

Mardag Foundation | Food Access Grant Program | Application Scoring Rubric

Grantmaking focus:

Mardag Foundation’s Food Access Grant Program supports organizations and programs that ensure access to food and address inequities in the food system.

Mardag’s Food Access Grant Program will consider proposals that address systems change and/or direct service work to eliminate barriers and increase access to culturally relevant, healthy, affordable food for low-income immigrant/refugee or Native American/Indigenous children, youth and families in the East Metro and Greater Minnesota.

The Food Access Grant Program will consider proposals that address one or more of the following:

- Extent to which the work empowers immigrant/refugee or Native American/Indigenous communities in reclaiming ownership and control of the food system – the right to grow, sell, access and eat food that is fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate and grown with integrity for the well-being of the people, land and animals
- Extent to which the work strives to provide culturally relevant food options in areas with lower access

Section 1: Overview of Proposed Work & Your Role in Community

Scoring Description: To what extent does the applicant clearly describe their proposed food systems change work? Does the applicant demonstrate how their work empowers immigrant, refugee, or Indigenous communities to reclaim ownership and control of the food system; including the right to grow, sell, access, and eat food that is fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and grown with integrity for people, land, and animals? If not centered on food sovereignty, does the applicant demonstrate how their work increases culturally relevant food options in communities with limited access?

Score

Description

5

The response clearly and compellingly describes the proposed food systems work and the organization’s role in community. It demonstrates strong alignment with food sovereignty principles, showing how communities, particularly immigrant, refugee, or Indigenous communities, are empowered to reclaim ownership and control of food systems. The work clearly advances culturally relevant, accessible, and sustainable food practices.

- 4 The organization describes its proposed work and role with clarity and shows meaningful contribution to culturally relevant food access. Connections to food sovereignty or community empowerment are present, though they may not be fully developed or deeply integrated throughout the response.
- 3 The response provides a basic description of the work and its intended impact but may lack specificity or a clear throughline. While culturally relevant food access is mentioned, the connection to community empowerment or broader food systems change is only partially articulated.
- 2 The proposed work is described in vague or general terms, making it difficult to understand the organization's role or impact. Connections to culturally relevant food access or community empowerment are minimal, unclear, or not well supported.
- 1 The response does not clearly describe the proposed food systems work or the organization's role in community. There is little to no evidence of alignment with food sovereignty principles or efforts to increase culturally relevant food access.

Comments
or
Questions

Section 2: Current and Future Conditions

Scoring Description: To what extent does the applicant identify the key challenges and root causes within the food system that they seek to change? Does the applicant analyze how these conditions create barriers for immigrant, refugee, or Indigenous communities in accessing or controlling their food systems? To what extent does the applicant articulate a compelling vision for a more just and equitable food system, including the outcomes or shifts they seek in structures, relationships, mindsets, power dynamics, or policies?

- | Score | Description |
|-------|--|
| 5 | The response clearly identifies key challenges and root causes within the food system and provides a thoughtful analysis of how these conditions create barriers for immigrant, refugee, and/or Indigenous communities. It articulates a compelling and well-defined vision for a more just and equitable food system, |

including specific outcomes or shifts across systems, relationships, power, or policy. The connection between current conditions, proposed work, and desired change is clear and cohesive.

- 4 The organization demonstrates a solid understanding of challenges and root causes and connects them to community-level barriers. The vision for a more equitable food system is clear, though some elements of the analysis or intended shifts may not be fully developed or explicitly connected.
- 3 The response identifies some challenges or barriers but remains broad or descriptive rather than analytical. The vision for change is present but may be high-level, with limited clarity on the specific outcomes or systems shifts the work aims to influence.
- 2 The description of challenges and root causes is vague, incomplete, or lacks clear connection to community impact. The vision for a more equitable food system is minimally described or unclear, and intended outcomes or shifts are not well articulated.
- 1 The response does not clearly identify key challenges or root causes, nor does it explain their impact on communities. There is little to no articulation of a vision for change or the outcomes the organization hopes to achieve.

**Comments
or
Questions**

Section 3: Strategies & Activities

Scoring Description: To what extent does the applicant present a cohesive set of strategies that advance food justice and long-term systems change? Strong applications will demonstrate how their work redistributes power within the food system by equipping immigrant, refugee, and Indigenous communities to exercise greater ownership and control. The applicant should show how they are creating conditions for culturally rooted and equitable food access while also building the leadership, infrastructure, and collective capacity needed to sustain these changes.

Score

Description

- 5 The response presents a clear and cohesive set of strategies that advance food justice and long-term systems change. It demonstrates how the work meaningfully shifts power by supporting immigrant, refugee, and/or Indigenous communities to exercise ownership and control of the food system. The approach integrates leadership development, infrastructure building, and collective action to create lasting, culturally rooted, and equitable food access.
- 4 The organization outlines well-defined strategies that contribute to food justice and improved food access. Elements of power-shifting and community leadership are present, though connections across strategies or to long-term systems change may not be fully developed.
- 3 The response describes a set of activities or approaches but may feel programmatic or disconnected rather than part of a cohesive strategy. While there is some alignment with food justice or equity goals, the connection to power redistribution or sustained systems change is only partially articulated.
- 2 The strategies are described in broad or unclear terms, making it difficult to understand how the work will lead to meaningful change. There is limited evidence of how the approach shifts power, builds community capacity, or contributes to long-term outcomes.
- 1 The response does not clearly describe strategies or activities that advance food justice or systems change. There is little to no indication of how the work will shift power, support community leadership, or create lasting impact.

**Comments
or
Questions**

Section 4: Community Voice

Scoring Description: To what extent does the applicant show that their work is informed by, formed with, and benefiting the communities most impacted? Strong applications should demonstrate how community voices shape their strategies and how they collaborate with organizations, coalitions, or public partners to build collective strength toward shared goals.

| Score | Description |
|--|---|
| 5 | The response clearly demonstrates that the work is informed by, formed with, and directly benefits the communities most impacted. Community voice is meaningfully integrated into decision-making and strategy, not just consulted. The organization shows strong, authentic collaboration with partners, coalitions, or public entities to advance shared goals and collective impact. |
| 4 | The organization describes how community voices inform and influence its work and identifies who benefits. Collaboration with partners is evident, though the depth of shared decision-making or collective strategy may not be fully articulated. |
| 3 | The response identifies the communities served and suggests some level of engagement, but it is unclear how deeply community voice shapes decisions or strategy. Partnerships may be mentioned but appear more transactional or loosely connected to shared goals. |
| 2 | The description of community engagement is vague or surface-level, making it difficult to understand how communities inform or shape the work. Collaboration with others is limited, unclear, or not meaningfully connected to the work. |
| 1 | The response does not clearly identify the communities most impacted or how they are involved. There is little to no evidence that community voices inform, shape, or benefit from the work, and collaboration is absent or unclear. |
| Comments or Questions | |

Section 5: Financial Health and Organizational Capacity

Scoring Description: To what extent does the applicant demonstrate the organizational capacity and financial health needed to sustain their work over the next five years? Strong applications describe how their budget aligns with their goals, identify areas of growth, and outline the resources needed to carry the work forward.

| Score | Description |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 5 | The response clearly demonstrates organizational capacity and financial health to carry out the work over the next five years. It thoughtfully connects budget, staffing, and infrastructure to systems change goals, while also naming areas for growth and how resources will support long-term sustainability. |
| 4 | The organization provides a clear overview of its capacity and financial position, with general alignment between budget and goals. Areas for growth and resource needs are identified, though connections to long-term sustainability or systems change may not be fully developed. |
| 3 | The response includes general information about staffing, budget, or operations but lacks depth or clear alignment to systems change goals. Resource needs or areas for growth are mentioned but remain broad or not fully connected to sustaining the work. |
| 2 | The description of organizational capacity or financial health is minimal or unclear, making it difficult to assess readiness for long-term work. The relationship between budget, goals, and resource needs is loosely addressed or underdeveloped. |
| 1 | The response does not provide enough detail about organizational capacity or financial health to determine readiness. It is unclear how the organization will resource or sustain the work overtime. |
| Comments or Questions | |