



**Community Incubator Network (KIN)
Community Researchers for Food Justice
Community Granting Program
*Request for Applications (RFA)***

Applications Due: Friday, September 19th, 2025

Request for Applications (RFA)

Opens: Monday, August 18, 2025

Closes: Friday, September 19, 2025

Award Notifications: October 2025

Program Duration: January 2026 – January 2027

I. Background

Community Incubator Network (KIN)

The Community Incubator Network (KIN) is a collaborative initiative led by the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative's Community Council, YMCA of San Diego County, UC San Diego Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science and UC San Diego Center for Community Health. Funded by the American Heart Association's Health Equity Research Network (HERN) and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, KIN seeks to reimagine and transform traditional research paradigms—shifting how resources, knowledge, and power flow between communities, academia, and institutions.

II. Granting Program Overview

Community Researchers for Food Justice

Community Researchers for Food Justice is a year-long community granting program co-designed by the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative's Community Council, YMCA of San Diego County, UC San Diego Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science and UC San Diego Center for Community Health.

The program supports local leaders and community groups to design and lead their own research projects that advance food justice grounded in lived experience and community knowledge. It is



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intended for those already making an impact in their communities who are ready to deepen and expand their work through community-driven research.

We will fund up to 10 community-driven research projects across San Diego County. Applicants may request up to \$35,000 per project for a total of up to \$175,000 awarded in 2025. We are looking for projects that lead to practical, community-centered outcomes, ensuring research findings result in real impact and benefits for the community.

What Food Justice Means to Us

The San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative's Community Council describes their vision for food justice as:

"Promote and ensure that everyone has water, fresh, healthy, and culturally appropriate food within their reach, as well as education to raise awareness in the community about a healthier life." - San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative's Community Council

This emerged through a community-led process rooted in lived experience and grounded in practical, community-driven solutions.

Who is a Community Researcher?

Research can be a powerful tool to strengthen community projects, helping to uncover needs, tell your story, and make a stronger case for funding or change. A Community Researcher is a local leader, organizer, community member, neighborhood group, or community-based organization who uses research to make positive change in their community. They combine lived experience, local knowledge, and community relationships to ask important questions, gather information, and take action.

You don't need to be a trained researcher—you just need curiosity, commitment, and a vision for change.

Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- A community garden leader tracking how their program impacts families' food security
- A cultural center evaluating their nutrition education classes and making improvements
- A youth group conducting a study on food quality and cultural relevance in school meals, with recommendations presented to the school board



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- A resident exploring why neighbors aren't using a local food distribution service, and how it could be improved

Our Commitment to Data Ownership

Traditional research often collects information from communities without their input, benefit, or recognition. We are committed to changing that. In this program, Community Researchers have full ownership of their findings and will determine how their data are used and shared. The KIN team's role is to support and uplift Community Researchers by offering tools, resources, and guidance to help bring their visions to life—not to direct the process or shape the outcomes.

What We Offer & Expectations

- Flexible funding up to \$35,000 depending on project size and scope
- A shared experience with other community researchers to promote collaboration, relationships, and knowledge sharing
- Access to mentorship, research skill-building, and tailored support from UC San Diego
- Support with sustainability planning beyond the grant cycle if desired
- Opportunities to return as a mentor or trainer in future program cycles

We recognize one-time grants spark important work, but lasting change takes time. This funding is a seed to grow your work and position you for future opportunities. Optional learning sessions offered to Community Researchers will cover topics like applying for future funding, navigating fiscal sponsorship, and linking research to advocacy and policy. You may also be eligible for future microgrants or mini grants from partners like Health Equity Research Network (HERN), San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative (SDCOI), or Human Milk Institute (HMI), which our team can help you explore.

Community Researchers will be expected to:

- Design and lead a community-driven research project focused on food justice
- Join six cohort gatherings over the course of the program to build connection and shared learning with other Community Researchers
- Share progress updates with the broader KIN community throughout the program
- Participate in a mid-point check-in with program staff to share progress on key activities





This program is rooted in a trust-based approach. That means our check-ins won't feel like traditional grant reporting—they're meant to be open conversations where we learn alongside you, celebrate your progress, and offer support if and when it's helpful.

Eligibility

To be eligible, applicants must:

- Be based in San Diego County
- Making an impact in local communities
- Be able to complete a W-9 (SSN or ITIN accepted)

Nonprofit status or fiscal sponsorship is **not** required. Funds can go directly to individuals or community groups when we receive a completed W9 form.

III. Funding

Applicants may request funding based on the size and scale of their project. We offer three funding tiers.

All grantees will receive support from the KIN team—through optional tools, mentorship, and capacity-building resources to help bring their ideas to life. What differs by tier is the size and scope of the proposed work, as well as the level of project development expected at the time of application.

Grant Tier	Funding Available	Ideal For Projects That...
Seedling Grant	Up to \$10,000	Are in early stages or exploring new ideas with a smaller scope <i>If your research question or plan is still taking shape, our experienced team will work with you to refine it. We're looking for strong seeds of ideas and a willingness to learn and grow—not a perfectly polished proposal.</i>
Momentum Fund	Up to \$20,000	Are building on existing work and ready to scale up, requiring more funds <i>You have a fleshed-out plan and a clear idea of where you want to go and how to get there but may need additional support to refine your research question.</i>



Root & Reach Fund	Up to \$35,000	Are larger in scope, aim for broader impact, and require significant funding to implement <i>You have a clear research question, fully developed plan, and strong foundation for the proposed work.</i>
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This grant offers flexible funding, meaning funds can be used across a range of project-related expenses, based on the unique needs and goals of your work. Flexible funds give grantees the autonomy to decide how best to use the resources—whether that’s covering staff time, supporting community engagement, or purchasing materials that bring your project to life.

We encourage applicants to courageously request the level of funding they need. Final award amounts may be adjusted based on the project’s scope and the overall funding pool.

Allowable Expenses

Funds may be used for:

- Staff time or stipends
- Community participant incentives
- Supplies, materials, and meeting costs
- Food, venue rentals, permits, local transportation
- Tools for documentation, storytelling, or evaluation
- Costs that support the project’s research and community engagement goals

Funds must be used exclusively for the awarded project and used in San Diego County.

Payment of Grant Funds

Grant funds will be disbursed as a one-time lump-sum payment from the YMCA of San Diego County prior to the start of project activities.

IV. Application Process

Applicants will be asked to submit:

- Responses to questions in an online application form
 - *[Click here to view application questions](#)*



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- Project plan + budget
- 1 or more Community Endorsement(s), i.e. Letter of Support

Prefer to answer questions out loud? We offer transcription support.
Email KINcommunitygrants@ymcasd.org to request this support.

We encourage all eligible participants to apply, including applications from:

- Leaders from diverse backgrounds
- Individuals, grassroots groups, and small or emerging nonprofits
- Applicants of all research experience levels

V. Selection Criteria

Projects will be selected by a community-centered volunteer committee made up of individuals whose lived and professional experiences align with the values of this program. The KIN team will not serve on the selection committee but will facilitate the process.

Applications will be evaluated on a 1–10 point scale using the following criteria, which together will help assess the project's overall impact:

- **Practical Community Benefit**
How will this project create real, positive change that matters to the community?
- **Feasibility and Sustainability**
Does the project feel possible given the 12-month timeline, budget requested, and support this program can offer? Could the work grow or continue in some way after the grant?
- **Alignment with Food Justice Values**
How well does the project connect to the SDCOI Community Council's vision for food justice?
- **Equity and Inclusion**
How does the project center the leadership, needs, and dignity of those most impacted by food injustice?
- **Innovation and Creativity**
How does the project build on community creativity, resilience, and vision to move food justice forward?

Awards will be announced in October 2025. Applicants who are not selected will receive feedback and are encouraged to apply again in future cycles.



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VI. Technical Assistance for Applicants

We are here to support you in the application process:

- **Webinar:** Grant Info Session, Monday, August 18, 2025, at 5:00 PM
 - Register [here](#)
- **Webinar:** Budget 101, Wednesday, August 20, 2025, at 12:00 PM
 - Register [here](#)
- **Office Hours with Researchers** (by appointment) beginning the week of August 25, 2025.
 - Register [here](#)
- **Resources & Templates:**
 - Budget Example and Template
 - English [here](#) and Spanish [here](#)
 - How To Develop a Research Question
 - English [here](#) and Spanish [here](#)
 - Example Research Project
 - English [here](#) and Spanish [here](#)

Webinar recordings will be posted online on our website. Spanish interpretation will be available.

Email our team with questions about the program, technical assistance, or application:

KINcommunitygrants@ymcasd.org.

Ready to apply?

[Click here](#) to apply now or view the application questions [here](#) before getting started.



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Key Dates

Application Open	Monday, August 18 th , 2025
Application Close	Friday, September 19 th , 2025
Awards Announced	October 2025
Grant Agreements Finalized	November 2025
Funds Dispersed	December 2025
Program Duration	January 2026-January 2027

Email: KINcommunitygrants@ymcasd.org

Web: www.ymcasd.org/kin

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The Community Incubator Network (KIN) Community Researchers for Food Justice Community Granting Program is open to all eligible people. The KIN Program does not consider race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, and/or other protected categories as part of the application and selection process. All eligible participants are encouraged to participate.



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