



Critical Conversations

In Person Gatherings Call For Ideas

The future of a resilient, just, and democratic food and agriculture system relies on more connected communities, aligned strategies, and increased resources. SAFSF recognizes the need for diverse capital partners to better coordinate around specific levers of change and regional opportunities, in alignment with the communities they serve. We also hear the need for more candid, strategic, and regionally accessible gatherings that can grow investment in food systems and foster greater alignment within and beyond the funder community.

To that end, SAFSF members are invited to propose and host **'Critical Conversations'** around the country in 2027. We want to hear from our members: what are the critical conversations we need to have now and where are we to gather? SAFSF will help shape your ideas into a series of high-quality, field building convenings in 2027. SAFSF is planning for up to 3 convenings with programming (e.g. half day to multi-day experience), and up to 3 community building events (e.g. a meal or happy hour). Number or type of event may change.

This is an opportunity for funders to collaborate with peers to organize and build the field, while leveraging SAFSF's expertise, legacy, and network of 125+ member organizations. Together, we will co-produce unique and transformative gatherings that move the field forward.

In Person Gatherings are designed to:

1. Increase funder interest in specific levers of food system change;
2. Increase strategic alignment among funders; or
3. Increase connectivity and community among SAFSF members

Here's how it works:

SAFSF will be responsible for:

- Managing event registration and attendee communication
- Event project and timeline management
- Speaker Research & Prep*
- Strategic Field Insights and Content Development*
- Promotion and Funder Outreach*
- Event Branding and Promotional Materials
- Vendor contracting and management
- Facilitation (*as needed*) and run of show management
- Write a "Key Takeaways" document and send a recap email to participants*

**Collaboration with event hosts.*

As an event host, your organization(s) will be responsible for:

- Securing the [event budget](#) through direct contribution or coordination among co-hosts
- Identify event venue (*contracting and payment can be directly managed by SAFSF*)
- Content Development Support and Speaker Ideas
- Promote and Invite Peers, especially beyond the SAFSF membership.

While proposals are *not* required to match the below geographies and topics, recent member surveys indicate strong interest in the following:

Geographies:

- California (Central Valley and Bay Area)
- Northeast
- Midwest
- Pacific Northwest
- Gulf Coast

Priority Topic Areas:

- Climate and environmental health (including industrial animal agriculture, pesticides, and regenerative agriculture)
- Food as Health (including Food is Medicine and ultra-processed foods)
- Land access, food sovereignty, and equitable land ownership
- Regional food system infrastructure (including food hubs and supply chain)
- Farm and Food Chain Worker Protections
- Emerging issues in food systems (e.g., AI, data and technology in food systems, water security, and community ownership models)
- Local and state policy (Including civic engagement and democracy protection)
- Integrated capital, capital innovation and orchestration for food systems

Gathering Types

- **Alignment Convening** - Defined as 1-2 day event with programmed sessions, meals, and potential for site visits. Designed for learning and strategic conversation, and to include many event elements (see below.) Typically, between 40 and 100 people support more in-depth conversations.
 - Previous examples for inspiration: a full day workshop on [equitable food economies](#) in Detroit, a strategic convening on [climate and agriculture](#) in Minneapolis, and an integrated capital convening with [local food entrepreneurs](#) in Chicago.
- **Community Building** - A more streamlined event production with a focus on a singular event type, such as a luncheon, networking reception, film screening and panel discussion, or field trip. Designed for community building. These events could be connected to a conference or other event that will likely be a gathering place for the SAFSF community. Attendance depends on format and venue.
 - Previous examples for inspiration: a **food justice** [dinner](#) in Atlanta, a [food and agriculture innovation](#) happy hour in Los Angeles, a luncheon on [emerging issues](#) in New York City, a conference adjacent reception on [Indigenous food systems](#) in Minneapolis.

Proposal must include:

- **Concept:** Details on theme and topics, thesis, speakers, event elements, and call to action (if applicable). What is the need for this event and how are you engaging the funding field? If your gathering is an alignment convening, please describe the event elements (such as workshops, site visits, film screening or performances, welcome reception, etc.)
- **Venue Location:** This is not required at the time you submit your idea, but we will count on you to identify and secure a location. If you have places in mind, even if not confirmed, please mention them.
- **Type of Event**
 - **Alignment Convening** - Defined as 1-2 day event with programmed sessions, meals, and potential for site visits. Designed for strategic conversation. Can include community building events within larger convening. Typically, between 40 and 100 people support more in-depth conversations.
 - **Community Building** - Examples include a luncheon, networking reception, film screening and panel discussion, or other event. Designed for community building. Attendance depends on format and venue.
 - **Other (please specify)**
- **Attendee Count** for the event
- **Audience**
 - Select the one that best fits your event):
 - Funder only (Attendees are funders but not exclusively SAFSF members)
 - SAFSF Member only
 - Open to non-funders (by invitation)
 - Open to public
 - Is your event by invitation only?

- No, registration will be open to anyone in the targeted audience indicated above.
- Yes, event attendance will be by invitation only.
- Maybe. I don't know yet.

- **Budget Template and Structure**

Here you will find two [Budget Templates](#). One budget is for an Alignment Convening, and the other is for a Community Building event. Also included are sample formats for each gathering type. These are meant as examples only: the Budget Templates should be adjusted to reflect your gathering's goals, size, and preferred features. Please note that certain budget line items are required, but costs may vary. We have provided you budget guidance based on SAFSF's experience in event production. Please fill out the Budget Template for your event as honestly and accurately as possible. For selected events, the final budget will be determined in collaboration with SAFSF.

Proposal and Event Guidelines

- [SAFSF members](#) may submit proposals for 2027 Gatherings.
- Each proposal must have **at least two (2) SAFSF members** as co-hosts. Extra points will be given for proposals coming from 3 or more SAFSF members, and from proposals that include a foundation as a co-host.
- Non-member funders may also be listed as hosts for the event.
- Events can be open to funders or non-funders but we encourage proposals to focus on engaging and educating funder audiences and consider the types of environments that enable honest and transparent discussions.
- Each event is highly encouraged to include an aspect that builds connections between SAFSF members.
- To ensure these events serve the SAFSF membership community, events must reserve 50% of tickets for funders.
- Events are non-solicitation/non-pitch environments and must follow [SAFSF Community Agreements](#)

Selection Criteria

- Alignment with [SAFSF mission, values, and goals](#)
- Supports the growth and/or coordination across the funding field for food and agriculture.
- Provides opportunity for member/funder connection and continued / future collaboration
- Alignment with SAFSF member interests
- **Extra points** for event proposals tied to priority regions, topics, or proposals from 3 or more members.

Process and Timeline

- Open Call For Proposals: August 7 - September 15, 2026
- Review: September - October 2026
- Notifications: by November 13, 2026
- Event Scheduling: During November
- Announcing 2027 Schedule: December 2026

Budget Requirements

- All event production costs must be paid by co-hosts either directly to vendors or through SAFSF.
- The sample budget is a suggested starting point for understanding the true costs associated with event production. You can view the budget as a “menu of options” for event production, and the event can be scaled up or down according to needs.
- In your proposal, you will indicate what you see as the core components for the event and budget. Upon agreeing to work together, that core budget will be the mutual expectation. The exact dollar amounts may vary in execution, but we will work to manage event costs to the expected budget and communicate with you when event costs exceed budget expectations.
- SAFSF requires a management fee to partner on the development and production of the event. This fee covers the estimated number of hours invested by our team to bring to life a thoughtful, impactful event.
 - The fee schedule is based on the size and requirements of the event, is additional to membership dues, and is non-negotiable.

- This fee can be processed as a grant, tax deductible donation, or added to membership dues when renewing (for this option, membership must be renewed by December 31, 2026.)

Ongoing Programming

Please indicate if you have an idea for ongoing strategic programming related to your proposal concept. For example, a virtual series, learning community or working group, and your willingness to resource this work.

Forum Location

Please indicate in your proposal if you would like your location and content to be considered for the 2028 SAFSF Forum.

For questions or assistance, please email events@safsf.org.