



## Scaling Local Food Businesses

### Problem Statement

The City of Gresham's Economic Development Department was interested in developing a small business growth platform within the city to provide local food businesses resources and opportunities for scaling their business. There were many organizations providing business support services, but no coordinated network of business assistance programming and no focused programming for food businesses.

The opening of a new public food market, [Rockwood Market Hall](#), was a catalyst for this effort. The City wanted the platform, in conjunction with the public market, to serve as a nexus for the regional food ecosystem, bridging relationships between local farmers, small food business and large food corporations, such as Reser's Fine Foods, Pacific Seafood, and Bob's Red Mill.

### Solution

Feeding Cities was engaged to identify successful models in other cities and to develop a roadmap for implementation, including gaining City Council approval for the platform.

### Successful Examples from Other Cities

We identified four relevant models that varied with respect to their focus on food entrepreneurs, relationship with the City, and connection to a public market. We introduced the project team to leaders of each model, to provide ongoing expertise.

[Midtown Global Market](#) in Minneapolis, MN is a newer market that was established under leadership by the City as a redevelopment effort. It leverages local partners to provide small business programming, but is not solely focused on food businesses. The [Neighborhood Development Center](#) (a co-owner of the market), provides most of the small business support services and is a great resource for curriculum, funding strategies and impact metrics.

[Eastern Market](#) in Detroit is a well-established, nationally recognized public market that supports the growth of food entrepreneurs. They offer robust programming, most in conjunction with non-profit partners, and is a great resource for ideas on potential partners and securing external funding.

[Findlay Market](#) in Cincinnati, OH is another well-established public market that was revived as part of a neighborhood redevelopment effort. They only support food business associated with the Market and offered a robust curriculum and creative use of a “pop-up” kitchen concept.

[CommonWealth Kitchen](#) in Boston is nationally recognized and provided important insights into what it takes to truly support the scaling of food businesses. Of the four examples, it provides the most comprehensive set of programming and resources for food entrepreneurs, but it is not associated with a public market. The Kitchen’s partnership with Santander Bank’s [Cultivate Small Business Program](#) offered useful insights into how to leverage and connect to corporations.

## **Roadmap for Moving from Vision to Reality**

### **1. Prioritize Objectives & Gain Early Allies**

- Building a platform focused solely on scaling food businesses would be challenging enough, without also trying to simultaneously build connections with local farmers, develop sustainable practices, etc. Clear initial objectives for the platform and a phased approach would allow the City to ultimately achieve all goals.
- We encouraged the project team to ask a few large food corporations for input into the vision, proposed model and objectives for the platform. How could these companies support the platform through mentorship, procurement or investment? They would also serve as community champions of the project.
- During this short project, the Feeding Cities team met regularly with five City staff, representing four different City departments, to build alignment across the different City departments that would be involved in the new platform. Sharing a detailed concept with the City Council for initial buy-in on timing and resources would be an important next step.

### **2. Identify Resource Partners**

- Mapping the small business support organizations working in the region across the main platform offerings helped identify potential partners as well as gaps in support. Regional and national small business programs could be leveraged to fill any resource gaps.
- The City also needed to identify effective partners for outreach and recruitment of food businesses. We recommended seeking out small business financial institutions (CDFIs in particular) and Community Development Corporations.

### 3. Explore Potential Funding Sources for Start-up Phase

- We recommended positioning the platform as a coordinating mechanism for the City to attract new funding and other economic development initiatives.
- We identified several funding opportunities for the start-up phase of the project, including the JPMorgan Chase Foundation (which helped fund the public market), other bank foundations, regional and community foundations, USDA Regional Food Business Centers, regional economic development grants, and the SBA.

### Impact

The platform was included as a recommended pilot project to immediately implement the 2021 Greater Portland Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The engagement process and resources developed for the Economic Development team were used to help secure buy-in from the City Council and corporate partners in the public market. Rockwood Market Hall includes resources for incubating small food businesses.

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