

Community Food Systems Mentorship Program FAQ

Eligibility

Q: Is this restricted only to staff of non-profit organizations?

A: No. If you're working in the space of developing community food systems, please apply and use the application to explain your situation, your journey, where you are in this work, and why you are seeking mentorship. Be honest in your explanations! This will help the mentors get a better sense of how they might support you.

Q: Put another way, I'm with Extension/a University/do not have 501c3 status/not employed by a food-focused organization, can I still apply?

A: Yes. If you're working in the space of developing community food systems, please apply and use the application to explain your situation, your journey, where you are in this work, and why you are seeking mentorship. Be honest in your explanations! This will help the mentors get a better sense of how they might support you.

Q: I'm a full-time student, am I eligible for the Mentorship program?

A: No. As a full-time student you would not be eligible. This program is designed for folks who are working in food systems.

Q: Can two people apply as a “team” for mentorship?

A: Yes. Two people can work with a mentor together and this has been a successful strategy in the past. Please fill out one shared application together. Do keep in mind that while we are open to it, the mentor also reviews the applications to discern the best fit.

Q: Where are most people in their career when they participate in the Mentorship program?

A: Generally, mentees have been involved in food systems work for at least a few years. That said, some mentees are fairly new to food systems work and just beginning their career, while others have been involved for many years. We do suggest having at least a few years of experience in this field as you apply.

Q: I live and work in Canada, can I still apply?

A: No. Unfortunately, at this time this program is only open to folks living and working in the US.

Application Details

Q. What's the cost of participation?

A: There is no cost for participation. This program is offered by the FSLN at no-cost to participants thanks to the generous support of the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#), and our partners at [ISED Solutions](#) via the [USDA Community Food Projects National Training and Technical Assistance Center](#).

Q: How many applicants are there usually?

A: We usually receive over 100 applications which is around triple the capacity of the Mentorship program.

Q: How many mentees are selected per cohort?

A: Each mentor works with three mentees. There will be 36 mentees in the Spring 2026 cohort.

Q: Are there multiple cohorts per year?

A: We currently offer one cohort per year, with applications opening in February and mentorship running April-July.

Q: I missed the deadline to apply! Can I still send through an application?

A: Unfortunately, due to the volume of applications we receive and timeline we work with, we're unable to extend deadlines or accept late applications.

Q: Can someone who is in the visioning stage apply? And/or if I'm developing a new program (versus working through an existing program).

A: Yes. Please describe where you're at and what you're trying to achieve in the application.

Q: Is it an issue if I'll be traveling out of the country for an extended period of time?

A: Please share this in your application. This may be something the mentor should know about in case they are also traveling, or if the gap seems like it may not be conducive for the relationship building and growth that the Mentorship program offers.

Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCAM)

Q: I work with a few organizations in different capacities and am seeking mentorship for myself as a professional in both of these regards. How should I complete the OCAM?

A: Please complete the OCAM for the organization you feel most involved in. Within the application, there is space to elaborate and explain your position in both organizations.

Q: How do you use the information in the OCAM?

A: The OCAM has a few different uses:

- Its primary use here is as a diagnostic to help you and your mentor prioritize goals for your time together. We do not use it to evaluate your application and your OCAM 'scores' won't affect your eligibility for the program.
- We collect OCAMs from participants of many FSLN services as it provides a picture of where organizations are feeling challenged and where they are excelling. This helps us design technical assistance and professional development opportunities that are relevant and useful for you.
- It is also a helpful tool for organizational teams to diagnose or assess their organization's capacity and where you might need to focus more attention – feel free to take it back to your teams and use it for strategic planning sessions!

Q: Is the OCAM data made public?

A: The individual OCAM responses are not made public. However, we do aggregate anonymized responses to provide a picture of where organizations are feeling challenged and where they are excelling. Your individual responses will **not be identifiable in the aggregated information**, which will be shared with FSLN members and partners.

Q: Is the OCAM intended to reflect my perspective only or more of an organizationally approved response? Does this need to be the organization's perspective or my personal perspective?

A: When you are completing the OCAM as part of an application, you can choose to fill it out from the perspective of your work within the larger organization, OR you can complete it with your team. It is up to you.

Q: I'm at a very large organization and feel like our team operates a bit differently from our larger organization... how should I fill out the OCAM?

A: The OCAM was designed primarily for the leadership of a small organization. If you're at a larger organization, then we suggest focusing on the capacity of the areas you can influence, so completing this at the level of your team may be the best option for you.

If you find that you are not eligible to apply to the Mentorship Program at this time, we invite you to share your questions about community-based food systems, your professional development, and more with the FSLN Community through one of the FSLN [discussion groups](#), and you may find a thought partner there.

Still got questions? Reach out to us at foodsystemsleadershipnetwork@gmail.com and we will do our best to answer your questions!