design Labs, focused on an introduction to community co-design and engaging in a co-design process to shape the fellowship experience.
- **Community Design Labs:** Participation in two sets of Community Design Labs in February 2026 and October 2026, focused on a facilitated co-design process to shape the fellowship experience and identify areas of collective action and momentum around key fellowship goals into a collective group project. These interactive sessions will build on the collective roadmap developed by the 2022-25 fellowship cohorts to develop a collaborative learning tool or resource to share with other leaders in the field. Meeting dates include:
 - **Design Lab 1: During In-Person Fellowship Program Launch, February 2026**
 - **Design Lab 2: During Fellowship Fall Retreat % 2025 National Community leadership Summit, October 2026**
- **Monthly Group Learning Sessions:** Virtual learning sessions will take place once a month



on the **3rd Wednesdays of the month from 2-5pm Eastern** from March through December 2026, with the exception of June (Cross-Cohort Project Showcase) and October 2026 (Design Lab 2 and the National Community Leadership Summit), as well as December 2026, which is scheduled earlier in the month due to holiday schedules. Sessions include active peer-led components to support learning, and capacity and knowledge building around key topics.

- **Bimonthly individual check ins:** With members of the Vital Village Networks team. These regular 1-hr check in's will be scheduled at a regular time block to be confirmed at the start of the fellowship.
- **In-Person Fellows Retreat and National Convening (3 days):** Participation in a community leader convening and project presentation or session during the 2026 National Community Leadership Summit, planned for October 2026 in Boston, MA. The convening will focus on key areas of community capacity building. Fellows will also participate in the second of two Community Design Labs, focused on identifying areas of collective action and momentum around key fellowship goals to develop a collective group project.
- **Peer Groups with Alumni Mentors:** Fellows will be grouped by shared interest, geography, or focus, and matched with an alumni mentor. Groups and alumni mentors are encouraged to meet quarterly to deepen connections and learning with one another.
- **Individualized coaching, technical assistance support, and regularly scheduled group working sessions** for innovation pilot grant and collective project implementation, to take place during the final 6-month of the fellowship program.
- **End of Fellowship Cross-Cohort Showcase:** Fellows will present their final cohort's collective project, and share reflections and learnings, in June 2027 in a final session joined by alumni, partners, and other invited stakeholders.

9) When will the Fellowship begin and end? What are the important dates? The Fellowship will begin in January 2026 and end in June 2027. The program is structured in two phases:

- **Part 1: January 2026 - December 2026,** which involves intensive peer learning experience with regular group, small group, and individual meetings. An in-person fellowship launch and the first of two Design Labs will take place in February 2026. Fellows will collaborate together around a collective project during a second Design Lab and also present or lead a session in person at Vital Village Networks' 2026 National Community Leadership Summit, which is tentatively planned for October 2026.



- **Part 2: January 2027 - June 2027**, which involves self-directed time focused on applying fellowship learnings, implementing innovation pilot grant supports, and individualized coaching and technical assistance with peers and staff. Fellows will present their final projects and learnings in June 2027 as part of a Virtual Community Food Systems Cross-Cohort Showcase, joined by alumni, partners, and other invited stakeholders.
- Please see the [Request for Applications](#) for a complete listing of 2026 Fellowship Program dates.

10) Who in the community would the Community Fellows engage over the 18-month time period?

Community stakeholders the Community Fellows engage may vary depending on their focus within the local food system. However, we strongly encourage Community Fellows to have an aspect of their project that engages parents and caregivers to ensure inclusive and meaningful ways for families who face the largest inequities to be integrated in the participatory research process.

11) Who is the main point of contact?

Please direct inquiries to foodsystems@vitalvillage.org.

12) Will there be a way for applicants who are not awarded the Fellowship to engage?

Yes, we invite all applicants to sign up for [our mailing list](#) to continue to engage with Vital Village Networks and receive updates regarding future opportunities and to join our [NOW Innovation Network online forum](#), which shares stories, resources, and tools. We are eager to continue to learn about you and your community's work.