Circular Food Innovators Fund (CFIF)

Information Meeting

January 26, 2026
12 – 1 p.m.

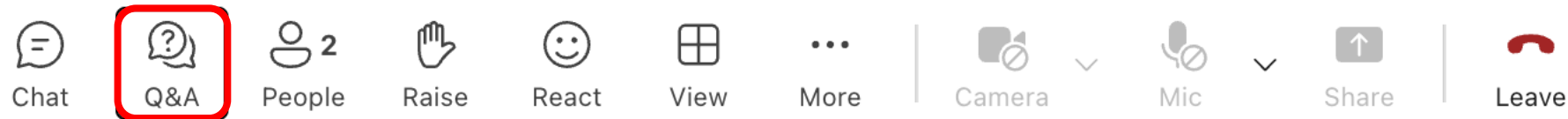**TORONTO**

Land Acknowledgement

Housekeeping

- This session is being recorded. The slide deck is already posted on the Circular Food Innovators Fund (CFIF) webpage. (toronto.ca/CircularFoodFund).

- The content discussed today is included in the Application Guidelines document, which is also posted on the webpage.

- Attendees will be muted by the hosts and will be unable to mute themselves.

- Chat is disabled

Question and Answer

- Please ask any questions using the Q&A button at the top of your screen.
  - The City will attempt to answer all questions asked during this session; however, if we are unable to do so, answers will be posted on the webpage.
  - We will be posting a list of questions received in this session and corresponding answers on the webpage.

Presentation Outline

- Overview of the Circular Food Innovators Fund Program
  - Objectives
  - Funding
  - Key Dates
- CFIF Projects
- Green Workforce Projects
- Application Process
- Evaluation Process
- Obligations of Grant Recipients and Project Implementation
- Question and Answer

More information can be found here:

toronto.ca/CircularFoodFund

CFIF Overview

Objectives

- The Circular Food Innovators Fund (CFIF) was introduced in 2024 to **support local small businesses** (both for-profit and not-for-profit) in the delivery of projects that will make progress toward eliminating single-use and takeaway items in Toronto and achieving a more circular food system.

- This round of funding will continue to support businesses in **implementing reuse systems** that replace single-use and takeaway items with reusable foodservice ware that is collected, cleaned and redistributed for further use in a circular system.

- This round of funding also introduces additional funding for the development and/or delivery of targeted **green workforce development activities** in areas relevant to the reuse systems and circular food economy focus of CFIF.

Funding

- **$5,000 to $35,000 per applicant** is available for CFIF projects.
- **$500 to $5,000 per applicant** is available for Green Workforce projects.
  - This amount is in addition to the funding that is received for CFIF projects.
- Funds will be allocated for activities taking place within a **term of 1 year**, anticipated to start in June 2026.
- This is **one-time** project-specific funding and is not an annual source of funding.
- The **City will not guarantee** that the total amount requested by a successful applicant will be granted.
- Grant recipients will be required to **provide receipts and/or other financial information** to verify moneys spent. Grant funding will only be provided for eligible costs.

Key Dates

Stage	Key Dates (2026-2027)
Application submission deadline	March 1, 2026 at 11:59 p.m.
Notification to applicants	May 2026
Project initiation	June 2026
Interim report deadline	December 1, 2026
Site visit (in-person or virtual)	January – February 2027
Project completion	12 months after project starts
Final report deadline	13 months after project starts

CFIF Projects

Reuse System Definition

Reuse System:

A business model in which reusable foodservice ware, provided to customers by a business for the delivery or takeaway consumption of food, is collected, cleaned and redistributed back for reuse by the business.

- Reusable foodservice ware includes **plates, bowls, cups, trays, glasses, straws, stirrers, condiment cups and utensils** that are made of durable materials to stand up to frequent washing and reuse.

- A reuse system can be operated by a **service provider** or can be operated by a **business selling food or beverage products** for delivery or takeaway consumption.

- A reuse system may include not only the reusable foodservice ware itself, but also the **infrastructure**, such as collection bins and cleaning facilities, and enabling technology, such as mobile applications to coordinate reverse logistics of reusable foodservice ware or barcode tracking systems for the reusable foodservice ware.

Eligible CFIF Projects

✓Proposed projects must **implement a new reuse system** OR **demonstrably enhance an existing reuse system.**

✓Eligible projects may deploy reuse systems:

- where food or beverages are being provided for takeaway consumption, which may include food distributed by vendors at public markets and events;
- where food or beverages are being provided for delivery, which may include catering services.

✓Projects are eligible if they deploy market-ready solutions, or solutions that are already in-market.

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Eligible CFIF Applicants

✓ The following applicants are eligible for funding:

- **For-profit businesses**, including business-to-business and business-to-consumer models

- **Registered charitable and not-for-profit organizations**, including Business Improvement Areas and academic institutions

- Previous CFIF recipients with a demonstrably different project

✓ Applicants must be a business that provides at least one of the following services, or be a Business Improvement Area or academic institution that is working with a business that provides at least one of the following services:

- **food and beverage products for takeaway consumption**, which may include food distributed by vendors at public markets and events; or

- **food and beverage products for delivery**, which may include catering; or

- **reuse system infrastructure for food businesses**

✓ Submissions are encouraged from businesses owned by women, visible minorities, Indigenous peoples and people with disabilities.

- For-profit businesses must **have fewer than 100 full-time employees**

- Any services funded through CFIF must take place **within the boundaries of Toronto**, except for services being delivered by urban off-reserve Indigenous-led organizations which may also provide culturally-based programming outside the boundaries of Toronto

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CFIF Funding Disbursement

For-profit applicants	Not-for-profit applicants
• May be funded up to 75 per cent of the total costs of the proposed CFIF Project, to a maximum grant of $35,000. • Must demonstrate an ability to contribute at least 25 per cent of the total CFIF Project costs.	• May be funded up to 100 per cent of the total costs of the proposed CFIF Project to a maximum grant of $35,000.

For all applicants:

• The initial 50 per cent will be disbursed at the outset of the project.
• The final 50 per cent will be disbursed at the conclusion of the project when a final report is submitted and accepted as complete by the City.

Eligible CFIF Expenses

Eligible Cost	Description	Maximum Grant Use
Project Materials and Supplies	Project materials and supplies, including product inventory (e.g., reusable containers) and equipment rental or purchase (e.g., washing stations)	Up to 100 per cent
Subscription Services	Project-specific subscription services (e.g., licensing an app to support use of reusable containers)	Up to 100 per cent
Capital Costs	Capital costs for renovations required as part of the Project	Up to 50 per cent
Direct Staff Costs	Direct staff costs for the delivery, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the project (e.g. salaries)	Up to 50 per cent
Purchased Services	Direct non-staff costs for purchased services from contractors and consultants to provide services such as web design, translation, communications and/or marketing campaign services for the Project	Up to 15 per cent

Eligible CFIF Expenses (2 of 2)

Eligible Cost	Description	Maximum Grant Use
Fees/Honoraria	Direct non-staff costs for fees/honoraria for professional skills instructors that are directly tied to the Project implementation	Up to 15 per cent
Overhead Costs	Overhead costs directly tied to the Project (e.g., room/facility and event rental fees)	Up to 15 per cent
Marketing Costs	Marketing costs directly tied to promoting the Project, including advertising and communication tools and materials (e.g., website, printing and distribution of marketing materials). Excludes "Subscription services".	Up to 15 per cent
Public Transportation	Stipends and local public transportation costs incurred by volunteers directly related to implementing the Project	Up to 15 per cent

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Green Workforce Projects

Green Workforce Development Definition

Green Workforce Development:

Activities that build worker skills, develop training resources and strengthen employment pathways needed to support Toronto's green and circular food economy.

- This includes efforts that help **train workers to adapt to reuse systems and initiatives** that enable circular innovators to design and scale training programs, curricula or workforce collaborations for broader green and circular food sector benefits.

- These green workforce development activities must **build skills or employment pathways** for Toronto residents related to reuse systems or sustainable practices in Toronto's food and beverage sector at large

- Your Green Workforce Project **does not need to be explicitly tied to your proposed CFIF Project**.

Eligible Green Workforce Applicants and Projects

✓ **Applicants that receive funding for a CFIF Project may be eligible for additional funding to complete a Green Workforce Project.**

✓ Eligible activities could include but are not limited to:

- Skill-building or upskilling in environmentally sustainable practices, technologies or systems;
- Training and work-based learning related to the food and beverage reuse sectors; or
- Creation of employment pathways in the circular economy.

✓ These activities must go beyond internal Standard Operating Procedures or content required for CFIF Project implementation and instead deliver sector-wide skill development, structured learning opportunities, or resources.

✓ Activities **do not need to be explicitly tied** to the delivery of the proposed CFIF Project but should contribute to **broader workforce capacity** in the sector.

Green Workforce Funding Disbursement

- No difference between for-profit and not-for-profit applicants.

- May be funded **up to 100 per cent** of the total costs of the proposed Green Workforce Project to a maximum of an additional $5,000.

- Where the total project cost exceeds $5,000, information must be provided on **other sources** of secured funding to implement the project.

- The **initial 50 per cent** will be disbursed at the outset of the project.

- The **final 50 per cent** will be disbursed at the conclusion of the project when a final report is submitted and accepted as complete by the City.

Eligible Green Workforce Expenses
(1 of 2)

Eligible Cost	Description
Training Content and Materials	Development of manuals, guides or digital resources to help staff understand reuse systems (i.e., sanitation, logistics, waste reduction)
Curriculum or Credential Development	Creation of micro-credentials, short courses or structured training pathways in partnership with colleges, training providers or workforce organizations
Hands-on Training Infrastructure	Purchase of equipment or supplies needed to train staff (i.e., sanitization kits, reusable container washing systems, mock training stations)
Partnered Training Delivery	Payments to workforce agencies, community organizations or innovation partners contracted to design and deliver training or employment-related components
Staff Upskilling and Cross-training	Internal "train-the-trainer" programs, staff certifications or cross-training to expand staff skills to include reuse logistics

Eligible Green Workforce Expenses
(2 of 2)

Eligible Cost	Description
Accessibility Supports	Translation, adaptive formats or other measures that improve training access for equity-deserving groups
Evaluation and Knowledge Sharing	Development of metrics, case studies or playbooks documenting workforce outcomes and lessons learned for the sector
Other	Expenses not included above that the City approves of through the evaluation process and that are materially necessary to implement the proposed Green Workforce Project

Up to 100 per cent of total funding for Green Workforce Project can be used for any category.

Application Process

Application Process

- Applications will only be accepted through the online portal in survey format that is available on the Circular Food Innovators Fund webpage (toronto.ca/CircularFoodFund).

- A PDF version of the application questions is provided as a tool for you to plan responses before making your official submission. **Word documents or submissions in any other form will not be accepted.**

- Applicants must submit a completed application form and confirm that all information provided in the application form and related attachments is true, correct and complete, as verified by an authorized official of the organization.

- **Incomplete applications will be disqualified.**

- Applicants can only submit **one application per funding round/year**. If more than one application is submitted by the same applicant (i.e., two or more different project proposals), only the application submitted first will be reviewed.

Application Requirements

Applications will require the following information:

- ✓ Contact information for the applicant(s) and the organization(s) applying for funding.
- ✓ Description of the proposed project, including a **completed project plan using the template provided** in the application and on the CFIF webpage.
- ✓ Information about the impact your project will make and how your project will be funded, including a **completed project budget using the template provided** in the application and on the CFIF webpage.
- ✓ Documentation to confirm the legal name of your organization, copies of any permits required, and declarations that your organization is eligible for funding.
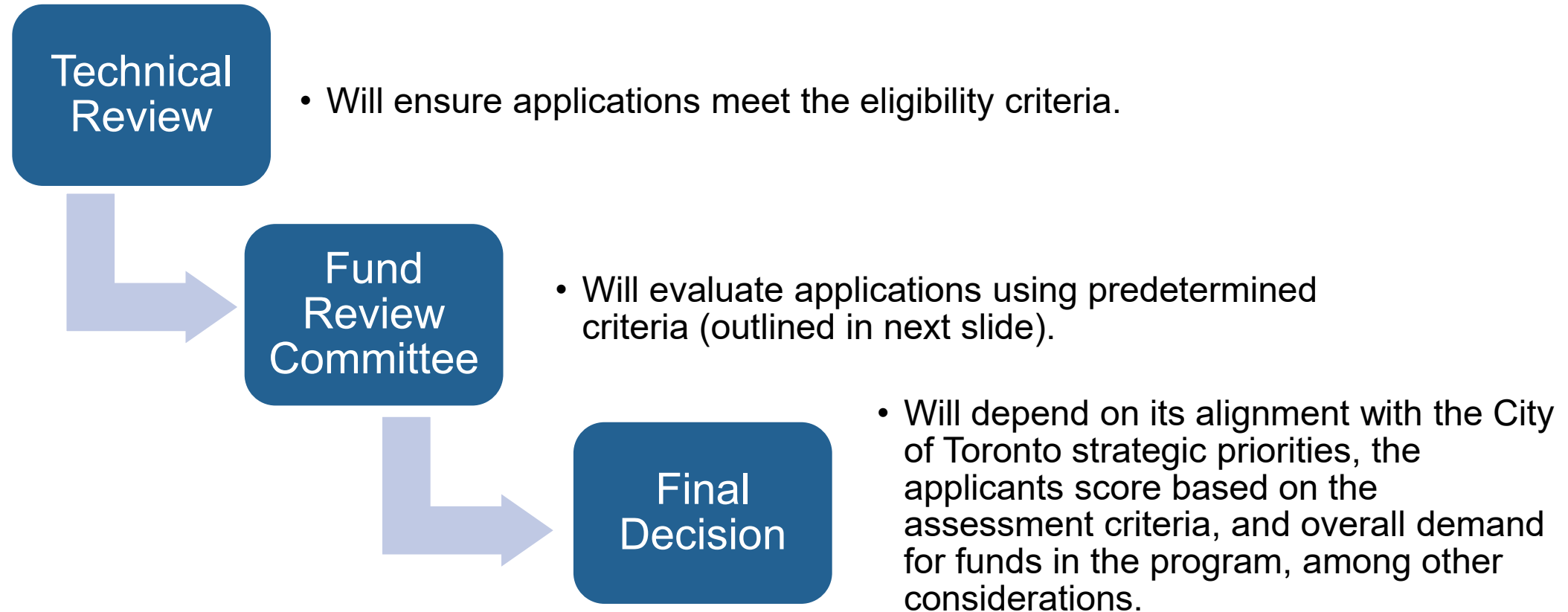
Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- While AI tools can be a helpful resource, they should be used as a supporting tool and not a substitute for the applicant's own expertise and voice.

- Applicants will be required to disclose if AI tools were used in developing their application.

- If using AI tools, applicants are strongly advised to:
  - Personalize their application.
  - Review all AI-generated content for accuracy, relevance, and compliance with the program requirements and eligibility criteria.
  - Ensure originality and authenticity.
  - Confirm organizational capacity and ability to deliver any commitments or ideas generated with AI assistance.
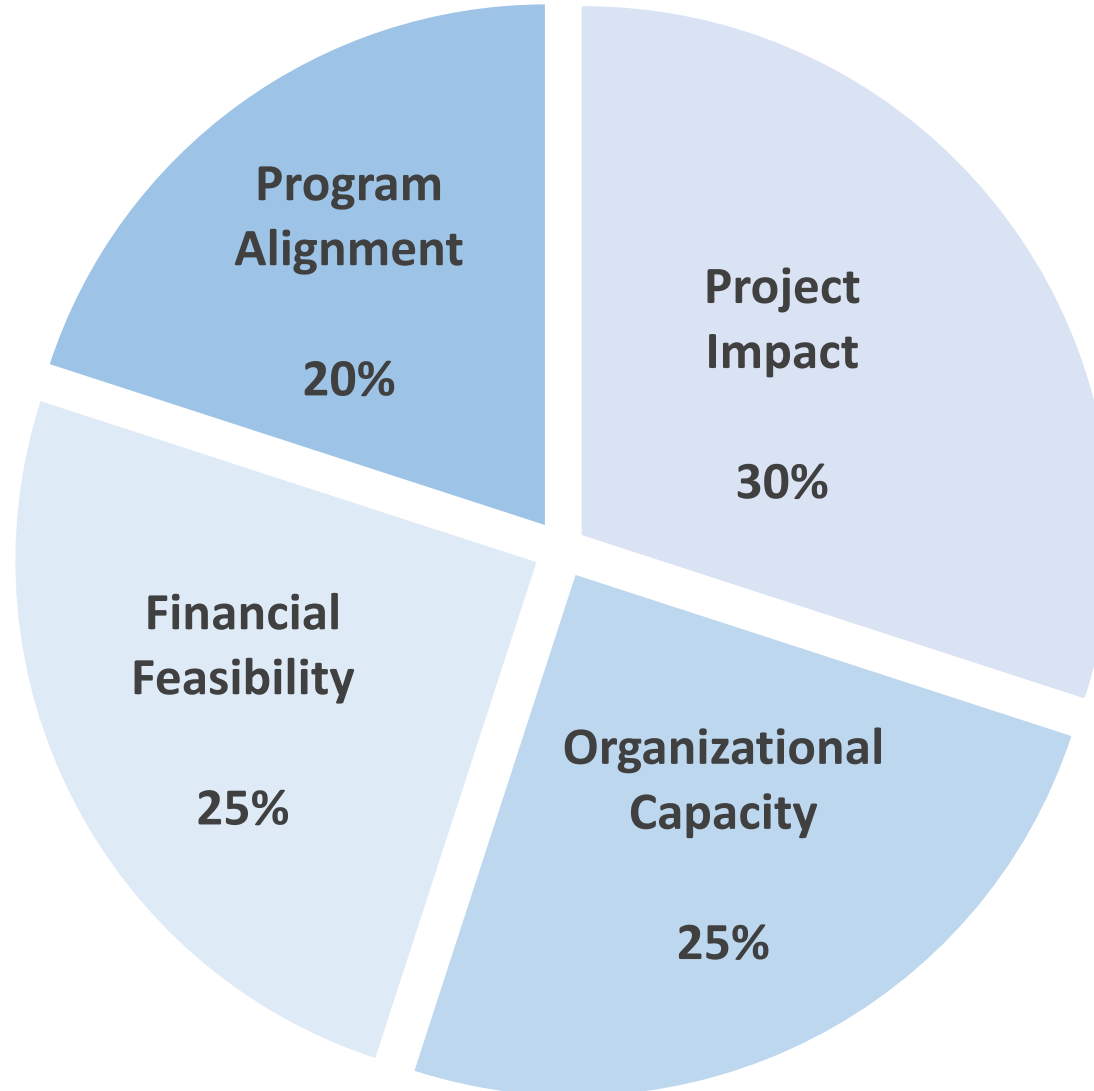
Evaluation Process

Evaluation Process

Technical Review

- Will ensure applications meet the eligibility criteria.

Fund Review Committee

- Will evaluate applications using predetermined criteria (outlined in next slide).

Final Decision

- Will depend on its alignment with the City of Toronto strategic priorities, the applicants score based on the assessment criteria, and overall demand for funds in the program, among other considerations.

- If successful CFIF applicants applied for Green Workforce funding, Green Workforce Projects will be evaluated after the CFIF funding decision is made.

Evaluation Criteria

Program Alignment 20%

Project Impact 30%

Financial Feasibility 25%

Organizational Capacity 25%

Obligations of Grant Recipients and Project Implementation

Fund Agreement

- Grant recipients will be required to enter into a Fund Agreement with the City of Toronto that sets out the applicable terms and conditions that will govern use of the funds and establish requirements and expectations of the grant recipients.

- **The terms of the Fund Agreement are non-negotiable.**

- A template Fund Agreement is publicly available on the CFIF webpage.

- Recipients must acknowledge the financial assistance provided by the City of Toronto in all public communications about the program.

- If you have any questions about the Fund Agreement, please ask City staff prior to the application closing period.

Receiving Funding

- Recipients will receive **initial 50% of funding** in June 2026, following completion of the Fund Agreement with the City.

- Recipients will receive **final 50% of funding** following approval of project and reporting requirements by the City.

- Grant recipients will be required to **provide receipts and/or other financial information** to verify moneys spent.

- Funding can only be used for **eligible costs**.

- Recipients must **keep all financial records** (including receipts and invoices) and non-financial documents relating to the fund or the project for seven years, in case of audit.

Reporting Requirements

- Funded organizations are required to submit an **interim and final report** to the City to receive the balance of funds; standardized reporting templates are available on the CFIF webpage.

- Recipients will be required to report on **specific metrics**.

  - **Metrics for successful CFIF Projects** include:

    - Return rate (%)

    - Amount of single-use and takeaway items avoided (# and/or kg)

    - Total waste reduction (%)

  - **Metrics for successful Green Workforce Projects** will be developed in consultation with the City.

- In addition, if required, the City may interview funded organizations to support information/data collection.

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Reporting Requirements (2 of 2)

- Reports will be used to document interim progress and final progress that the recipient has made on their project with the funds provided, including any lessons learned.

- Where possible, lessons learned will be shared with relevant stakeholders, including other grant recipients.

- To maintain transparency and accountability, the City will **publicly disclose the names of organizations that received funds, recipient Ward and funded amounts.**

Meetings, Site Visits & Photos

- A **virtual meeting** will be convened at project initiation with all grant recipients.

- **Site visits** will be scheduled with each of the grant recipients shortly after the interim reports are reviewed by the City. Preference is for these to occur in person.

- Site visits are an opportunity for grant recipients to showcase their solution and demonstrate the progress made.

- The City may take photos/videos of the funded projects throughout the funding term, in particular during the site visits.

- Recipients will also be asked to **provide photos or video documentation** of their project activities.

- For the City to be able to use any photograph(s)/video(s), careful attention is paid to concerns of copyright and consent. To address this, recipients will be required to complete the City's Multimedia Consent Form (provided as part of Fund Agreement).

Repayment of Funds

Under certain scenarios, the City of Toronto may request the return of funding.

Possible scenarios include, but are not limited to, the following:
- the project is not complete within the allowable timeframe
- funds were not used for the stated purpose of the approved project
- funds were not used for eligible expenses
- an organization fails to submit their interim or final report

Thank you!

- Implementing innovative, zero-waste business models is an important part of building a more circular food system.

- Thank you for your interest and we look forward to receiving your inspiring ideas to push Toronto's circular economy transformation forward!

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Questions?

For additional questions, comments or concerns regarding the Circular Food Innovators Fund, contact circulareconomy@toronto.ca / 416-396-4699

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Other Dates of Note

- Second CFIF Information Session (register [here](#))
  - February 18, 2026 from 5 to 6 p.m.
- City Grants and Services Open House (register [here](#))
  - January 29 from 6 to 8:30 p.m. at Scarborough Civic Centre
- CafeTO applications (Toronto.ca/CafeTO)
  - Open until February 11
- Summerlicious applications (Toronto.ca/summerlicious)
  - Open until February 20
- Single-Use and Takeaway Items Reduction Strategy
  - Report back to Council Q2 2026