

**Subject:** New submission from Community Development Combined  
**Date:** Friday, January 5, 2024 at 4:56:54 PM Eastern Standard Time  
**From:** jnytko@govsol.org  
**To:** jnytko@govsol.org

<b>General Information</b>
<b>Date of application:</b> 01/05/2024
<b>Organization name:</b> Albany Fund for Education
<b>Organization TIN or EIN:</b> 14-1810885
<b>If available, provide your Unique Entity Identifier (UEI):</b> MJL6QA2FSSY5
<b>Organization physical address:</b> c/o Friends and Foundation Albany Public Library 161 Washington Ave Albany, NY 12210 United States <a href="#">Map It</a>
<b>Is the mailing address different from the physical address?</b> Yes
<b>Organization mailing address (if different):</b> PO Box 3110 Albany, NY 12203 United States <a href="#">Map It</a>
<b>Contact Information</b>
<b>Primary contact name:</b> MAri Shopsis
<b>Primary contact title:</b> Executive Director
<b>Primary contact phone:</b> 518-417-2107
<b>Primary contact email:</b> <a href="mailto:execdir@albanyfundforeducation.org">execdir@albanyfundforeducation.org</a>
<b>What is the preferred method of contact?</b> Email
<b>Website (if available):</b>

**Organization Info and Structure:**

**Is the organization a nonprofit?**

Yes

**If nonprofit, please attach to this application proof of your organization's Tax-Exempt Status**

- [afe-501c3-irs-letter.pdf](#)

**Date of establishment:**

01/24/1998

**Give a brief description of your organization. Please include information on the organization's activities or mission statement (150 words or less):**

The Albany Fund for Education's mission is to enhance opportunities for students in the City School District of Albany to learn, grow and succeed. AFE connects good ideas with community resources to enrich educational opportunities and address the challenges facing students in the CSDA, where 71% of students are economically-disadvantaged.

One challenge AFE is addressing is food-insecurity in our schools. Students cannot learn, grow, or succeed when they are too hungry to concentrate. To combat this problem, we provide school-year and summer weekend backpack programs and have established full service food pantries in four Albany schools.

Other core programs include:

- An active grant program, which allows teachers and school personnel to request funds for programs that enhance students' educational experience, ranging from field trips and author visits to family engagement programming.
- Support for the arts through a musical instrument donation initiative and after-school music practice clubs.

**Provide the total number of full-time employees (if applicable):**

1

**Provide the total number of part-time employees (if applicable):**

0

**Provide the total number of volunteers (if applicable):**

100

**What is the organization's current annual budget?**

191,316

**Have you or the organization ever received any form of COVID-19 relief funds or loans specific to the negative impacts of the Pandemic?**

Yes

**If you selected "Yes" above, please specify type and amount.**

AFE received a \$4,089.30 PPP loan to cover salary costs, which was forgiven.

**Did your organization lose revenue as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic? If yes, provide the amount of lost revenue (2020-2022)**

AFE actually gained revenue due to new initiatives such as the computer donation program and community support for these programs. Although we were forced to cancel our annual gala two years in a row, we were able to make up these funds by moving our silent auction online and adding an additional funding appeal.

**Project Proposal**

**Applicants may choose to apply for up to 2 program areas. Please select the primary program area for which you would like to apply.**

Food Access

**If applicable, please select the secondary program area for which you would like to apply.**

Behavioral Health, Substance Abuse, Telehealth

**What amount of funding is being requested (Must be at least \$100,000 and should not exceed program area totals)?**

\$281,156

**Is this a new project or expansion of an existing initiative, please describe.**

Nourish Albany Now is a significant expansion of the Albany Fund for Education's school-based food access programming. This programming includes school year and summer weekend backpack programming for students who go hungry on weekends when school and community meals are not available, and four full-service food pantries in City School District of Albany middle schools and the Albany International Center. Nourish Albany Now will expand the food pantry program to provide full-service food pantries in at least five additional elementary schools that do not currently have pantries and provide additional support, equipment, and resources to existing school pantries.

The NAN project also contains two new initiatives. The "Snack Box" pilot program will provide all classrooms in three schools (year one) with a box of healthy snacks that teachers and health and wellness staff can provide students as needed to reduce hunger in school and improve focus and behavior. Assuming positive results from year one, the program will be scaled up to five schools in year two, positioning us to request further funding for a district-wide program post ARA. Finally, we plan to host a half day conference for school staff involved in school-based food access programming throughout Albany County, and to create an e-network so that the conversations and connections initiated at the conference can continue.

**Please provide an executive summary of the proposed program or project for which you are requesting funds. Include a description of the target population, as well as the goals and objectives of your proposed project (500 words or less).**

The "Nourish Albany Now" (NAN) project will provide increased food access for students in the City School District of Albany (CSDA – primary audience) through school-based food pantries and as-needed snack boxes. The secondary audience for this project is other Albany County schools (Albany charter schools, Berne-Knox-Westerlo, Cohoes, Green Island, Guilderland, Menands, North Colonie, Ravena, Voorheesville and Watervliet) that provide school-based food access programs.

According to the NYS Education Dept., 71% of students in the CSDA were considered economically disadvantaged – a 6% increase from pre-pandemic (2019). 14% of the District's ~8,000 students are English Language Learners, reflecting a recent influx of refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Central/South America. 82% of District students self-identify as racial/ethnic minorities.

The overarching goals of NAN are: 1) To build a solid foundation for personal and academic success by both providing CSDA students the physical nourishment they need to thrive and alleviating family stress due to food insecurity; 2) To share best practices in school-based food support amongst Albany County schools that currently provide that support as well as any districts that are interested in starting similar projects.

These goals will be achieved through the following objectives:

1.1) Create full-service school food pantries (SFPs) in CSDA schools in at least five of the eight elementary schools currently without FPs. Full-service SFPs have refrigerators/freezers to stock fresh produce, eggs, milk, and frozen meat along with dry goods, providing access to nutritious, unprocessed foods that are difficult to obtain in Albany's food desert neighborhoods. AFE also allocates funds to SFPs to purchase culturally-specific foods that are not available from the Regional Food Bank (e.g. halal meats, rice, noodles) from local ethnic grocery stores

1.2) Enhance services at the ten existing SFPs by providing needed refrigeration, storage equipment, and additional funds for food purchases;

1.3) Expand AFE's culturally specific food pantry program to serve the six SFPs not currently participating;

1.4) Pilot snack box program - provide and replenish as-needed snack boxes to three elementary buildings (2024) and five (2025);

2.1) Convene a gathering of Albany County school staff providing food-based school support;

2.2) Create an e-network to continue knowledge-sharing amongst County schools

In addition to its primary goal of providing food access, this project will also address several of the County's other ARPA goals. Parents who are unable to provide regular meals for their children experience high levels of stress, which in turn affects the mental health of their children. Students who live in households experiencing food insecurity are twice as likely to have seen a psychologist than students from food secure households (Cook & Jeng, 2007, p. 23). By addressing one of the root causes of emotional and behavioral challenges, this project addresses the ARPA goal of Behavioral Health. Children who are food secure are more likely to stay in school and less likely to drop out

and engage in anti-social behaviors, which touches on the goal of preventing/responding to violence and leverages the benefits of ARPA funded youth service programs.

**Please explain why this program or project is needed within the County.**

“Among 6- to 12-y-old children, food insufficiency was associated with poorer mathematics scores, grade repetition, absenteeism, tardiness, visits to a psychologist, anxiety, aggression, psychosocial dysfunction, and difficulty getting along with other children.” (Jyoti and Frongillo, 2005)

Hunger and lack of access to healthy food is a chronic problem in the City of Albany. The recent closings of the Shoprite and Stewart’s on Central Avenue have decreased food access, especially for families in West Hill and Arbor Hill. The USDA defines urban food deserts as areas with poverty rates of 20% or higher, where at least a third of residents live more than a mile from a full-service grocery store. According to the Times Union (6/8/2021) “In Albany’s census blocks that are predominantly comprised of Black residents and people of color, 95 percent of the area is identified by the USDA’s Food Access Research Atlas as a food desert.”

AFE’s food access programs address this problem by providing access to food through a known resource – schools. With 71% of students classified as economically disadvantaged by the NYS Education Department, Albany has a large number of students at risk of food insecurity. Many families are forced to make choices between purchasing food and paying rent – during the 2022-23 school year 410 students, or 5% of the total District population – experienced homelessness. At Arbor Hill Elementary School, 15% of the student body was homeless, according to the 2022-2023 School Report Card. Providing food assistance helps to reduce the frequency of these difficult decisions.

Albany schools also help low income, high-risk students achieve academically, improve classroom behavior, and decrease absenteeism. This should not be surprising. Research is clear that children who are hungry cannot learn. A study that classified low income children ages six to twelve as “hungry,” “at-risk for hunger” or “not hungry” found that hungry children were significantly more likely to receive special education services, to have repeated a grade in school, to have received mental health counseling, and to have disciplinary problems than at-risk-for-hunger or not-hungry children (Kleinman, Little, Murphy, 1998). This is born out in a comparison of suspension rates – in 2021-2022 13% of Albany students were suspended for at least one full day – in neighboring Guilderland the suspension rate was 2%. Knowing that food will be available provides a sense of security that helps children and families to thrive – and leads to fewer behavioral and disciplinary challenges.

Another benefit of SFPs is the opportunity to build stronger relationships between school staff and families, increasing parental involvement/engagement, and enhancing the ability of school staff to keep at-risk students on track throughout the year. As one Home-School Coordinator told us this past summer: “This is the most rewarding part of my job... I develop relationships with these families.” School-based food programs also provide an opportunity to keep students with chronic absenteeism (absent more than 10 days/school year) engaged with the school. In the 2021-2022 school year, 37.4% of Albany students in grades 1-8 were classified as chronically absent, as opposed to 24.9% in Guilderland CSD.

Nourish Albany Now also supports Albany’s recent influx of refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from the middle east, Afghanistan, and Central and South America. For example, in just 5 years, the population at Roots Academy has changed dramatically. In 2018, 19% of students at Roots were English Language Learners, and the student body was 54% Black/African-American, 18% Latino/Hispanic, and 10% Asian. By 2022, 30% of the student body consisted of English Language Learners, with 40% Black/African-American, 27% Latino/Hispanic, and 18% Asian (the percentages of white and multi-racial students remained essentially the same). Many of these new arrivals struggle to find well-paying work due to language barriers and experience poverty and food insecurity as a result. They live in food desert neighborhoods and often lack transportation to reach full-service supermarkets. The food in the weekend backpacks is unfamiliar to them, and frequently contains ingredients that are haram – forbidden by religious law.

By providing students and families with the opportunity to choose their own food and have access to familiar culturally specific foods, AFE’s school food pantries also give students and families a sense of agency and control in a challenging world. In just a year of operation, these pantries are already serving hundreds of families and changing lives. Albany International Center Principal Rachel Stead explained that: “Earlier this school year, our school staff was approached by a high school student who was feeling pressured to work instead of go to school in order to support their family. The student was able to bring home food from the school pantry and continue their education.”

Even when working in the same district, school staff rarely have the time they need to share insights and develop collaborations, let alone share experiences and strategies around their mutual challenge – how best to provide school-based food interventions – with staff from other districts. Providing this opportunity through our conference of county-wide school-based food access staff and the subsequent e-network will allow sharing of strategies that are working – saving us from reinventing the wheel, and the opportunity to identify potential collaborators.

**All funded activities must meet the objective of responding to the public health and negative economic impact of the pandemic. Please describe how your proposal will help address this objective and assist with recovery (250 words or less).**

The City of Albany's ARPA impact survey reads: "The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically affected our medically, socially and economically vulnerable populations through loss of employment, further reductions in access to essential services and an increase in food insecurity... there is an ongoing need to ensure that critical social services continue to be funded" including "ensuring access to healthy food options."

Access to healthy food was identified as "an urgent need with a high unmet financial need," due to job losses and economic hardships, which "exacerbate[ed] the need for access to local healthy food." These results are echoed in the County ARPA Investment Plan, which ranks food access as the #4 priority in Community Development, with behavioral health ranked #1, however the two are closely knotted together. Food-insecure families experience high levels of stress, leading to increased behavioral referrals and mental health needs in schools.

A July 2023 Education Week article analyzed recent data on academic recovery from COVID19, finding that "the data suggest that interrupted learning time during the initial phase of school shutdowns has become a "compounding debt," creating gaps that have made it harder for students to move forward." Academic interventions cannot work unless students are present and prepared to learn. Food-insecurity is connected with absenteeism, and hungry students cannot concentrate on learning. By investing in school-based healthy food access, the NAN project increases the likelihood that the dollars spent on academic recovery will bear fruit, helping to alleviate the long shadow of COVID-19 on our future workforce.

**If an award is made, describe how Albany County stakeholders will benefit. Where possible, please use measurable outcomes to quantify impact.**

Students and families in the City of Albany will experience reduced hunger and stress from food insecurity (see KPIs)

Schools will notice increased family engagement and reduced disciplinary referrals among participating students (see KPIs)

Refugee and asylum seeker families will report diminished stress due to food assistance and the ability to access culturally specific foods.

Teachers and schools participating in Snack Box Program will report diminished classroom disruptions/more positive environment for learning.

School support staff, most of whom live in Albany County, will have additional earning opportunities.

All culturally specific food will be purchased from ethnic grocery stores in Albany County, supporting local small businesses.

**Please describe your organization's ability to implement the project you propose including organizational structure, staff members involved, a summary of similar initiatives you have undertaken and the date they were completed:**

The Albany Fund for Education has successfully carried out similar programs before. In 2022 and 2023, we established full-service school-based food pantries in the CSDA's three middle schools as well as the Albany International Center, thanks to support from the Seymour Fox Memorial Foundation, Regeneron, and the Albany County Legislature. From 2020-2023, AFE has collaborated with the Regional Food Bank and the CSDA to deliver weekend food bags containing healthy produce, bread, vouchers for milk and eggs, and shelf stable foods to students who have been identified as persistently food-insecure. The 2023 program served more than 400 students from all but two of the CSDA's schools and academic programs.

For its first 17 years, AFE was entirely volunteer led. A strategic planning process in 2013 identified a need for professional leadership if the organization was going to expand its impact. Since the first Executive Director was hired in 2015, AFE has substantially increased both its fundraising capabilities and the services it provides to Albany's public schools. Although the Fund has not received direct federal grants, it has received three years of CDBG regrant funds for the Feed and Read program, as well as three years of CARES ACT federal emergency funds distributed through the City of Albany. In addition, Executive Director Mari Shopsis has managed both federal (IMLS, USDA) and state (NYSCA, ESD) grants before in previous positions.

AFE also focuses on accommodating urgent needs that come up and are difficult for the school district to respond to promptly. AFE responded to the challenges presented by the pandemic by creating several new programs, including a grant program that reimbursed teachers for expense incurred to improve their virtual teaching, the summer weekend backpack program, and a computer donation program that provided more than 600 Albany students with computers to use so that they could access virtual education after the school district's Chromebook order was delayed. This project was funded by a \$75,000 contribution from Hannaford Supermarkets.

Ms. Shopsis will lead the NAN project and her salary will be partially funded through these ARPA funds; if awarded, a part-time administrative assistant will be hired to cover some of her other responsibilities. The City School District

of Albany provides key staffing for this project through its Community School Site Coordinators and Home School Coordinators, and through Maintenance Department support for food deliveries. Ms. Shopsis will supervise the establishment of food pantries and track regrants of funding to cover overtime costs as school staff incorporate new food pantries into their job responsibilities. Daily operations of the school food pantries will be carried out by school staff who best know the students, their families, and their needs.

**How will you track performance goals and define success? Include at least two key performance indicators and expected annual outcomes/impact?**

If the NAN project is successful, students participating will show reduced signs of hunger, as observed through the Regional Food Bank backpack program referral criteria. Referral criteria include:

Displaying extreme hunger on Monday morning; Asking when the next meal/snack will be served; General anxiety about food/meal time; Rushing food lines at meal time; Quickly eating all of the food served and asking for more; Regularly asking their teacher for food; Saving/hoarding/stealing food to take home for themselves and/or a sibling; Lingered around for or asking for seconds; Commenting about not having enough food at home; Asking classmates for food they don't want

At the end of each school year, teachers of participating students will also be asked to rate changes they have observed over the course of the year, based on the Regional Food Bank backpack referral criteria on a scale from (1) Worsened – No – Improvement – (5) Strong Improvement with an "N/A" option. These ratings will be amalgamated by grade level or school. While it is impossible to solely credit NAN programs for any change that may occur individually, or to conclusively determine that programs are or are not contributing, as many factors in a student's life can influence their access to food, we expect to see an overall rating of improvement on a school-wide level.

Similarly, we will ask school personnel to provide the numbers of disciplinary referrals from students participating in NAN programs, who have used the SFP at least ten times during the year (this data is already collected for the Regional Foodbank) and compare it to data from the previous time period before SFP participation. Again, we can only claim correlation, not causation, but we expect to see a decline in the overall number of disciplinary referrals when students are receiving additional food support compared to the previous year.

Teachers will be surveyed regarding their experience with the snack boxes vis a vis any changes they have noticed in classroom disruptions (that may not rise to the level of a referral) that correlate to snack box support.

Finally, participating parents will be surveyed in their preferred language to see if they report lessening levels of stress, or concern about ability to pay bills, since their student has been participating in the SFP program. They will also be asked to rate how well the food provided by the SFP program meets their cultural and dietary needs.

We intend to reach out to the School of Public Health at SUNY Albany to see if any professors and graduate students are interested in assisting with survey design and data analysis.

**Project start date:**

07/01/2024

**Project End date:**

12/31/2025

**Please provide key project milestones inclusive of the anticipated timelines and descriptions**

Milestone	Anticipated Timeline	Task Description
See attached timeline	October 2024	See attached timeline

**At the top of this page is a downloadable project budget. Please download the budget form and upload it here.**

- [ARTS-Budgetclean.pdf](#)

**If you are funding a multi-year initiative, please provide a breakdown of funding level per year below:**

2024	2025	2026
33112	108754	139290

**Use this space to provide a narrative supporting and clarify anything from the proposed project budget above. In addition, if “Other Funds” or “Other Uses” are included above, please specify the source(s) below.**

The project budget includes funds to support food purchases from the Regional Food Bank for both new and existing SFPs. These are in subawards as are translation services and overtime costs to be paid to CSDA for pantry establishment costs. Equipment includes refrigeration supplies, shelving and storage. Supplies contains cultural specific food funding, snacks and snack boxes. Other costs are the conference. Training is for a 2 day online grants management seminar. Other costs not listed is conference expenses for the school food conference. Salaries include 35% executive director salary and 5% admin asst salary (to be hired).

**Explain why ARPA funds are needed to complete the proposed program/project. Would the proposal be possible without ARPA assistance? Describe how your proposal would be impacted if you are awarded a smaller grant than requested?**

ARPA funding provides a rare opportunity to address school-based food assistance interventions on a systematic, multi-year level and to assess their impact. Expanding school food pantries and supporting snacks in the CSDA were already identified as organizational priorities for AFE, however without ARPA assistance, these projects would need to be approached school-by-school as funding was secured, not on a comprehensive district-wide scale. Should a smaller grant be awarded, we would work with the CSDA to determine which buildings have the highest level of need, and proceed on a smaller scale relative to the amount of funding received.

**ARPA funds must be expended by December 31, 2026. Please describe how your project will be sustained if it will continue beyond this date.**

The multi-year time frame of the ARPA grant gives AFE and the CSDA ample time to identify and apply for additional funding to sustain these programs beyond December 31, 2026. We anticipate that we will have evidence of impact to make these strong applications.

**List any project partners/subrecipients:**

Regional Food Bank

City School District of Albany

**Please list any matching funds:**

The City School District of Albany is committing staff time to implement this project; estimated value and fringe benefits are included in budget. This includes Food Pantry coordination, administrative time, and maintenance time to deliver supplies.

**Tax Information or Additional Information**

**Please upload Federal tax returns for tax year 2019**

- [2019-Exempt-ALBANY-FUND-FOR-EDUCATION-INC-ClientCopy.pdf](#)

**Please upload Federal tax returns for tax year 2020**

- [Albany-Client-Copy\\_20211115152816.pdf](#)

**Please upload Federal tax returns for tax year 2021**

- [Albany-Fund-for-Education-12-31-21.pdf](#)

**Please upload Federal tax returns for tax year 2022**

- [Albany-Fund-for-Education-Client-Copy-Tax-Return-12-31-22.pdf](#)

**Please upload IRS Form W-9**

- [w92022.pdf](#)

**(OPTIONAL) please feel free to upload anything which you feel would strengthen your application.**

- [AFE-Summer-Food-and-School-Pantry-program.MP4](#)

<b>Risk Assessment:</b>
<b>Has the organization adopted and/or implemented policies relating to: records retention, conflict of interest, code of ethics, and/or nondiscrimination policies</b>
Yes
<b>If you selected "Yes" above, please specify:</b>
all of the above
<b>Is the organization properly insured?</b>
Yes
<b>If you selected "Yes" above, please specify the types of insurance held and the limits:</b>
D&O \$1,000,000 in the process of obtaining general liability
<b>Does the organization have a financial management system?</b>
Yes
<b>If you selected "Yes" above, please specify:</b>
quickbooks online
<b>Has there been any change in your organization's key staffing positions in the last 2 years?</b>
No
<b>Has the organization previously done work for the Federal government (i.e. Is the entity experienced in managing Federal funds)?</b>
Yes
<b>If you selected "Yes" above, please specify:</b>
Although the Fund has not received direct federal grants, it has received three years of CDBG regrant funds for the Feed and Read program, as well as three years of CARES ACT federal emergency funds distributed through the City of Albany. In addition, Executive Director Mari Shopsis has managed both federal (IMLS, USDA) and state (NYSCA, ESD) grants before in previous positions.
<b>Certifications</b>
<b>Acknowledgment 1</b>
I Have Read and Understand the U.S. Treasury's Compliance and Reporting Guidance for State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (see below link) U.S. Treasury's Compliance and Reporting Guidance for State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds: <a href="https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRF-Compliance-and-Reporting-Guidance.pdf">https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRF-Compliance-and-Reporting-Guidance.pdf</a>
<b>Acknowledgment 2</b>
Should the County Allocate ARPA Funds, I am Able to and Pledge to Adhere to ALL Compliance and Reporting Requirements of the U.S. Treasury as it relates to any State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds
<b>Acknowledgment 3</b>
I Understand the County Will Contact me if/when Additional Information is Needed and that Information will be Promptly Provided to the County to Support Reporting Requirements
<b>Acknowledgment 4</b>
If for Any Reason I am Unable to Comply with the U.S. Treasury's Compliance and Reporting Requirements I will Immediately Notify the County in writing by email or letter
<b>Acknowledgment 5</b>
All Information Submitted in this Application is True & Accurate



**Electronic Signature Agreement**

I agree

By checking the "I agree" box, you agree and acknowledge that 1) your application will not be signed in the sense of a traditional paper document, 2) by signing in this alternate manner, you authorize your electronic signature to be valid and binding upon you to the same force and effect as a handwritten signature, and 3) you may still be required to provide a traditional signature at a later date.

**Type name**

Mari Shopsis