

Request for Applications: NourishMD



Program Overview

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is pleased to announce the second round of the NourishMD Grant Program. Round 2 introduces a tiered application framework designed to better serve Maryland's high-need fresh food access areas while optimizing the administrative process.

The primary goals for this grant cycle include:

- **Reducing Applicant Barriers:** Utilizing a tiered application approach to prevent high-need applicants from being disqualified by early-stage technical or administrative errors.
- **Increasing Impact:** Focusing resources on areas with the highest community need through quantitative evaluation and weighted scoring.
- **Speeding Up Execution:** Streamlining the review and approval gates to execute grant agreements significantly earlier than in the previous round.

Two-Tiered Application Process

To maximize efficiency and provide targeted technical assistance, the NourishMD Round 2 application is split into two distinct phases.

Tier 1: Eligibility and Triage

The objective of the Tier 1 application is to verify baseline eligibility and measure community need before applicants invest significant resources required for a full grant proposal.

- **Eligibility Floor:** All projects must meet an absolute Fresh Food Gap Score (FFGS) floor of 65. Applications with a score below 65 will be removed through an automated binary check during submission. Please use [this link](#) for more information on the Fresh Food Gap Score Methodology and how to identify your FFGS.
- **Use of Grant Funds Narrative:** This section will include a business overview, and an overview/needs statement for the use of grant funds. Detailed breakout of RHTP/GO Bond fund requests will be completed by the applicant in Tier 2, with assistance provided as needed.
- **Triage Scoring:** Qualified Tier 1 applicants will be scored based on the following criteria to determine advancement to Tier 2:

Criteria	Scoring Scale & Metrics	Max Points
Community Need (FFGS Tiers)	5 pts: FFGS > 90; 4 pts: 85–89; 3 pts: 80–84; 2 pts: 75–79; 1 pt: 65–74	5
Priority Community Designation	3 pts: Project within Just Community, ENOUGH Act, or Sustainable Community zones; 0 pts: Outside zones	3

Criteria	Scoring Scale & Metrics	Max Points
Additional Data Points	Region, MMM Status, and RHTP Eligibility (Captured for alignment and distribution)	0

Tier 2: Comprehensive Project Evaluation

Applicants who successfully pass the Tier 1 triage and receive leadership approval will be invited to submit a full Tier 2 application. This phase requires detailed documentation to ensure project viability and administrative compliance.

Submission Requirements:

- **Project Narratives:** Comprehensive descriptions of the project, including its impact on fresh food access and a breakout of RHTP and GO Bond funded expenses.
- **Line-Item Budgets:** Detailed expense budgets including vendor quotes and unverified cost assumptions.
- **Governance & Compliance Documents:**
 - Articles of Incorporation and Organization By-Laws.
 - SDAT proof of good standing, State tax registration documentation, IRS W-9 Form (name must match exactly).
 - Mandatory disclosure for active bankruptcy or litigation.
 - Any additional documentation that may be required by DHCD.
 - **RHTP Applicants Only:** Attestation regarding duplication and supplantation.

Evaluation Framework

Tier 2 applications will be evaluated based on a maximum 35-point scoring matrix.

Tier 2 Evaluation Matrix

Criteria	Description of Exceptional Scoring	Max Pts
Plan Feasibility & Sourcing	Comprehensive line-item budget, clear timeline, and formal vendor quotes.	8
Social Value & Impact Sizing	Clear evidence funds act as a deal-closing mechanism or yield high need-weighted household returns.	10
Healthy Food Threshold	Verified >20% floor space or active inventory dedicated to healthy options with clear diagrams.	5
SNAP / EBT Infrastructure	POS system active for SNAP/WIC/EBT or a specific, budgeted implementation plan.	6
Local Procurement	Clear tracking proving the majority of inventory is sourced from Maryland vendors.	4
Energy Efficiency	Allocations tied to Energy Star refrigeration, heat pumps, or electrical.	2

Needs of the State Criteria

Beyond the rubric score, final award determinations will be made based on the "Needs of the State," which includes strategic policy alignment and quantitative ROI calculations:

- **Quantitative ROI Framework:** Evaluation of the **Capital Leverage Ratio** (total capital mobilized relative to grant request) and the **Community Return Ratio** (FFGS-weighted households served relative to grant request).
- **Geographic Distribution:** Ensuring a balanced statewide portfolio of projects across all regions.
- **Programmatic Alignment:** Considering how projects bundle with other state streams like Maryland Market Money or Vacant Reinvestment Initiatives.

Timeline

The following tentative schedule outlines the Round 2 milestones from launch to final disbursement.

- **September 10, 2026:** Soft launch and virtual information sessions, see below for registration links.
- **September 22, 2026:** Official launch; Tier 1 Application Portal opens (12:00 p.m. EST).
- **November 2, 2026:** Tier 1 Application Portal closes (5:00 p.m. EST).
- **February 4, 2027:** Tier 2 Application Portal closes (5:00 p.m. EST).
- **February – March 2027:** Tier 2 Review & Funding Recommendations finalized.
- **April 2027:** Award Notifications and funding approvals.
- **May 2027:** Execution of grant agreements and fund disbursement.
- **May 2028:** End of grant period and final deliverable deadline.

Engagement Strategy

View the informational webinars on the [DHCD YouTube Page](#).

Funding Overview & Partnership with Maryland Market Money

NourishMD Round 2 provides grant awards ranging from **\$25,000 to \$150,000** per project. These funds are designed to bridge capital gaps for projects that expand fresh food access in high-need areas.

Beyond Direct Grants: NBW Loan Options

NourishMD serves as a vetting engine for broader state of Maryland business development initiatives. Applicants may also be evaluated for direct loan products and companion lending through the **Neighborhood BusinessWorks (NBW)** program. A checkbox is provided in the application for those interested in exploring these flexible lending options.^[1]

[Maryland Market Money \(MMM\) Partnership](#)

In partnership with the Maryland Department of Agriculture, NourishMD applicants will be considered for coordinated funding opportunities through both programs. MMM provides a dollar-for-dollar match for purchases made using federal nutrition benefits at participating Maryland farmers markets, farm stands, and other on-farm retailers, while also providing technical assistance, training, marketing, and other support to participating businesses.

Currently participating MMM Access Points are encouraged to apply for NourishMD funding. New NourishMD applicants seeking to become MMM participants will be prioritized for MMM participation as funding becomes available. Applicants that are jointly eligible for both programs and apply to both will receive priority consideration for awards from each program, subject to available funding and program eligibility requirements. Farmers markets and on-farm retailers seeking technical assistance to accept SNAP/EBT may indicate this in their NourishMD application and will be connected with MDA for assistance with the process.

¹ Indicating an interest in your application for these programs does not guarantee acceptance or an award of funding from DHCD.

Eligibility Criteria & Healthy Food Threshold

For-profit and nonprofit businesses engaged in retail activity are eligible, provided that they:

- Serve a community with a high fresh food gap score per the Maryland Community Business Compass
 - High fresh food gap score is defined as a score of 65% or higher
- Operate at least 5 days per week, year round (farmer's markets/on-farm markets exempt from 5-day requirement and must operate at least 10 months of the year)
- Employ a maximum number of 500 workers;
- Are registered and in good standing with the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT);
- Offer, or plan to use grant to offer, a variety of high-quality fresh produce, or a mix of fresh, frozen, and preserved produce, as well as other healthy grocery items (e.g., whole grains, dairy products, fresh meats/proteins);
- Ensure that at least 20% of their retail inventory or floor space dedicated to food sales will be comprised of healthy food items;
 - This percentage may be based on:
 - Square footage of food display space, or;
 - Dollar value of inventory for sale.
 - Applicants must provide documentation, photos, or a store layout to confirm compliance with the requirements.

Food Desert Definition (FFGS 65+)

To qualify for NourishMD funding, projects must be located in a designated "Fresh Food Gap" area. Round 2 has raised the **Fresh Food Gap Score (FFGS) floor to 65**. This quantitative threshold ensures that state resources are prioritized for communities with the most significant barriers to healthy food access.

Eligible Retailers

Eligible retailers include, but are not limited to:

- Grocery stores;
- Corner stores;
- Farm stands and other on-farm markets;

- Farmers' markets;
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA, using an average FFGS for delivery area);
- Food co-ops;
- Delivery retailers serving a population with low fresh food access; and
- Small retail stores where the majority of inventory or sales are food-related (provided no more than 25% of gross sales are derived from alcohol/tobacco products).

Healthy Food Categories & Threshold

All funded projects must maintain a **Healthy Food Threshold** of at least 20% of floor space or active inventory dedicated to healthy options. Healthy food categories include:

- Fresh, whole, or frozen fruits and vegetables (preferably local and seasonal);
- Whole grains (e.g., brown rice, oats, whole grain breads);
- Dairy products;
- Fresh, frozen, or lean proteins (e.g., poultry, fish, beans, tofu, eggs);
- Minimally processed items (low in added sugar, sodium, and saturated fats); and
- Healthy pantry staples (e.g., olive oil, canned vegetables, dried beans, spices)

Applicants must provide clear diagrams or proof of inventory to verify compliance.

Eligible Use of Funds

State GO Bond funds may be used for any of the below expenses that directly support the expansion of healthy food retail, including:

- Purchase of furniture, fixtures, and/or equipment (e.g., Energy Star-rated refrigeration, shelving, etc.);
- Renovation, build-out, and facility upgrades;
- Capital needs related to inventory expansion (non-prepared foods);
- Working capital involved with expansion or renovations/construction;
- Infrastructure and technology for SNAP/EBT setup;
- Purchase of a vehicle for fresh food delivery;
- Commercial solar installations or heat pumps to reduce operating costs.

Federal Rural Health Transportation Program Funding may be used for any of the below expenses that directly support the expansion of healthy food retail, including:

- Purchase of furniture, fixtures, and/or equipment (e.g., Energy Star-rated refrigeration, shelving, etc.);
- Facility upgrades to support cold storage or point of sale expansion ONLY (ie. electrical upgrade for a new walk-in, grant year WIFI costs for POS terminal usage, cement slab for new walk-in)
- Infrastructure and technology for SNAP/EBT setup;
- Marketing costs to promote the RHTP funded efforts only; (Please note, pre-approval for these expenses is required.)
- Purchase of a vehicle for fresh food delivery;
- Electrical installations or heat pumps to reduce operating costs.

Please note, expenses related to pre-harvest infrastructure are not eligible for any grant funding under this grant program.

Tier 2 applicants must provide a detailed budget justification annotating the GO Bond/RHTP funding breakout. A template and technical assistance will be provided to all Tier 2 applicants.

Required Documentation

Applicants advancing to Tier 2 must submit a comprehensive package, including:

- **Project Narratives:** Impact on fresh food access and RHTP vs. GO Bond funding breakout.
- **Financials:** Line-item budgets with vendor quotes.
- **Governance:** Articles of Incorporation, By-Laws, State Tax Registration, SDAT Certificate of Good Standing.
- **Compliance:** IRS W-9 and mandatory litigation/bankruptcy disclosures.
- **RHTP Applicants Only:** Attestation regarding duplication and supplantation.

Grant Award Information

Grant award amounts are subject to funding availability. If approved and awarded, DHCD will enter into a grant agreement with subgrant recipients. DHCD will provide subgrantees with a lump-sum disbursement of 100% of the total grant funds.

Subgrantees need to be registered with the Maryland Comptroller's Office to receive electronic payment. DHCD maintains the authority to suspend or terminate the grant agreement and demand immediate repayment of any or all disbursed funds should DHCD determine the subgrantee has failed to comply with the project's scope of work or fails to provide required documentation.

RHTP Funded Grants

All partners and subawardees of Maryland's RHTP cooperative agreement with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) must agree to and comply with RHTP terms and conditions included in:

- [CMS Notice of Funding Opportunity \(NOFO\)](#)
- [CMS NOFO - Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Maryland Notice of Award Terms and Conditions](#)
- [CMS RHTP Frequently Asked Questions—April 2026](#)

Contact Information

Contact information: For questions regarding this RFA, please email: nourishmd.dhcd@maryland.gov.

Disclaimer

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