



IMPACT100 TRAVERSE CITY

2025 Education: Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities

www.groundworkcenter.org

INITIATIVE: Connecting Farms, Food and Health in a Teaching Kitchen

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities is advancing Phase II of the Esperance Community Teaching Kitchen with a transformative initiative: expanding access to food-as-medicine education across Northwest Lower Michigan. With support from Impact100 Traverse City, the Esperance Community Teaching Kitchen will livestream, record, and distribute high-quality culinary medicine and nutrition training to underserved communities in the five-county region.

The initiative will establish the Esperance Community Teaching Kitchen as a regional broadcast hub and technical assistance center. It will deliver live and recorded classes, create an on-demand resource library, and provide continuing medical education for healthcare professionals. Partnerships with media outlets will further broaden access, reaching schools, food pantries, and households across the region.

This initiative represents transformational change by scaling a proven model. Programs like “Dinner with Your Doctor” have already shown improved health behaviors and empowered patients to better manage chronic conditions. By embedding food-as-medicine into both healthcare and community settings, the Esperance Community Teaching Kitchen strengthens vital connections between providers, patients, and families. Long-term partnerships with healthcare systems like Munson Healthcare and a diversified revenue model—including healthcare contributions, class fees, sponsorships, rentals, and consulting—ensure growth beyond the grant period.

With an Impact100 Traverse City grant, this initiative will directly serve at least 500 individuals by 2027 while reaching thousands more digitally. Together, we can transform rural health, proving that food is not just nourishment—it is medicine.

The following sections contain key information from the application, as written by the applicant. While detailed financial information has not been provided here due to its confidential nature, each applicant submitted an initiative budget and supporting financial documents as part of their application. Each proposed initiative and the supporting financial documentation has undergone a thorough review and the initiatives proposed by our finalists have met our eligibility requirements.

ORGANIZATION'S VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is a thriving and equitable Michigan where people and nature are in balance, communities are resilient in the face of climate change and other pressures, and our economy is regenerative. We envision a future where our food systems are diverse and healthy, our energy is clean and locally controlled, our transportation is accessible and sustainable and our communities are inclusive. We see a region where every person has a voice in shaping their future, and where we work collaboratively across sectors and communities to build a resilient and just society for generations to come.

ORGANIZATION'S MISSION STATEMENT

Together we partner to create enduring and equitable local solutions that preserve the environment, strengthen the economy and create healthy, thriving communities that people cherish, protect and nurture.

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION AND ITS HISTORY

The Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities is a nonprofit dedicated to protecting the environment, strengthening the economy, and building community in Michigan. Focused on local food, clean energy, and strong cities, Groundwork was founded in 1995 as the Michigan Land Use Institute and later rebranded to reflect its integrated mission of creating a resilient future.

Governed by a dedicated Board of Directors and supported by an Advisory Council, Groundwork benefits from strategic guidance and oversight. With an annual budget of \$3.1 million, the organization operates with a balanced mix of foundation grants, individual donors, and corporate sponsors, supporting 21 staff members who drive impactful programs and organizational growth.

For 30 years, Groundwork has propelled transformative ideas and programs, acting as a catalyst for advancing Michigan's public transportation network, local food systems, and clean energy economy. Overarching goals include:

- Expand the local food economy in Michigan and improve community health by addressing diet-related disease. We can keep locally owned farms financially viable—strengthening community, preserving a way of life and saving our precious landscapes—while also supporting the health and vitality of children and adults across Michigan.

- Achieve 100% renewable energy across Michigan – keeping energy dollars in the pocketbooks of families, building community resilience through energy independence, and helping slow climate change. We work to redirect energy investments and infrastructure, such as oil pipelines and electric generation, away from long-term fossil fuel commitments and instead toward renewable projects.

- Revitalize regular passenger rail service to northern Michigan and be a champion for a vibrant array of local transportation options. With bike share, convenient buses, shuttles, and carpools we will keep cars off the road, assuring a bright, desirable future for our towns.

Groundwork's food initiatives began over 25 years ago and have strengthened our local food economy and increased access to locally grown food for all. We continue to work with the state implementation team on Ten Cents a Meal for Michigan Kids and Farmers. This program provides over 500,000 of our state's children, from early education to high school, with locally grown fresh fruits, vegetables and beans as part of their school meals. We are also expanding our Building Resilient Communities (BRC) project, which allows Groundwork to consult with food pantries, meal sites, schools, community centers, and other sites to provide local, nutritious food to some of our most vulnerable populations. This program has supported 40 sites throughout all ten counties of northwest lower Michigan since its inception in 2020. We are taking this program state-wide in 2025 and will work with 55 sites.

Since the late 1990s, Groundwork's leadership in public transportation initiatives has helped secure increased investment in transit and rail, shaping a more sustainable and connected Michigan. We continue to work on North-to-South Passenger Rail. Funds have been secured for a comprehensive business plan, including how the stops will work and who should operate the passenger rail. We anticipate having the full plan completed by 2026. Groundwork is also part of New Safe Streets Alliance, which was recently formed to advocate for better transportation policy in the City of Traverse City. The group is made up of community volunteers and established advocacy groups like TART Trails and Norte and is developing some overall goals and approaches to engage city leaders on ways to build better infrastructure to help people get around without a car.

Our Climate and Environment programs are also core to helping create resilient cities, towns and villages. We've continued to work with area schools to advance renewable energy and to help pass 100% renewable energy commitments at the school board level, including Petoskey and TCAPS, and work to increase solar energy education in northwestern Michigan. We engage local teachers and curriculum specialists to create customized lessons for various grade levels, with a focus on creating place-based learning opportunities and ensure that all materials meet Next Generation Science Standards. The Access MI Solar program provides a solar group-buy to two northern Michigan communities – the Petoskey and Traverse City areas. The program offers discounts for participating residents and small businesses to purchase solar. Coupled with governmental incentives, people that join can experience a reduction in the hard cost of the installation of almost 50%, making solar more affordable for many. To date, 52 families and small businesses have reduced their carbon footprint in three years.

Through advocacy, innovation, and collaboration, Groundwork continues to mobilize communities, foster economic resilience, and drive policy solutions that ensure a sustainable future for Michigan.

SUMMARY OF INITIATIVE

Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities is launching the next phase of the Esperance Community Teaching Kitchen (ECTK) with a bold new vision: expanding access to culinary medicine and nutrition education across Northwest Lower Michigan through innovative technology. Building on the past two years of success of our teaching kitchen model in Traverse City, this initiative will overcome geographic and resource barriers to bring food-as-medicine education to the most underserved rural and remote populations in the five-county region of Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau counties and beyond.

The project will equip the ECTK with the programming and technology infrastructure needed to livestream, record, and distribute high-quality nutrition and culinary medicine training to hundreds of individuals who cannot physically access the kitchen. Our partners—including healthcare providers, medical students, graduate medical education (GME) programs, and community organizations—will use this new capability to deliver real-time and on-demand educational sessions to both professional and lay audiences. This critical investment will transform the ECTK into a broadcast and regional technical assistance hub that improves the health of communities through the power of food.

During Phase I of the ECTK project, we built on a decade of experience delivering farms, food and health programs by adapting and refining our food-as-medicine education for the teaching kitchen setting. This included a six-week cooking series and the “Dinner with Your Doctor” program, piloted in partnership with Munson Family Practice in a clinic waiting room to support patients at risk for diabetes. Today, we have over 30 hours of culinary medicine educational sessions developed for professional audiences—ready to be updated and optimized for use in a dedicated teaching kitchen environment.

Members of our ECTK steering committee regularly participate in professional development sessions through the Teaching Kitchen Collaborative (TKC), where they learn best practices for delivering effective virtual culinary classes and explore technology strategies to enhance teaching kitchen experiences.

This Phase II expansion will enable:

- Live-streaming of nutrition and culinary classes to rural communities, eliminating transportation and time barriers for patients and providers alike;
- Recording of Culinary Medicine training sessions for healthcare professionals to evaluate and improve their communication and patient counseling skills, using evidence-based approaches such as Motivational Interviewing;
- Development of an on-demand digital media library, providing continuing medical education (CME) resources to physicians and allied health professionals across the region;
- And, growing our collaboration with 9&10 News and other media partners to expand our current short “Eat Local” promotional news segments to full scale cooking shows and broader public consumption, including vulnerable food pantry and school populations.

Groundwork is uniquely positioned to lead this transformational work. To our knowledge, the ECTK is the only community-owned teaching kitchen in Michigan affiliated with the international Teaching Kitchen Collaborative, providing an unparalleled platform for rapid innovation and community engagement. Our close partnerships with healthcare systems and community groups ensure the initiative will meet real-world needs across the continuum of care - from providers to patients to the broader community.

The impact will be both measurable and lasting. We anticipate directly serving 500 individuals over two years through virtual and hybrid sessions, with additional reach through our media partnerships. More importantly, this work will build the foundation for long-term change by giving providers the tools they need to integrate food as medicine into clinical care and empowering individuals to adopt healthier eating behaviors to prevent and manage chronic diseases.

Sustainability is a cornerstone of the project. Our long-standing relationships with healthcare institutions, academic partners, and community organizations will support the integration of culinary medicine into existing clinical and community health programs. We will leverage multiple revenue-generating tools and funding sources, including potential engagement with healthcare system community benefit dollars, class fees with sliding scale options, kitchen rental fees and private sponsorships, to maintain and grow the program beyond the grant period.

This initiative aligns directly with Impact 100's commitment to transformational change: it scales a proven community health solution to reach new and underserved populations, creates a sustainable platform for education and engagement, and addresses urgent public health challenges at the intersection of nutrition, food insecurity, and chronic disease management.

The Phase II expansion of the ECTK will not only transform the delivery of food-as-medicine education in our region but will serve as a replicable model for rural health innovation across Michigan and beyond.

COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

The Esperance Community Teaching Kitchen (ECTK) Phase II expansion is designed to serve residents across Northwest Lower Michigan, specifically the five-county region of Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau counties and beyond. While the ECTK is physically located in Traverse City, our goal is to bridge the gap between the center and outlying communities by removing barriers to access through live-streaming, recording, and distance learning.

This largely rural region includes many remote communities where residents face limited access to healthcare, reliable transportation, and nutrition education. Populations in rural Benzie, Antrim, Kalkaska, and Leelanau counties—as well as those in outer areas of Grand Traverse County—experience high rates of chronic diet-related illnesses such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension. The MiThrive Community Health Needs Assessment highlights elevated levels of food insecurity in these areas. For example, 20% of Kalkaska County residents and 18% of Benzie County residents live below the poverty line.

During Phase I, we successfully adapted our six-week “Dinner with Your Doctor” cooking program for community members in recovery in partnership with Addiction Treatment Services. We also collaborated with Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) to deliver SNAP-Ed and

Cooking Matters classes to teen parents. In 2025, we plan to expand this partnership with MSUE to offer additional cooking classes tailored for neighbors with disabilities.

Underserved populations that will particularly benefit from this expansion include:

- Low-income families and individuals experiencing food insecurity;
- Rural seniors and people without access to transportation;
- Patients served by community clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs);
- Medicaid recipients and uninsured individuals seeking disease prevention and nutrition education;
- Healthcare providers and allied professionals in rural area who lack access to Culinary Medicine training and continuing education;
- And, students in rural school districts whose families have limited access to health education and fresh food.

By working with community partners—including Munson Healthcare, Thomas Judd Care Center, Traverse Heart and Vascular Clinic, local schools, food pantries, and 9&10 News—we will extend ECTK programming beyond our physical location and into homes and clinical settings throughout the region. The technology-enabled model will allow us to reach some of the most vulnerable individuals and families in Northern Michigan with critical nutrition and food-as-medicine education.

ECTK's community ownership model uniquely positions us to rapidly adapt to local needs and co-create solutions in partnership with residents and healthcare providers throughout the region. Recorded and archived Culinary Medicine sessions will provide ongoing access for healthcare providers and the public, ensuring continuity and equity in education across the region. This approach ensures the initiative is inclusive and accessible, regardless of geography or income..

Through this expansion, we expect to directly engage at least 500 individuals over two years in both community and clinical settings, plus many more through recorded content and media broadcast partnerships, making a transformational impact across a geographically large and traditionally underserved region.

NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED AND GAPS IN EXISTING SERVICES

Rural residents of Northwest Lower Michigan face persistent barriers to reliable, affordable, and culturally relevant nutrition education and chronic disease prevention resources. Across Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau counties, the MiThrive Community Health Needs Assessment and local healthcare providers report disproportionately high rates of food insecurity, obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and other diet-related illnesses. These disparities are compounded by geographic isolation, limited transportation, and a shortage of Culinary Medicine and nutrition programming in both clinical and community settings.

Healthcare providers consistently report challenges in delivering nutrition counseling. Many rural medical professionals and students receive fewer than eight hours of formal nutrition education, leaving them underprepared to support patients adopt sustainable, health-promoting behaviors.

Meanwhile, patients—especially in remote areas—have few opportunities to access cooking classes or evidence-based nutrition support that meets them where they are.

In 2023–2024, Groundwork’s Esperance Community Teaching Kitchen (ECTK) served 380 individuals across 52 events, delivering Culinary Medicine programming to both healthcare providers and community members. Phase I revealed strong demand, particularly through meaningful programs like our adapted six-week “Dinner with Your Doctor” series for individuals in recovery, developed with Addiction Treatment Services. We also worked with Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) to provide SNAP-Ed and Cooking Matters classes for teen parents. These efforts reflect ECTK’s core purpose: providing practical, empowering tools that help people take charge of their health.

Despite the success of Phase I, our reach remains limited by geography. Participation has been mostly confined to those living near Traverse City. Many rural and underserved communities across the five-county region remain out of reach.

This proposal addresses that gap by launching a scalable Phase II initiative that uses live-streaming, recording, and digital archiving to break down barriers of distance and time. In partnership with Munson Healthcare, the Thomas Judd Care Center, Traverse Heart and Vascular Clinic, and other community organizations, ECTK will expand equitable access to food-as-medicine education for both providers and residents in remote areas.

The ECTK is one of the only community-owned teaching kitchens in Michigan affiliated with the International Teaching Kitchen Collaborative, giving us a uniquely flexible and collaborative model. Unlike institution-bound programs, ECTK can collaborate across health systems, schools, and nonprofits to offer high-quality, evidence-based education statewide. Past collaborators include Corewell Health’s Culinary Medicine program, McLaren Northern Michigan Foundation’s “Prescriptions for Produce” program, and Trinity Health’s Culinary Medicine dietitian, Kelly Wilson, as a faculty member for our educational events.

By offering real-time virtual classes, hands-on workshops, and an on-demand CME-accredited media library, ECTK Phase II will transform how preventive health education is delivered in rural Northern Michigan. This initiative not only continues but significantly enhances our earlier efforts by building an accessible, flexible platform for long-term impact. It will empower providers with better tools, equip families with practical cooking and nutrition skills, and strengthen community-based efforts to advance health equity.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE

Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities has a long and proven track record of launching, scaling, and sustaining community-based programs that blend environmental, economic, and public health goals. Our organization’s commitment to long-term sustainability is deeply embedded in our strategic priorities, which focus on building diverse coalitions, cultivating authentic partnerships, and securing varied revenue streams to ensure lasting impact.

The Phase II expansion of the Esperance Community Teaching Kitchen (ECTK) is specifically designed to integrate into existing community health and education systems, which supports its sustainability beyond the Impact100 grant period. Our approach leverages four complementary strategies:

Institutional Partnerships:

We have established strong collaborations with healthcare providers and institutions such as Munson Healthcare, Traverse Heart and Vascular Clinic, and the Thomas Judd Care Center. These relationships provide consistent clinical referrals and shared programming opportunities that embed the teaching kitchen into long-term clinical and community health initiatives. Our partnership model with Munson Healthcare is particularly robust, as we are already working to align Culinary Medicine with continuing medical education (CME) requirements and to integrate lifestyle nutrition into patient care. Lifestyle medicine is a medical specialty that uses therapeutic lifestyle interventions as a primary modality to treat chronic conditions. This approach focuses on six pillars: nutrition, stress, sleep, physical activity, social connection, and substance use reduction.

Diversified Revenue Model:

We will pursue a blend of funding streams to sustain and grow the program. This includes partnering with healthcare systems to explore allocations from their community benefit dollars and billing codes for nutrition services; developing sliding-scale class fees for community programming; and continuing to secure private, corporate, and foundation sponsorships. We are actively exploring fee-for-service models, including paid consulting and technical assistance for other communities looking to replicate this model.

Program Scalability and Cost Efficiency:

The investment in live-streaming and recording technology will allow us to expand our reach without adding significant recurring costs. Once the infrastructure is in place, we can provide both live and archived educational sessions to multiple partners simultaneously, lowering the cost per participant over time while increasing program reach and impact.

Organizational Experience in Managing Growth:

Groundwork has a proven history of successfully scaling pilot programs into fully funded, ongoing initiatives. For example, our Farm to School 10 Cents a Meal project began as a localized pilot in Traverse City and has grown into a statewide policy and funding initiative that has secured millions in state support. Our ability to manage complex partnerships, diversify funding sources, and integrate innovative models into our core operations gives us the experience and capacity to sustain ECTK Phase II.

We view this project as a natural progression of our work to build community resilience through local solutions. By empowering providers and patients with practical nutrition education and by removing geographic barriers to access, this initiative will become a lasting resource for our five-county region and a replicable model for rural health innovation across Michigan.