Sourcing Local in Ontario School Food Programs

Grant Guidelines

Overall Purpose

This grant stream is intended to support 5-6 communities in Ontario to increase their capacity to procure, process and/or distribute local food for school food programs throughout their region, with a priority on small- to mid-sized producers. More broadly, we are looking to support concrete projects that could explore and test different small-scale community-led approaches to local procurement in school food programs, which could be replicated or expanded upon in future years.

About the Guidelines

This document provides guidelines for organizations considering applying for a grant to source more local food for their school food program in Ontario. These grants are provided by Farm to Cafeteria Canada (F2CC) in partnership with The Schad Foundation.

We will host an instructional webinar on **December 8 at 2 pm ET** to share information about the grant stream and to allow time for live Q&A. The webinar will be led in English; however, participants can ask questions in French or English.

What is local food?

F2CC defines local food as food that is consumed as close as possible to where it is produced. We encourage people to source local food first within their community or region, then within their province, then within Canada. This grant aims to support food purchased as close as possible, at least within Ontario, with a focus on sourcing from small- to mid-sized producers wherever feasible.

Local food includes traditional Indigenous food harvested from the land and water.

Funds Available

Farm to Cafeteria Canada has **$150,000** available for one-time grants of **up to $30,000 each** (we estimate funding **5-6 community organizations** across Ontario). Applicants can submit grant requests in any amount.

Timeline for grant use

March 2027 - June 2028 (16 months)

Organizational Eligibility

Applications are open to **not-for-profit organizations/entities** that are **directly involved in the delivery of school food programs** (i.e. programs that provide food to students in K-12 schools) **in Ontario** and **serve multiple schools** in a region.

Eligible organizations:

- Incorporated not-for-profit organizations and charities
- School boards and education bodies
- Band councils and tribal councils
- Municipal governments and health authorities

For-profit entities and individual schools are not considered to be eligible recipients; however, they could be partners on a project.

Please reach out if you have any questions about your organization's eligibility.

Grant Goals and Anticipated Outcomes

The goals of these grants are to:

- Increase the long-term capacity and coordination to procure, process and/or distribute local food for school food programs throughout a region in Ontario.
- Sustainably increase the amount and quality of local food served in school food programs in Ontario.
- Support growth in incremental sales that local food providers can leverage through access to school markets, particularly among local small- and mid-sized producers. Improve everyone's understanding of barriers and opportunities to local purchasing/distribution in distinct communities in Ontario, as well as how challenges can be overcome.
- Enable those procuring food to have more inspiration, knowledge, skills, validation and connections in this area.

Eligible Costs

These grants have been designed to be flexible to meet the needs of communities and may be used towards:

- Project planning (hiring a consultant or putting staff time towards outreach and planning)
- Coordination time and/or travel costs to build relationships and partnerships and implement the project plan
- Purchase of equipment or infrastructure upgrades
- Scaling up existing initiatives
- Product market readiness exploration/implementation so that products can be more ready for the school market
- Outreach materials to increase participation in local procurement initiatives or services
- Other activities that would support increased local food procurement for the school food programs served by the organization
- Administrative costs of up to 12%

NO, the grant funds *cannot* be used for:

- Food costs to supply the school meal service (food costs must be recovered through other means)
- Staff salaries for ongoing logistics and coordination beyond the cost associated with the proposed project.

Please note that the application form itself includes a budget template, which must be submitted along with your application. While we do not require quotes as part of the application, we strongly encourage you to get estimates as part of your budget planning.

Application Process and Timeline

Wednesday, November 25, 2026	Online application opens.
Tuesday, December 8, 2026, at 2:00 pm ET - register here	Join a virtual conversation to connect with us, learn more about the grants, and ask all your questions!
Friday, January 22, 2027	**Last day to apply.**
Week of March 8, 2027	Applicants contacted; Grant period begins.
End of June 2028	Program deliverables and reporting complete; Grant period ends.

Additional Considerations and Reporting

- Applicants will benefit from showing that they are currently involved with procuring food for school food programs, including established relationships with schools, food producers or suppliers, and additional community supporters.
- F2CC draws on partnerships for our success, and we know that strong school food programs rely on multi-sectoral partnerships within schools and communities. We will look for a demonstration of diverse partnerships, or ways you are working toward them, in your application.
- As part of the application process, we will ask applicants to develop and articulate a sustainability plan to ensure that the work can continue after the grant period ends.
- We will ask you to confirm that any content drafted with the assistance of AI tools has been carefully reviewed and edited by a human member of your team to ensure it is accurate, feasible for your specific context, and reads as authentically your own, in language your team would naturally use.
- We will ask those who receive funding to take part in regular conversations with other grantees (approximately every 6-8 weeks) to explore questions with each other, share experiences, and document learnings that can be shared widely after the grant term.
- All funds must be fully spent by June 30, 2028.
- We will ask all grant recipients to share baseline program metrics and commit to a set of self-identified quantitative targets at the outset of their grant. Baseline metrics will include:
    - the current dollar value of local food procured annually
    - the number of relationships held (contracts and partnerships) with local food providers

    - and the number of schools or students served.

  Examples of self-identified targets might include:

    - increasing annual local food purchases by a specified dollar amount or percentage
    - establishing relationships with a set number of new producers
    - or expanding local food to a defined number of additional schools or students.

- At the end of the grant term we will also ask you to share with us a short story along with photos or videos that show the impacts of your initiative on the school communities you serve and the local food system you work within.

Selection Criteria

We will assess the grant applications with a small committee and award grants based on the potential impact that the project will have on the region's ability to source local food for school food programs, the potential for the project to serve as a model that can be learned from, replicated or expanded upon in future years, and the organization's capacity to administer the grant.

Background: Why are we offering this grant stream?

The National School Food Policy lays the groundwork for healthier students, stronger communities, and a more equitable school food system. One of the 6 Principles of the National Policy is that "Food is locally sourced where possible and reflective of local and regional circumstances". The newly released National Food Security Strategy states a Key Performance Indicator: "By 2030, increase the proportion of local food sales by small and mid-sized producers by 25%".

Public food procurement has been identified by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization as a potential "game changer" to promote the development of more sustainable food systems, local procurement and the adoption of healthy diets. School food programs present a significant opportunity to generate revenues and create stable markets for local food providers, as well as to strengthen local and regional food systems. In the context of recent tariffs, the conversation about how to support local food in school food programs is relevant and timely.

However, there are many barriers to sourcing local food for school food programs. The recent report co-funded by The Schad Foundation and Greenbelt Foundation, Growing Local: Strengthening School Food Programs with Ontario Food, as well as F2CC's work with the Arrell Food Institute, Closing the Local Food Gap in Ontario explore opportunities to address many of these barriers and offer valuable routes that can be taken by a multitude of stakeholders.

Provincial and territorial governments will be looking for more local food procurement models that work. In light of this moment in time, we are looking to support concrete projects that could explore and test different small-scale community-led approaches to local procurement in school food programs in Ontario that could be replicated or expanded upon in future years.

How to Apply

Applications will be accepted online from November 25 - January 22.

- Access our Grant Application Template, which includes a link to the online application form.

Get Inspired!

Are you looking for ideas relating to local food? Check out our Resource Centre!

Questions?

Need help with your grant application or have questions about the application process? Reach out to us at hthoma@farmtocafeteriacanada.ca