

THE BETTER FOOD POLICY FUND

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



betterfoodpolicy.org



Dear Better Food Policy Fund Partners and Food System Advocates,

As we close out 2025, we do so in the wake of profound disruption across our local food systems. Farmers, families, food policy councils, and partners nationwide faced frozen grant funds for underserved communities, canceled climate-smart agriculture contracts, labor disruptions targeting our undocumented neighbors, and unjust cuts to the safety net programs that feed our communities.

In the midst of this upheaval, the Better Food Policy Fund faced a defining choice: focus narrowly on building our young fund, or step into the moment to meet urgent needs. **We are proud to say we did both.**

This year, we leaned into our core values: cultivating connection, remembering abundance (even when it felt elusive), dancing with complexity (and there was plenty of it), and shifting the funding landscape through participatory grantmaking. These values guided our decisions, strengthened our partnerships, and grounded us when the path forward was uncertain.

In 2025, the Better Food Policy Fund invested \$600,000 in 30 food policy councils across the country. These flexible funds unlocked critical capacity—enabling councils to advance policy change, build their coalitions and networks, engage community members, and weather the shifting federal context.

As we move into 2026, we are resolved in our efforts to raise awareness of the importance of food policy councils within philanthropy, shift traditional funding through participatory methods, and grow the fund's resources so that we can support additional food policy councils in these challenging times.

We are deeply grateful to the funders and food policy council partners who stood with us, trusted the process, and showed up with courage and generosity. Your leadership and commitment made this work possible—and made it matter.

With appreciation and resolve,

The Better Food Policy Fund Independent Advisory Committee

Adrienne Markworth
Ethan Gallegos
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Eileen Horn [staff]
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WHO WE ARE

The Better Food Policy Fund was founded in 2023 to support local, regional, and tribal groups working in the US to advance better food policy through civic collaboration.

We invest in food policy councils because they sit at the heart of systems change. These councils bring farmers, advocates, government agencies, and residents to the same table—creating space for inclusive dialogue and practical solutions. Through our grants, storytelling, and peer-learning opportunities, we help councils strengthen their work and amplify their impact.

The Better Food Policy Fund is a Collective Action Fund of the Tides Foundation. Our work is guided by an Independent Advisory Committee that reflects the values and lived experience of the communities we serve. This committee provides stewardship of the Fund, ensuring thoughtful decision-making, long-term stability, and a strong commitment to equity.

At the core of our approach is participatory grantmaking. By sharing decision-making power with those closest to the work, we aim to rebalance who holds power in food systems funding—and to help build a more just, resilient, and community-driven food system for all.



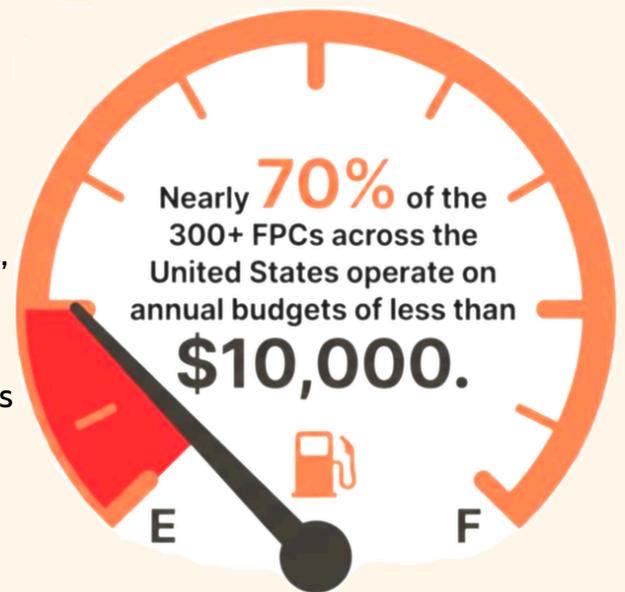
OUR WHY

In an era marked by food insecurity, public health challenges, and climate change, the demand for innovative, local solutions is urgent.

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) serve as essential organizations that unite diverse stakeholders—farmers, grocers, nonprofits, faith communities, economic development, local governments, funders, and residents—to strengthen and reimagine their local food systems. They expand food access through farm-to-school programs and municipal procurement policies, support farmers markets and food hubs, protect culturally important foods, and advance land use, waste reduction, and climate adaptation strategies that strengthen local food infrastructure.

There are 300+ food policy councils in the US, driving community-led initiatives that build resilient and equitable food systems for all. Currently, FPCs are dramatically underfunded. Nearly 70% are working with annual budgets of less than \$10,000.

To achieve better food policy across our communities, we must invest in the civic collaboration and local innovation of food policy councils.



OUR IMPACT

2024-2025 Inaugural Grantees

In April 2025, we convened our inaugural grantee cohort to share stories of impact. We utilized ripple effect mapping to capture some of the key impacts the first year of funding had on our grantees and their communities.

Grantees shared that BFPF funding allowed them to focus on **coalition-building, community engagement, movement building, and advocacy—activities that are critical to building vibrant local food systems, but are often difficult to fund!**

Grantees also utilized unrestricted funds from BFPF to:

- Hold a food security coalition convening that focused on expanding SNAP through the Food for All Oregonians Campaign (Gorge Grown Food Network).
- Foster collective engagement with the policy process (California Food and Farming Network).
- Launch a Tribal Food Sovereignty Initiative to advance initiatives i.e. access to land for gathering first foods (Gorge Grown Food Network).
- Grow their team's capacity to engage in state-level policy by expanding their executive director to a full-time position (NJ Food Democracy Collaborative).
- Successfully advocate for unfreezing of federal funds using BFPF unrestricted funding (Syracuse Onondaga Food Systems Alliance).
- Conduct strategic planning and implement top priorities (Western U.P. Food Systems Collaborative).
- And much more!

2024 -2025 Grantees

California Food and Farming Network

Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission

Duval Food Policy Council

Indianapolis Community Food Access Coalition

NJ Food Democracy Collaborative

San Diego Food System Alliance

South Carolina Food Systems Network

Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance

VI Good Food - Territorial Agricultural Group

Western Upper Peninsula Food Systems Collaborative



OUR IMPACT

Rapid Response Grantees

Applicants to our Rapid Response grant announcements described a year marked by unprecedented instability. Sudden federal funding freezes and terminations forced councils to lay off staff, pause programs, and scale back advocacy—often just as community need and engagement were increasing.

Many councils emphasized that without flexible, values-aligned funding, years of relationship-building and systems change work risk being undone.

Grantees utilized Rapid Response funds to stabilize core operations, bridge gaps left by federal funding cuts, and to sustain the critical coalition-building and civic engagement that is core to food policy council work.

Rapid Response Round 1

Alaska Food Policy Council (AK)
Arizona Food Systems Alliance (AZ)
Marion County Food Policy Council (SC)
MinneAg Network (MN)
The Passaic County Food Policy Council (NJ)
Prince George's County Food Equity Council (MD)
Rhode Island Food Policy Council (RI)
West Central Minnesota Food Council (MN)

Rapid Response Round 2

Kansas Food Action Network (KS)
Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition (MO)
NW Indiana Food Council (IN)
Wyoming Food Coalition (WY)
The Northern Colorado Foodshed Project (CO)
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas (CA)
Gaston County (NC)
Growing COB Food Council (SC)
McDowell Local Food Advisory Council & Foothills
Food Hub (NC)
Salem Food Policy Council (MA)
Hampshire Food Policy Council (MA)
Pottstown Area Food Collaborative (PA)

“This funding is a critical bridge that allows us to maintain momentum during a period of sudden and destabilizing funding loss.”

“Flexible funding will stabilize core operations and prevent the loss of community trust, relationships, and leadership.”

“This moment requires coordinated, community-led action to protect food access and local producers.”

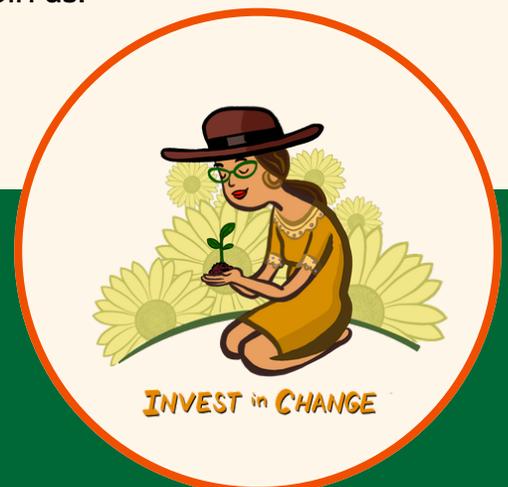
OUR PARTNERS

The Better Food Policy Fund has been supported by a committed group of founding donors who embraced participatory grantmaking as a means to shift power—placing resources and decision-making directly in the hands of grassroots leaders.

We are so grateful for the support of our founding seed funders who were excited to go first and go big!

- The From Now On Fund
- The Smith Edmonds Family Foundation
- Broad Reach Foundation
- Anonymous individual donors

Shifting the food system and local food policy is too complex and interconnected for any one donor to tackle alone. As we continue to build the Better Food Policy Fund, we are learning from other pooled funds—funds that engage the resources and expertise of values-aligned donors to amplify their impact and advance systems change. A strategic priority for the coming years is to invite more visionary donors. Come join us!



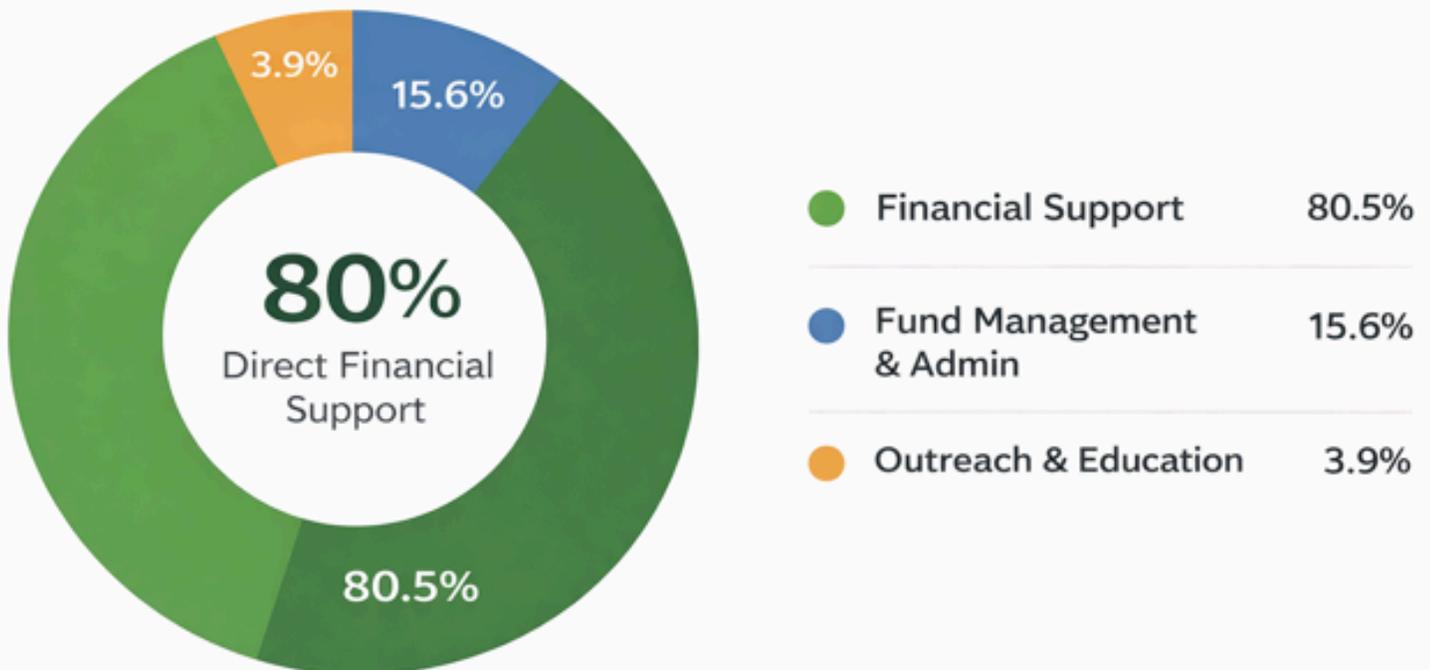
OUR FINANCIALS

The Better Food Policy Fund moves into the future in a strong financial position. In 2025, our pooled fund brought in \$650,000 from aligned funders. Given the unusual nature of the year in food systems and the funding losses experienced by our food policy council partners, the IAC decided to dip into our reserves to launch the Rapid Response grants for 20 grantees in 2025. Therefore, we spent \$780,000 in 2025.

We are proud that the majority of our funding goes to directly supporting food policy councils, with 80% providing direct support to them.

Allocation of Funds by Activity

Majority of funding supports direct financial assistance



LOOKING AHEAD

2025 was a year of tremendous growth for the Better Food Policy Fund. With only one prior year of grantmaking under our belts (2024), we doubled the financial resources we granted to food policy councils, and brought the number of councils served from 10 to 30!

As we look ahead to 2026, we know that many of the headwinds remain the same—federal policy uncertainty and reduced funding for food system innovations—but our commitment remains the same: We will continue to lean into our core values: cultivating connection, remembering abundance, dancing with complexity, and shifting the funding landscape through participatory grantmaking.

Top priorities for 2026 include: Turning our current Strategic Framework into a more robust Strategic Plan, adding new members to the Independent Advisory Council to expand our perspectives and expertise, strengthening relationships with values-aligned funders, growing our staff/consultant support team's capacity, and continuing to identify innovative funding mechanisms to support food policy councils across the country.

Cultivating connection is a core value of our Fund, and as we grow, we are excited to build more partnerships - with other funders, food policy councils, and food system stakeholders like you. Let's work together to build a more just, equitable, and sustainable food system for all!



OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



The Better Food Policy Fund is empowering community and government collaboration for better food policy and food systems. To do this, the Fund is focused on achieving four strategic priorities:

1 Providing funding to food policy councils:

The Better Food Policy Fund's primary strategic goal is to invest in U.S.-based food policy councils to advance collaborative, community-rooted food policy.

2 Cultivating connections for shared learning and increased visibility:

Since its inception, the Better Food Policy Fund has emphasized participatory strategy and relationship-building as core to its work. At the heart of this effort is a commitment to championing FPCs as vital, yet often undervalued, infrastructure for community-led food system change.

3 Expanding our funder network:

The early success of the Better Food Policy Fund was made possible by a committed group of founding donors who embraced participatory grantmaking as a means to shift power—placing resources and decision-making directly in the hands of grassroots leaders. To expand our reach and amplify our impact, we are building a broader network of philanthropic partners who share our commitment to locally driven food systems change.

4 Building a healthy backbone organization:

The Better Food Policy Fund is guided by an active and committed Independent Advisory Committee that ensures transparency, accountability, and values alignment. As the Fund grows, we are seeking to strengthen our capacity by adding staff to support the IAC, manage funder and grantee engagement, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the Fund's operations and governance structure.