

For Immediate Release

Contact:

Sweet P Bailey

Illinois Public Health Institute

224-348-8772

sweetp.bailey@iphionline.org

Lake Michigan School Food System Innovation Hub Launches in Midwest to Fuel Change for Region's School Food System

CHICAGO, IL, Jan. 9, 2024 — [Lake Michigan School Food System Innovation Hub](#) announced today that it will open two funding opportunities for collaborations of local food system leaders that want to ensure their school meals better reflect the Lake Michigan region's harvests and cultural diversity. These grants are funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's [Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative](#) to improve the nutritional quality of school meals through food systems transformation. Grant applications open Feb. 1, 2024, for prospective grantees in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin.

This new initiative offers grants up to \$250,000 to build pathways for local and nutritious food to reach more schools — especially in areas that don't have equitable access to resources. Through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Illinois Public Health Institute convened state leads in Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, and Wisconsin; and other national and regional partners to create the Lake Michigan School Food System Innovation Hub. The Innovation Hub seeks applicants who have ideas to strengthen the local school food system and want to join collaborative teams to bring those ideas to life.

"Schools meals are vital to the health and well-being of our nation's children, providing critical nutrition to tens of millions of students every school day," said Cindy Long, administrator of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. "The Innovation Hub is a prime example of USDA's deep commitment to ensuring schools have all the support and tools they need to continue to rise to that task. We are excited to fund innovative ideas that will strengthen the local food supply chain and help ensure students throughout the Midwest have better access to nutritious and appealing foods."

Grants from \$10,000 to \$250,000 are available to teams that may include farmers, food producers, suppliers, distributors, food service directors, community-based program leaders and more. The Innovation Hub will invest in community-driven ideas of all sizes and scopes — from hyper-local projects to multi-state collaborations — so long as projects direct more resources to students, schools, and local economies. The Innovation Hub will prioritize investments in communities that have experienced racism and discrimination and/or communities that have been underserved. This includes Black or African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic or Latine, Asian or Pacific Islander, or other people of color; people who live in rural

areas; and people with limited incomes. More information about eligible applicants can be found at [InnovateSchoolFood.org](https://www.innovateschoolfood.org).

“The Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI) is thrilled to have the opportunity to work with partners in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin to fund innovative school meal projects across the region,” said Elissa Bassler, CEO of IPHI. “Communities are the best designers of innovative projects that will help students get the nourishing meals they need to thrive. We can’t wait to see — and support — innovations that will transform the school food system and address historical inequities in ways that better serve Midwest communities.”

For more information, visit [InnovateSchoolFood.org](https://www.innovateschoolfood.org). Prospective grantees in eligible states of Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin can register for an introductory webinar on Jan. 24 at this link ([in English](#)) or this link ([in Spanish](#)).

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Lake Michigan School Food System Innovation Hub nurtures community-driven collaborations that reimagine students’ meals. By working together, we’re building pathways for local, nutritious and culturally relevant food to reach more schools across Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Indiana — especially in areas that don’t have equitable access to resources. We offer funding, training and other help to collectives of schools, school districts, organizations, farmers, producers, suppliers and distributors who are transforming our school food system to better serve our communities. We are [funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) and convened by the Illinois Public Health Institute. Organizations leading the initiative include Seven Generations Ahead (Illinois), Michigan State University’s Center for Regional Food Systems (Michigan), NWI Food Council (Indiana), Kids Forward (Wisconsin), healthTIDE (Wisconsin), National Farm to School Network, Chicago Food Policy Action Council and Action for Healthy Kids. [InnovateSchoolFood.org](https://www.innovateschoolfood.org)