

2021-2022 Virtual Farm to School Institute

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Virtual Farm to School Institute?

The Virtual Farm to School (FTS) Institute helps teams work together to create a culture of equity and wellness, improve food access, increase student leadership, and strengthen local food systems. The Virtual Institute brings teams together for an intensive summer session held online to build relationships, skills, and a collaborative action plan for FTS programming. Team members leave ready and able to support one another, to implement the action plan and learning school-wide, and to build shared leadership and capacity for the long haul. With the support of a coach, teams spend the next year putting their plans into action and connecting classrooms, cafeterias and communities. A role specific professional learning community (PLC) supports individual team members with their unique role and helps them integrate the FTS action plan.

Who participates in the Institute?

Any PK-12 school or early childhood program in New England or New York can apply to the Virtual Institute. Teams are welcome to apply as a single school, school district, early childhood program or as an early childhood collaborative. If an early childhood collaborative applies, each individual program should have at least one representative on the team. The Institute is designed to support programs in either the early stages of development or in taking their programming to the next level.

What is included in the Institute program?

Teams selected for the FTS Institute are given support for an entire year, beginning with a coach that helps the team assess their current FTS efforts and then joins them for a summer intensive where together they engage in action planning. Vermont FEED and other FTS partners provide support (PLC & workshops) and serve in an advisory capacity to teachers, school nutrition staff, and community members during the year as they implement their plan and assess their successes and challenges.

Who should be on a team and how do we select people to serve on our team?

Farm to school efforts are most successful and long-lasting when teams take the time to build buy-in from the school/center and community through a diverse set of stakeholders. These stakeholders should include nutrition/food service staff, teachers, administrators, family members, students (middle & high school),

nurses, farmers and community partners. Teams for the Institute's summer retreat are typically 5-7 members, but a full team or FTS committee can be larger during the school year. Consider inviting people who are already FTS champions as well as key decision-makers and implementers who have yet to become involved but could provide valuable insights or connections when it comes time to implement your action plan. Your school may already have a group that has been working on FTS or wellness, or there might be a committee that has worked on these efforts in the past but possibly needs a "refresh" with some new planning and new team members.

What will take place during the summer intensive on August 16-17, 2021?

Teams will be invited to learn together in both large and small groups designed to share strategies and address common challenges in Farm to School. Teams are given time with their coach to develop their custom action plans, which are the heart of the Institute experience. Each team assesses its school's strengths and opportunities, then creates an integrated action plan that builds on those strengths, with the added chance to receive feedback from peers from across the region.

What will a team be expected to do throughout the year?

Once a final draft of the action plan is completed, teams should share their plan with key members of their school or program's administration and any other stakeholders. Institute schools are expected to commit to implementing their Farm to School Action Plan and establishing systems to track progress throughout the year. Teams will establish regular meetings that include their coach (monthly is recommended), with the focus on assessing progress, communicating and celebrating successes, and changing course as needed. In addition, there will be monthly role specific PLCs that allow for individuals to meet with others in similar roles across all the teams. At the end of the institute, all teams will present out on their successes and challenges through a spring webinar with other teams. Teams will also have a final opportunity to work with their coach to create an updated action plan and rubric for the following year.

What is the role of a coach?

Every team participating in the Institute has a designated coach that will be matched to them based on their geography and/or specific needs their team may have in building up their Farm to School program. Coaches are supported

by Vermont FEED in order to provide the best services possible to their teams during the summer intensive and throughout the year. Coaches facilitate the development of the action plan and make connections to any technical assistance a team could use as they implement their plans. Coaches keep teams informed of learning opportunities and professional development that can strengthen their practice. They can help infuse creativity into the planning and implementation process by offering insights, suggestions, and feedback regularly. Gentle reminders to celebrate successes, capture photos and stories, and market their team's FTS efforts are encouraged. Most of all, coaches guide their team, rather than do things for them—they listen, reflect, evaluate, rethink and support the implementation of the Action Plan.

Is there a cost to participate in the Institute?

Thanks to the generous support of our funders over the years, we are able to provide the year-long Institute programming to school teams at a reduced rate of \$600 per team. We work to make the Institute accessible to all by offering scholarships for potential applicants.

Who hosts the Institute and how do we contact them for any questions?

Vermont FEED (Food Education Every Day), which is a partnership project of Shelburne Farms and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), has hosted the Farm to School Institute since 2010, building upon decades of experience in supporting schools, communities and farms. Visit the Vermont FEED website (www.vtfeed.org) for more information about the Institute and other resources. Questions specifically about the Institute can be sent to institute@shelburnefarms.org.