Urban Agriculture Directors Alliance (UADA)

Business Plan & Fundraising Strategy

Jun 30, 2025

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### Executive Summary

The Urban Agriculture Directors Alliance (“UADA” or “Alliance”) is a newly formed national network that aims to embed urban agriculture (“urban ag”) into city planning and development through collective action by municipal leaders.

Launched as an informal, unfunded network in 2020, UADA has since grown to 20 member-cities meeting regularly to discuss model policies, share lessons, and help cities institutionalize urban ag across the country.

The Alliance convenes urban agriculture directors and leads systems-level change, cross-agency collaboration, and policy innovation across member cities. UADA cultivates a thriving urban ag movement in cities across the US by uniting municipalities, simplifying access to best practices, and bolstering funding access to ensure urban ag is a permanent feature of urban planning to advance food sovereignty, community development, and sustainability. UADA leverages peer learning, advocacy, and strategic coordination to help cities scale local food systems, protect farmland, integrate climate-smart agriculture, and build community wealth.

Now is the time to scale UADA’s work. As federal funding systems falter, the Alliance will provide essential systems of support for municipal urban ag programs. By establishing a national municipal support system, the Alliance will provide municipalities with tools, policy models, and collaboration networks, codifying urban agriculture as an integral and sustainable component of urban planning across the country.

### Organization Description

#### History

In 2020, a small group of urban ag directors from three cities began to meet virtually as a group of municipal representatives advancing urban ag and to learn from each other. Since then, engagement has rapidly expanded to include over 20 USDN member-cities. The sharp increase in attendance highlights the urgent and growing need for increased support. For the first three years the group held monthly meetings of a fairly informal nature focused on share-outs, updates, and opportunities for troubleshooting. In 2022, the project moved within the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) which afforded the group more administrative support. The group currently meets bi-monthly and covers topics ranging from co-locating urban ag and affordable housing, land leasing for urban farms, urban agriculture Extension resources, building capacity within municipalities, and more.

#### Mission, Vision & Goals

**UADA’s vision** is a future where urban agriculture is an integrated, resilient pillar of every U.S. city's environmental, economic, and public health systems.

**UADA’s mission** is to strengthen and scale urban agriculture through a national coalition of city leaders advancing systems-level change, peer learning, policy alignment, and public investment in just, community-rooted food systems.

**UADA’s goals** are to:

* Embed urban agriculture into core city functions and planning frameworks;
* Catalyze shared innovation through peer learning and technical support;
* Elevate national urban agriculture policy through city-led coordination;
* Unlock public and philanthropic funding for equitable food systems; and
* Deliver measurable local impacts on food access, climate adaptation, and workforce development.

#### Membership

Membership is open to any U.S. municipality committed to urban agriculture. Founding UADA cities include:

* USDN cities with full-time Urban Ag Directors: Atlanta, GA; Baltimore, MD; Boston, MA; Detroit, MI; New Orleans, LA; New York City, NY; Philadelphia, PA; Washington, DC.
* Other participating cities: Albuquerque, NM; Austin, TX; Boise, ID; Bozeman, MT; Dallas, TX; Denver, CO; East Point, GA; Lincoln, NE; Minneapolis, MN; New Haven, CT; Salt Lake City, UT; San Francisco, CA; Springfield, MO.

### Programs, Products & Services

#### UADA’s Core Program Areas

Facilitating Collaboration & Problem Solving

* Bi-monthly recurring member meetings to facilitate ongoing peer-learning, address challenges, and build collective voice
* Annual, in-person meeting of Alliance members

Supporting Urban Ag Planning & Implementation

* Develop and deliver a robust website housing resources and data to help jurisdictions pursue deep urban ag development
* Leverage collective voice to expand existing municipal urban ag programs, establish new ones, and inform the USDA urban ag direction

Investing & Accelerating Urban Ag Solutions

* Provide funding for high-impact, city-led projects that develop, test, implement, and amplify urban agriculture success and best practices

Engaging & Educating Key Decisionmakers on Urban Ag Priorities

* Develop educational and outreach materials to inform state and federal stakeholders on roadmaps for success in urban agriculture

Sharing Alliance Member Progress & Urban Ag Best Practices

* Elevate and amplify national best practices for urban ag policies and programs
* Report annually on Alliance progress including city innovations & need

#### Early Results

UADA has demonstrated immediate value and traction:

* New Orleans launched its first Urban Agriculture Working Group and is developing a citywide urban agriculture and food plan thanks to support from UADA peers.
* Austin secured bond funding for farmland preservation and launched agricultural neighborhood feasibility studies.
* Cities across the U.S.—from New York to Salt Lake City to Louisville—have joined UADA to gain technical knowledge, peer support, and a stronger collective voice.

These early results illustrate that cities are ready, and the UADA model fills a crucial systems-level gap in the urban ag movement: sustained infrastructure for local leaders to collaborate, build, and advocate.

### Market Analysis

The urban ag landscape in the United States has grown rapidly in the past decade, driven by increasing concerns around food insecurity, sustainability, and equitable access to healthy food. Numerous NGOs and government agencies support or coordinate urban ag efforts, presenting both collaborative opportunities and potential competition for UADA. UADA, envisioned as a national peer network supporting urban ag leaders within city governments, will need to differentiate itself from existing players that occupy adjacent spaces.

#### Key “Competitors”

USDA Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP)

* *Scope*: A federal program supporting urban ag through grants, education, and policy development.
* *Strengths*: National reach, funding authority, technical assistance.
* *Weakness*: Bureaucratic, less nimble in facilitating peer networks.
* *Overlap*: UADA may compete for visibility and influence among city agencies; however, the USDA could also serve as a funder or strategic ally.

US Council of Mayors Food Policy Task Force (USCM)

* *Scope*: A member driven program shaping food policies at the local level, focusing on issues like access to healthy food, food equity, and sustainability
* *Strengths*: They are strong advocates for policies that support these goals, including advocating for protections for federal nutrition programs and promoting local and sustainable food procurement practices
* *Weakness*: Not all major US cities are operated as Mayor-strong governments; the broad scope of this group (administering federal food programs, food access programs, and municipal food procurement) leave limited space for discussion of urban agriculture
* *Overlap*: Both UADA and USCM share values on food equity, food access, and strengthening local, sustainable food systems.

National Urban Agriculture Initiative

* *Scope:* aims to increase the number of urban farmers who will learn about and utilize a variety of resources for finance, education, research, and outreach to benefit their farm operations. Connecting farmers to the programs and services that are offered nationwide through USDA’s Farm Service Agency is a primary goal of this initiative
* *Strengths:* Successful annual conference attracts diverse group of urban ag stakeholders
* *Weaknesses:* Largely dependent on USDA funding
* *Overlap:* Shared goal of bringing communities together in-person to advance urban agriculture.

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

* *Scope:* An alliance of grassroots organizations advocating for federal policy reform to advance the sustainability of agriculture, food systems, natural resources, and rural communities
* *Strengths:* Trusted advocate, broad reaching, active voice for sustainable farming
* *Weaknesses:* Limited to policy reform and education
* *Overlap:* UADA and NSAC likely agree on many issues areas facing agriculture sustainability.

#### UADA’s Strategic Advantage

While several organizations touch urban ag through policy, practice, and municipal engagement, no dedicated national peer network currently exists for local government officials leading urban agriculture work. This leaves a critical gap in coordination, shared learning, and policy alignment—precisely the niche UADA could fill. The main challenge for UADA will be keeping up with growth of urban ag in cities, demonstrating distinct value, and potentially navigating overlapping mandates with agencies like the USDA or other city-focused networks.

### Management & Organization

UADA’s organizational structure is modeled after the Southeast Sustainability Directors Network, other regional networks created by the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN), and the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA).

#### Fiscal Sponsorship

UADA is a fiscally sponsored project of USDN, which provides fiscal oversight, legal support, in-kind meeting facilitation, and serves as a thought and fundraising partner to UADA’s Director.

#### Management Structure & Founding Leadership Team

UADA Advisory Committee

The UADA Advisory Committee (AC) guides the strategic direction for the early stages of Alliance establishment. The Committee consists of committed UADA members exhibiting diversity in geographic region, city size, and political environments. The AC guides the strategic direction of UADA for fundraising and partnerships, programs and offerings, and staffing. Inaugural Advisory Committee members and Chair have agreed to serve 12-month terms. Advisory Committee responsibilities include:

* Reviewing and providing input/feedback on fundraising materials;
* Providing input and feedback to develop the initial 12-month business plan;
* Participating in AC quarterly virtual meetings;
* Participating in funder engagements when available;
* If possible, helping identify sources of funding;
* Contributing to the achievement of the goals of the Alliance;
* Being ambassadors for the UADA.

UADA’s founding Advisory Committee members are:

* Alex Brooks, Climate Action & Sustainability Coordinator, Boise, ID
* Edwin Marty, Food Policy Manager, Austin, TX
* Grace Treffinger, Urban Agriculture Liaison, New Orleans, LA
* Latha Swamy, Food System Policy Division Director, New Haven, CT
* Shani Fletcher, Director of GrowBoston, Boston, MA

UADA Advisory Committee Chair

In addition to the UADA Advisory Committee responsibilities listed above, the Advisory Committee Chair:

* Participates in a monthly meeting with Alliance Director and consultant;
* Reviews draft AC meeting agendas;
* Chairs quarterly Committee meetings;
* Is available for more direct consultations as needed, within reason.

More details about Advisory Committee roles and responsibilities can be found in the UADA Advisory Committee Scope of Work (Appendix 1).

Director

UADA is managed by a Founding Director who oversees the day-to-day operation of the Alliance, as well as fundraising efforts, member relationships, and staffing the Advisory Committee.

UADA’s founding Director is Kate Lee. Kate launched Washington DC’s Office of Urban Agriculture, the nation’s third person to hold this title, following Atlanta and Philadelphia. Seeking connection with peers, she convened fellow directors—sowing the seed that became UADA. Before government service, Kate spent a decade building and leading DC urban farms. As DC’s Urban Ag Director she gained critical experience in policy and program development. Her diversified experience is well-suited to lead UADA in supporting the needs of municipal urban ag offices.

Strategic Advisor

Currently supporting this effort is Johanna Partin, former Founding Director of the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance, and Senior Advisor on Climate and Sustainability to San Francisco mayors Newsom and Lee. Johanna is a seasoned sustainability expert, systems-change leader, and brings deep experience in building institutional infrastructure, securing strategic funding, and forging cross-sector partnerships. Her guidance ensures UADA is well-positioned for long-term success.

### Financial Plan & Fundraising Strategy

#### Fundraising Goal

In 2025-2026, UADA is seeking $150,000-$200,000 in startup funding to formalize operations, support peer learning infrastructure, fund high-impact projects, and elevate national standards and practices. During this incubation period, UADA will build staffing, governance, and fundraising capacity and expand programming opportunities for members.

#### Grants Received To-Date

In April 2025, UADA received a $20,000 Catalyst Fund grant from the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) to create a 12-month business and fundraising plan; develop materials to secure a first year of funding for UADA; and begin to implement an effective member engagement strategy to ensure UADA’s support aligns with members' top priorities.

#### Fundraising Strategy & Timeline

UADA has identified a list of foundation prospects (Appendix 2) based on overlap between UADA’s goals and the foundations’ funding priorities, as well as existing relationships. UADA has also developed funder outreach language and a fundraising pitch deck (Appendix 3) to use in funder meetings. UADA’s fundraising timeline is as follows:

April-June 2025:

* Develop Alliance business plan and fundraising strategy
* Develop target list of potential funders
* Create fundraising materials
* Formalize curated pitches for funders

July-September 2025:

* Pitch at least five potential funders
* Secure a minimum of one year’s funding

#### Fundraising Principles & Agreements

UADA may encounter circumstances in which it is seeking funding for work that is closely related to the work of an individual UADA member or may overlap with member cities’ own fundraising efforts. Therefore, UADA is working with the Advisory Committee to develop a set of Fundraising Principles and Agreements that ensure that UADA can be both collaborative and efficient with its fundraising efforts. This document is expected to be completed by September 30, 2025.

### Evaluation & Impact Metrics

Success in 12 months will be measured by the following indicators:

* Recruitment of Alliance Advisory Committee
* Completion of a 12-month business and fundraising plan
* Number of funder engagements convened
* Amount of funds raised
* Number of peer-network meetings convened
* Full-time staff support for convening recurring meetings, managing communication and outreach, supporting ongoing fundraising and development
* A website with valuable municipal urban ag planning infrastructure including: urban agriculture position descriptions, approved urban ag zoning policies, templates for urban farm land lease and tax abatement program development, and community-led urban agriculture master plans
* A 3-5 year strategic funding and business plan
* Sufficient funding to support UADA’s work in Year 2 support, and hold peer-sharing network meetings on topics of interest to members including land use planning and the intersectionality of urban ag and other government investments

Success in five years will be measured by the following indicators:

* Three additional municipalities create dedicated urban agriculture roles in local government
* Ten jurisdictions have formally adopted urban agriculture policies and/ or programs into their municipal planning frameworks, securing dedicated staffing and funding
* The US Dept. of Agriculture recognizes the Alliance as a tool for driving standardized urban agriculture policy models, zoning frameworks, and municipal incentives that serve as national best practices.[[1]](#footnote-0)

Appendix 1

[UADA Advisory Committee Scope of Work](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Bg73VJSrHGSWqo_5EEJuL3GarZrRsP_J/view?usp=drive_link)

Appendix 2

| **UADA Funder Prospects** |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
| **Foundation** | **Red flag?** | **Member contact?** |
| [11th Hour Project](https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/funders/11th-hour-project) |  |  |
| [Agua Fund](https://www.aguafund.org/) |  |  |
| [Bezos Earth Fund](https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/grants-b/bezos-earth-fund) | yellow flag | Edwin/ Latha |
| [Builders Initiative](https://www.buildersinitiative.org/) |  |  |
| [Howard G. Buffett Foundation](https://www.thehowardgbuffettfoundation.org/) |  |  |
| [Clif Family Foundation](https://cliffamilyfoundation.org/) |  | Edwin |
| [ClimateWorks Foundation](https://www.climateworks.org/) |  |  |
| Michael & Susan Dell Foundation |  | Edwin? |
| [Gates Foundation](https://www.gatesfoundation.org/) |  |  |
| [Global Greengrants Fund](https://www.greengrants.org/) |  |  |
| [Healing Soils Foundation](https://www.healingsoils.org/) |  |  |
| [James Beard Foundation](https://www.jamesbeard.org/) |  |  |
| [JM Kaplan](https://jmkfund.org/) |  |  |
| [Kellog Foundation](https://www.wkkf.org/) | maybe? | Grace |
| [Kresge Foundation](https://kresge.org/) |  |  |
| [McKnight Foundation](https://www.mcknight.org/) |  |  |
| [Mars Wrigley Foundation](https://www.mars.com/our-brands/mars-snacking/mars-wrigley-foundation) |  |  |
| [No Regrets Initiative](https://www.noregretsinitiative.com/) |  |  |
| [David and Lucile Packard Foundation](https://www.packard.org/) |  |  |
| [VK Rasmussen](https://vkrf.org/) |  |  |
| [Panta Rhea Foundation](https://pantarhea.org/) |  |  |
| [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](https://www.rwjf.org/) |  |  |
| [Rockefeller Foundation](https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/) |  | Latha |
| [Rockefeller Brothers Fund](https://www.rbf.org/) |  |  |
| [Schmidt Family Foundation](https://tsffoundation.org/) |  |  |
| [Summit Foundation](https://www.summitfdn.org/) |  |  |
| [Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders](https://www.agandfoodfunders.org/) |  |  |
| [Trust for Public Lands](https://www.tpl.org/) |  | Latha |
| [Volgenau Foundation](https://www.volgenaufoundation.org/) |  |  |
| [Walton Family Foundation](https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/) |  |  |
| [Wright Foundation](https://wrightfortomorrow.org/) |  |  |
| <https://biggreen.org/> |  | Edwin |
| [ShipT](https://www.shipt.com/about) |  | Edwin |
| Simplot Foundation |  | Alex |
| [Venable Foundation](https://www.venable.com/community/foundation) |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| grey = not sure they're a great fit |  |  |
| green = current USDN funder |  |  |

Appendix 3

[UADA Fundraising Pitch Deck](https://drive.google.com/file/d/14apvwXcLf5rI5zkR_sLZvjgjkX4DzdsB/view?usp=drive_link)

1. Given the unpredictability of government priorities and funding, the recognition and sustained support of the U.S. Department of Agriculture is not guaranteed. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)