Request for Proposals:
Facilitator for Planning Process

Urban Farm Enterprise Pathways Project

Issued by: NeighborSpace

Deadline for Proposals: February 12, 2015
SUMMARY
Urban Farm Enterprise Pathways Project (Urban Pathways) is a planning process for creating a thriving and independent business structure for Chicago’s urban farmers that is based in the Englewood farm district. Through this year long process, Neighborspace, working with an advisory group of Chicago’s urban agriculture not for profits, neighborhood organizations, and farmers will explore and document a strategy for establishing trained urban farmers on available land in Englewood and the surrounding area, creating a sustainable farm business structure.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT
Neighborspace, together with Grow Greater Englewood, representative urban farmers, Growing Home, Chicago Botanic Garden, Growing Power, and Angelic Organics Learning Center, will lay the framework for a farmer business structure based in Chicago’s Englewood urban agriculture zone. Through a facilitated year-long planning process, and with the assistance of consultants with expertise in relevant topics, the group will determine the issues that must be examined, communicate with the City and others in the urban agriculture community, research areas of concern, and draft a report relating the process for establishing a business structure to support small urban farmers. This project will leverage the substantial resources and expertise of Chicago’s established urban agriculture organizations for the benefit of the Englewood area. The creation of a successful business enterprise will have the capacity to transform the community in Englewood and beyond while providing a viable outlet for beginning farmers in training programs.

EXPECTATIONS:
Neighborspace seeks an experienced facilitator to lead the year-long planning process.
· The facilitator will work with Neighborspace to craft a planning process and will document all activities throughout the grant period.
· He/she will be responsible for organizing and leading monthly meetings including notifying meeting participants (organization representatives, farmers, and, as necessary, additional technical consultants), drafting an agenda, noting outcomes, and incorporating feedback and lessons learned into a cohesive framework.
· This individual will document processes, or coordinate additional consultants’ documentation process, related to obtaining land, mitigating and establishing the physical site, creating a business entity, obtaining a business license, and other issues that arise.
· He/she will also organize the documents established by the advisory group, for example, guidelines related to the technical process for production, governing structure of the cooperative and its relationship with the advisory group, and the process for applying to and criteria for being accepted into the cooperative.
PROJECT SCHEDULE
March-September 2015

TYPE OF CONTRACT
This is a fixed-price contract.

DEADLINE
Interested individuals and/or firms should submit a letter of intent indicating their interest and previous experience leading similar projects with nonprofit and/or nonprofit organizations. In addition all submissions should include the following materials:

- Estimate of fees associated with project
- A list of related projects completed by the individual/firm.
- At least three references.
- Any other relevant documentation

EVALUATION CRITERIA
Proposals will be evaluated by the advisory group based upon relevant experience, qualifications, cost, technical approach, familiarity with the geographic area and logistical capabilities.

Responses to this RFP must be received no later than February 12th 2015 and may be directed via email to bhelphand@neighbor-space.org or via mail to Ben Helpahnd, Executive Director, NeighborSpace, 445 N. Sacramento Blvd, Chicago, IL 60612.

BACKGROUND:
Urban farmers in Chicago face an uphill battle to accessing land and resources necessary to start a farm. Training opportunities are limited, and city regulations developed for industries unlike urban farming pose substantial barriers to anyone attempting to make a living off the land. And while the existing urban agriculture players in Chicago have made great strides in establishing production sites and training new farmers, these farmers face barriers to creating their own small businesses, including the inability to obtain a business license and sell produce independently. As a result, the demand for locally grown produce continues to outstrip supply.

Many of Chicago’s urban agriculture players agree that a new business model for urban farmers is a needed next step in growing Chicago’s agriculture community. Currently there is no small farmer business structure that focuses exclusively on produce grown in Chicago. Farm cooperatives based outside of Chicago accept farmers located in the City, but these systems are not targeted at urban farmers and thus do not respond to specific urban needs and opportunities. In addition, while Englewood has been targeted for developing Chicago’s agriculture district, no community organization based in the neighborhood currently has the capacity to facilitate land tenure for trained individuals wanting to establish for-profit farms there. Other large cities, such
as Seattle, New Orleans, and Vancouver, have established successful cooperatives that have succeeded in varying degrees.

Mayor Emanuel announced his dedication to urban agriculture in 2011, and later that same year, the City Council of Chicago approved an ordinance that made farming vacant Chicago land more accessible. Last year the Chicago Botanic Garden, Growing Power, and Angelic Organics Learning Center launched incubator programs on Chicago’s South Side; these programs provide beginning farmers with the agriculture knowledge and business skills to establish small farms. By 2016, graduates of these programs will be ready to start farms and will require land and support to do so. Locating these farmers in Englewood, which has established itself as a hub of food system activity, will complement the efforts of the Green Healthy Neighborhoods (GHN) initiative, which was formally approved by the City of Chicago Plan Commission in March 2014. The situation in Chicago, and Englewood in particular, is ripe for creating a business structure that will support beginning farmers and provide them with independence after completing training with one of Chicago’s established urban agriculture organizations.

The hope is that a new business model for urban farmers can provide substantial benefits to farmers just establishing small businesses. It will link beginning farmers with land and financing, one of the most difficult elements of starting an urban farm, and will create greater likelihood of success—a process that could be replicated in other parts of Chicago. Importantly, this process will help create a locally-controlled entity independent of the existing urban agriculture players.

ABOUT NEIGHBORSpace
NeighborSpace is the only nonprofit urban land trust in Chicago that preserves and sustains gardens on behalf of dedicated community groups. We shoulder the responsibilities of property ownership — such as providing basic insurance, access to water, and links to support networks — so that community groups can focus on gardening. NeighborSpace-protected gardens and farms give young and old alike an opportunity to get their hands in the earth and enjoy nature, right in their own neighborhoods. We understand that gardeners and farmers invest an enormous amount of time, funds, sweat and heart into these sites, and that these are the very ingredients that make community gardens beautiful and unique. The NeighborSpace land trust works to protect local sites by providing permanent protection against potential development, establishing local partnerships that ensure community management and control and covering basic liability insurance for gardeners and volunteers.