



Request for Proposals

Assessment of Food Systems and Food Security in the Mat-Su Borough

Issued February 23, 2024 | Deadline March 20, 2024, at 5pm AK Standard Time

About Us

Mat-Su Health Foundation (MSHF) is the official business name of Valley Hospital Association, Inc., which shares ownership in Mat-Su Regional Medical Center (MSRMC). In this capacity, the MSHF board members and representatives actively participate in the governance of Mat-Su's community hospital and protect the community's interest in this important healthcare asset through board oversight. The MSHF invests its share of Mat-Su Regional's profits into charitable works that improve the health and wellness of Alaskans living in Mat-Su.

Vision: A community where all persons have the opportunity for a healthy life

Mission: To Improve the Health and Wellness of Alaskans Living in the Mat-Su

Values: Prevention, Access, Wellness, Fairness, Equity, Collaboration, and Leadership

Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

At the MSHF we believe that for all Mat-Su residents to have an opportunity for a healthy life we must intentionally work to reduce health disparities. We can do this by understanding and addressing inequities and root causes. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are instrumental to increasing health equity, as they promote representation and acceptance. As an organization and community partner, we are on a journey to learn and work toward diversity, equity, and inclusion in our programs and operations.

Healthy Foundations Focus Area

The MSHF created the Healthy Foundations focus area in September 2020, after seeing an upswing in the number of food-specific grant requests and noting that several key food providers were asking for assistance with major capital projects, operating funds, and significant infrastructure improvements that would buttress or fill gaps in Mat-Su's food system. The focus area's systems work is critical, because it involves community voices in convenings and field trips that highlight assets in Mat-Su's food system; addresses barriers and fills gaps in the system; "feeds and waters" promising programs and projects, such as Matanuska Community Farmers Market and lessons for children and adults in how to grow produce; and makes the system more equitable by connecting all Mat-Su residents to existing resources that educate about gardening, subsistence, sources of local foods, and proper nutrition.

About Mat-Su

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough (Mat-Su) is situated on the ancestral lands of the Ahtna and Dena'ina peoples in Southcentral Alaska about 40 miles northeast of Anchorage. The Mat-Su covers 25,258 square miles, about the size of West Virginia, and has a population of about 110,000 people. The borough includes three incorporated cities – Palmer, Wasilla, and Houston; 26 rural/remote unincorporated communities; and two federally recognized Alaska Native Tribes.

The Mat-Su Borough continues to be one of the fastest growing regions in Alaska and the only region with consistently positive net migration. The Mat-Su gained 22,757 residents from 2010 to 2020, becoming the second-most populous borough in Alaska. Mat-Su is also becoming more diverse. During the same period, the percentage of Mat-Su residents identifying as a race other

than white increased from 15% to 22% of the total Mat-Su population. In terms of percentage change this was a 79% growth in population compared to 10% growth in the white population. Residents identifying as two or more races are the second largest group at 11.5% (114% change from 2010 to 2020) followed by American Indian and Alaska Native alone at 6.4%. Additionally, of the most populated boroughs in Alaska, Mat-Su has the fastest growing older adult population. From 2012 to 2022, the population 60 and over grew by 72.4% in Mat-Su compared to 40.7% for Alaska, 28.2% for Anchorage, and 37% for Fairbanks North Star Borough. Mat-Su is home to 16% of Alaska's veteran population, of which 26% experience disability compared to 14% of the general population.

Background

Around 10% of the Mat-Su population lives below poverty, however this varies by census tract from the lowest at 5.3% in Gateway (Tract 11) to the highest at 20% in Houston (Tract 4.01). More children live in poverty (12%) compared to the general population. Fifty-two percent of households in the Mat-Su are cost burdened, meaning they spend 30% or more of their household income on rent leaving less income available for healthy foods and medical care.

In recent years, Mat-Su's most vulnerable populations have struggled to access nutritious food. The pandemic resulted in job losses, high inflation for food and other necessities, and other negative economic impacts for many Mat-Su residents. In the 2022 Mat-Su household survey, 19% of households reported the pandemic made it more difficult to access food. This was significantly more impactful for rural (27%), low income (36%), and gay/lesbian/bisexual residents (32%). As the State of Alaska declared the end of the public health emergency and supplemental funding ended, Mat-Su residents lost temporary increases in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits; they stopped receiving those benefits in September 2022. The State of Alaska has since been grappling with crisis-level backlogs in administering SNAP benefits. The backlog number swelled in Fall 2023 to over 12,000 pending applications, and as of February 2024, the Alaska Division of Public Assistance notes a SNAP backlog of 3,500 applications statewide. Mat-Su residents caught in the SNAP backlog have been turning to Mat-Su's food bank and pantries creating increased demand for these nonprofits, many which were already struggling due to the pandemic.

Purpose of this Assessment

- To assess food insecurity, food sovereignty, and food support systems and community strengths in Mat-Su.
- To disseminate findings and lessons learned to strengthen food systems in Mat-Su.
- To gather data and identify community needs and assets that can inform policy.

Scope of Work/Services

The Mat-Su Health Foundation seeks proposals from experienced evaluators to design and carry out an assessment of food systems and food security in the Mat-Su Borough.

Evaluation Questions

Below are suggested key evaluation questions to facilitate responses to this RFP. The selected contractor will work in collaboration with MSHF staff and partners to determine final questions.

- What has been the impact of the SNAP backlog on Mat-Su residents and food systems?
- What inequities and disparities exist in Mat-Su that perpetuate food insecurity?
- What barriers do Mat-Su residents face in accessing nutritious foods, culturally relevant foods, or diet specific foods?

- What are the opportunities for Mat-Su residents to learn about healthy eating, nutrition, maximizing their food budget, growing and harvesting food, or preparing food?
- What policies exist that facilitate or hinder food access for Mat-Su residents across the lifespan?

Anticipated Activities & Deliverables

The anticipated deliverables for this project include but are not limited to:

- Working with MSHF staff to finalize a detailed plan and timeline for assessment methods and deliverables.
- Consulting with MSHF staff and as needed Mat-Su Food Systems Steering Committee to inform the assessment and deliverables.
- Conducting an environmental scan to identify Mat-Su food resources and programs, review current policies, and compile relevant secondary data.
- Designing and implementing a food access survey.
- Designing and conducting key stakeholder interviews.
- Providing updates throughout the process and communicating with key MSHF staff on progress and roadblocks.
- Producing at a minimum a final report summarizing all findings and key takeaways.
- Collaborating with MSHF staff to share results with the Mat-Su Food Systems Steering Committee, grantees/potential grantees, community partners, and other key stakeholders and community groups.

Proposal Requirements

Proposals should include responses to the seven sections outlined below. Proposals shall not exceed 10 pages, single-spaced, excluding the budget, resume/CVs of key personnel, references, and sample work product.

1. Evaluation approach

Describe in detail your approach to fulfilling the scope of services and answering the proposed questions, including:

- Processes for designing and informing the evaluation
- Proposed methodologies for data collection and analysis, including considerations for data equity
- How you will apply a health equity lens to the approach
- Data security processes and systems

2. Qualifications and experience

Identify who will serve as project lead and the roles of any additional project team members. Describe the experiences and qualifications of the individual, team, and/or subcontractors who will engage in this work, including:

- Experience in evaluating or assessing food systems
- Experience incorporating primary and secondary data and mixed methods evaluation
- Experience working in Alaska and/or the Mat-Su
- A resume or CV for key personnel, including any subcontractors who will make significant contributions to the work
- A sample work product or report

3. Engaging key stakeholders and priority populations

Briefly describe how you intend to engage key stakeholders (e.g., MSHF staff, grantees, Mat-Su Food System Steering Committee members) and a spectrum of Mat-Su residents (e.g., low-income individuals or families, older adults, veterans, people with disabilities) in the assessment development and implementation.

4. Challenges and limitations

Briefly describe any anticipated challenges and limitations to completing the assessment and any proposed strategies to address or mitigate them.

5. Workplan

This project is anticipated to start on or before May 1st and end mid-December. Provide a workplan that identifies key activities, dates and timelines, and deliverables.

6. Budget

The proposed budget should not exceed \$80,000 for services conducted in 2024 and should be commensurate with the scope of work. Include a detailed project budget and justification. Include all direct and indirect costs, as well as the anticipated total number of hours at various hourly rates. For contractors outside the Mat-Su Borough, travel costs specifically related to this project are allowable as direct costs.

7. References

Include the name, organization, and contact information for a minimum of three references that can speak to the contractors' (subcontractors', if appropriate) experience.

RFP Timeline

Applications must be submitted no later than 5 p.m. Alaska Standard Time, March 20, 2024. Please submit your application in PDF form via email with the subject line "Mat-Su Food Assessment RFP Submission" to Danielle Reed at dreed@healthymatsu.org.

Applications will be reviewed by April 1, 2024 and final candidates will be invited for an interview. We anticipate selecting a contractor by April 12, 2024 with the goal of having a signed contract in place on or before April 24, 2024.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Evaluation approach – 40 pts
 - Evaluation design and methodology (20 pts)
 - Demonstrated commitment to health equity (10 pts)
 - Data security processes and systems (10 pts)
- Qualifications and experience - 30 pts
 - Appropriate staffing structure for proposed scope (5 pts)
 - Experience with similar assessment projects (15 pts)
 - Experience relevant to Mat-Su (10 pts)
- Meaningful engagement with stakeholders and priority populations - 10 pts
- Workplan - 10 pts
- Cost Effectiveness - 10 pts

Questions

If you have questions or would like to discuss this RFP further, please contact Danielle Reed, Director of Data and Impact, dreed@healthymatsu.org.