



Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance

Request for Proposals: Strategic Planning Consultant

As the Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance (SOFSA) embarks on its next chapter, the council seeks a consultant to work with SOFSA's membership and leadership to weave together existing plans with the interests and perspectives of the network's many stakeholders to create a five-year strategic action plan for the partnership.

Background & Mission

The Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance (SOFSA) is a network of food system stakeholders and a catalyst for change. Our mission is to strengthen our food system so that it works for all people in the city of Syracuse, surrounding Onondaga County, and neighboring Onondaga Nation. We bring communities together to foster relationships, develop projects, align resources, and advocate for policies to improve the health of our neighbors and our environment.

Our region is home to a diversity of both populations and landscapes, presenting a unique opportunity for a regional and collaborative approach to food systems change. SOFSA's work knits together the shared interests of our diverse partnership to support a coordinated, equitable, and resilient regional food system. SOFSA aims to address seemingly competing goals – food sector business viability, responsible environmental stewardship, and equitable access to affordable regionally-produced food. We envision a community with a common dedication to food sovereignty for all in which all players in our food system share decision-making power in determining our food system's future. (Additional background information included in the addendum at the end of this RFP.)

Project Activities

- Facilitation of participatory processes in collaboration with the SOFSA Advisory Board, Community Liaisons, staff, and broader membership
- Broad stakeholder engagement across both existing network and relevant external parties
- Integration of prior assessments throughout planning processes
- Consultation services throughout the duration of the contract, including updates and presentations to Advisory Board and membership as necessary
- Facilitation of at least two in-person sessions:
 - Day-long retreat with SOFSA Advisory Board, Community Liaisons, and staff
 - Interactive exercises with food systems stakeholders during next Food Justice Symposium to be held on October 28, 2023
- Support for reporting to funder, the NY Health Foundation, on the outcomes of this project

Project Deliverables

- Five-year strategic to include:
 - Updated organizational theory of change, mission, and vision statements toward food systems transformation in Syracuse, Onondaga County, and Onondaga Nation developed

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- o Outline of the organization's strategic direction and goals for the next five years with milestones
- o Sustainability plan including long-term fund development and incorporation structure
- o Model and pathways for ongoing development of SOFSA's membership and leadership

Desired Qualifications

- Proven track record working with networks and/or coalitions to maximize collective impact
- Ability to address how organizations can operate out of a racial equity culture and step away from white dominant culture
- Strong facilitation skills including utilization of inclusive methods to maximize participation
- Experience working with diverse, multiracial organizations/networks
- Experience in 501(c)3 nonprofit incorporation, community-engaged governance, community-centric-fundraising, and sustainable fund development
- At least two of the following:
 - o Local knowledge of the Central New York community, context, and stakeholders
 - o Content area expertise in food systems, racial justice, just economic transition, impact networks, and/or related frameworks
 - o Familiarity with the work/approach of food policy councils in particular (prior strategic planning for another food policy council is a plus).

Submission Requirements

Please limit the submission to 5 pages.

1. General information
 - Name of consultant/firm, address, phone number, email address, and website (if applicable)
2. Introduction
 - Describe your approach to strategic planning and your alignment with the desired qualifications outlined above.
3. Background and experience
 - Relevant work activities, expertise, knowledge, and strategic planning experience.
 - Personnel - Please include information about all team members who will be involved with the project, including names, email addresses, titles, experience, and education.
 - References - Three client references (please include each individual's name, address, phone number, email address, affiliated organization, and relationship to the bidder).
4. Approach
 - Describe your workplan, which includes but is not limited to: timeline, activities, and proposed schedule
 - Describe relevant frameworks and tools to be utilized

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- Describe how your approach connects to the values expressed in the Guiding Principles section of [SOFSA's current bylaws](#).
- 5. Detailed budget not to exceed \$35,000
 - Estimated ranges are fine if they include a not-to-exceed cap
 - For out-of-town applicants, please include travel expenses for 2 two-overnight visits to Syracuse, NY for facilitation sessions discussed below
- 6. Optional (does not contribute toward page limit)
 - To help us better understand if we are meeting goals to work with a diverse group of vendors and contractors, please consider providing the following demographic information about the consultant/consulting team:
 - o Race and ethnicity
 - o Gender identity
 - o Sexual orientation
 - o Disability status
 - o Lived experience of food or housing insecurity
 - o Veteran status
 - Supplemental materials
 - o Deliverable from a similar project
 - o Resume(s) and/or curriculum vitae

Anticipated Timeline *subject to change*

- Request for Proposals Published: June 16, 2023
- Proposals Due: July 14, 2023
- Notification of Interviews: July 28, 2023
- Finalist Interviews: August 7-9, 2023
- Notification of Selected Consultant: August 11, 2023
- Work to Begin: September 4, 2023
- Facilitated Session #1 - Food Justice Symposium (*In-person in Syracuse, NY*): Sat, October 28th
- Facilitated Session #2 - to be designed by Consultant (*In-person in Syracuse, NY*): Jan/Feb 2024
- Preliminary Report to SOFSA Leadership: March 2024
- Strategic Action Plan presented to SOFSA General Membership (*virtual*): April 18, 2024
- Technical Assistance for Plan Implementation: April-June 2024
- Work to Conclude: June 30th, 2024

Submission Process

Please submit your application as a single email attachment to director@syrfoodalliance.org. All submissions should be received no later than **July 14, 2023 at 5pm**.

Clarifying questions can be directed to director@syrfoodalliance.org with the subject line 'Strategic Plan RFP Question' by July 7, 2023.

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Addendum

History of the Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance

Early History (pre-2019)

Onondaga County was second in the nation to initiate a food system planning effort through establishment of a food policy council. Operating from 1984-1988, the Onondaga Food Systems Council coordinated a county-wide effort to mobilize food system stakeholders but was ultimately unsustainable. In 2012, the county government established the Onondaga County Agricultural Council (often referred to as the “Ag Council”) to lead efforts to establish a more comprehensive food systems approach, bridging sectors to effect broader change.

In 2016, [FoodPlanCNY](#) brought together diverse voices from across Onondaga County to tell the story of food. Funded by the AgCouncil, FoodPlanCNY was collaboratively developed to assess how we grow, distribute, consume, and dispose of food. The plan captures the strengths and aspirations of the county’s food system, and identifies steps to improve policies, programs, and individual actions that shape the way food moves from farm to plate. An intended outcome of the process was the creation of a Central New York Food System Council. The council was intended to continue to listen to and address the needs of the community through open forums and regular monthly stakeholder meetings. The findings and recommendations from this work highlight the urgent need to coordinate food system efforts and an eagerness of diverse stakeholders to engage directly in this process. In addition to FoodPlanCNY, key activities to address health equity through access to food include a 2015 Syracuse Food Justice Symposium; a 2017 assessment of the food environment in Syracuse by the Onondaga County Health Department; and a 2018 symposium exploring opportunities to address food disparities in the region. Each of these activities built on previous efforts to increase access to healthy foods in the county. Collectively, these efforts produced momentum and in 2019, with funding from the New York State Department of Health’s Population Health Improvement Program (PHIP), partners engaged a consultant from the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future to conduct initial interviews of a range of local stakeholders to inform formation of a food council.

Visioning Phase (2019 - early 2020)

Partners in Syracuse and surrounding Onondaga County recognized the need to collaborate on food systems challenges and the importance of resident engagement and leadership. To make these ideas actionable, Transforming Communities Initiative Syracuse (TCI) hired a local consultant in May 2019 to convene partners and facilitate a year-long visioning process. Approximately 30 different organizations contributed to those foundational efforts – organizing themselves under the name Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance (SOFSA) – to collaboratively craft preliminary

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mission and vision statements as well as the objectives, goals, and activities upon which the proposed project is based. Convenings of the entire partnership took place five times over the course of the year with numerous advisory team, committees, and working groups in the intervals between.

Responding to Converging Crises (March through May 2020)

The period of March 2020 through May 2020 was a turbulent and transformative period for SOFSA. Only a few months into its formal existence, the organization began to chart its course and establish a game plan for next actions. The timeline laid out by Evan Weissman, Matt Potteiger, Mary Carney, Emilija Postolovska, Jessi Lyons, and Maura Ackerman was planned to reach its zenith in a public-facing SOFSA launch celebration in June 2020. With plans to host a full SOFSA membership meeting, as well as continue to build SOFSA's membership through community engagement recruitment strategies, the organization was poised for an interactive and productive Spring and Summer 2020. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic beginning, plans rapidly changed.

With an original focus on public relations and celebration, the organization quickly pivoted to meeting the needs of the community through rapid response efforts. Instead of gatherings for celebration, SOFSA knitted a countywide map of emergency meal and grocery distribution sites organized by school districts, local businesses, and food pantries. SOFSA conducted a comprehensive scan of food systems players to identify the ways in which their operations have temporarily and/or permanently changed amid the crisis. Instead of general listening and recruitment sessions, SOFSA set out to collect stories about how the pandemic was affecting residents of Syracuse, Onondaga County, and Onondaga Nation – specifically related to both food access and food business operations – which in turn informed the organization's strategic approach, policy goals, and direct efforts to alleviate the most immediate needs of our community.

The March-May 2020 period helped SOFSA solidify itself as an organization positioned to tackle systems issues both in policy/systems change and in direct action. The 90-days rapidly repositioned the organization, but came with bitter news on top of an already-worsening pandemic: on April 9, 2020, SOFSA lost our friend and co-founder Evan Weissman passed away unexpectedly. When the organization was awarded a USDA Regional Food Systems Partnership planning grant, Evan was responsible for many pieces of inspiration that resulted in SOFSA's ultimate success in the project's funding. To him, we owe an inexpressible amount of gratitude for his visionary leadership and the trails he blazed so that SOFSA can do the work it completes today.

Planning & Experimentation (2020-2022)

As a brand-new organization operating under the fiscal sponsorship of Syracuse Grows, the SOFSA network mobilized in early 2020 to respond to the impacts of the pandemic on our neighbors across the county by compiling and publicizing food access points, leveraging funds to

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support community-based emergency food initiatives, and supporting school food service staff through added volunteer capacity and resource-sharing. As the network has collaborated to react to changing needs of our community through the many phases of the pandemic, the strength, potential, and necessity of our partnership became even more evident. Later that year, SOFSA received a \$25k seed grant from the Ag Council, and later, a two-year Regional Food Systems Partnerships planning grant.

A core component of our RFSP planning grant was a collaboration with Syracuse University's Lender Center for Social Justice through a faculty research fellowship to support SOFSA's ongoing development and ensure a solid organizational foundation rooted in social justice. The fellowship provided dedicated resources to help SOFSA identify best practices for building food councils inclusive of historically-marginalized participants; provide space for knowledge sharing between researchers, students, and community members; and fundamentally shape the council's future strategic operations. The fellowship supported the initiation of a racial justice learning series including supporting food systems leaders within SOFSA to attend an "Uprooting Racism in the Food System" training offered by Soul Fire Farm.

In partnership with the Lender Center and numerous other partners, SOFSA hosted a launch event for FoodPlanCNY at the Central New York Regional Market in July 2021. Speakers included County Executive Ryan McMahon, County Legislator David Knapp, Syracuse Mayor Ben Walsh, and FPCNY Co-Author Matthew Potteiger. In addition to the unveiling of the final plan, attendees engaged in interactive data collection sharing their ideas for a better food system and how they want to be engaged in SOFSA's work. The event received press coverage from both Syracuse.com and our local NPR affiliate WAER. These data collection and listening methods shaped a participatory Community Learning Series that was piloted in summer 2022, engaging over 50 food system stakeholders to provide meaningful input for our partnership's activities and structures.

With input from SOFSA's membership alongside findings from Lender projects, SOFSA has generated an Equity & Justice Action Plan outlining key areas for building a more equitable food system, including: 1) creating opportunities for ongoing learning among SOFSA members and leaders to continually strive to dismantle injustices in the food system 2) seeking funding to establish a career pathway program to support emerging leaders representing historically-marginalized groups; 3) improving the accessibility of our work (esp. when meeting virtually); and 4) operating BIPOC and LGBTQ+ affinity gathering spaces.

Looking Ahead (2023 and Beyond)

In late 2022, Syracuse Grows – on behalf of SOFSA – became the first ever entity to be awarded two USDA Regional Food Systems Partnerships grants. The newly-funded implementation project seeks to strengthen local capacities and community connectivity toward a thriving regional food

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system in the city of Syracuse – the largest city in Central New York – as well as surrounding Onondaga County and neighboring Onondaga Nation. The project knits together the shared interests of this county’s unique composition to support a coordinated, equitable, and resilient regional food system.

The award includes \$765k in federal funding matched with \$238k from local funders (including the Ag Council, the Allyn Family Foundation, and the Central New York Community Foundation). In total 35% of these funds will go “out-the-door” to support other partners’ efforts.

Further Background & Resources

Additional resources on SOFSA’s history, governance, impact, and finances can be found here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1I20wvOSUdZXNjOY9NeBY2rcFUNrB-dNr?usp=drive_link

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