



Dine Vegan Toolkit: A Guide to Launching Your Own Citywide Vegan Dining Campaign

Empowering Activists to Partner with Local Restaurants and Build Vegan Momentum



What is Dine Vegan?

Dine Vegan is a grassroots, city-focused campaign designed to bring visibility, excitement, and support to plant-based dining by partnering with local restaurants to feature and promote their vegan menu items for a limited-time event – whether for a weekend, a week, or a full month. It's more than just a food event. It's a **public education tool**, a **business partnership model**, and a **culture-shifting strategy** all in one. Through collaborative planning and community promotion, Dine Vegan campaigns help normalize vegan options in mainstream settings, showcase the creativity of local chefs, and make plant-based eating more accessible to everyone.

Think of it as a local celebration of the vegan food your community is already making – one that sparks conversation, encourages trial, and builds lasting relationships between advocates and food businesses.

"Our goal wasn't just about food – it was about vegan visibility and opening doors to vegan options for people who haven't explored them yet."

– McKenzie, Dine Vegan Nashville Organizer



Why Start One in Your City (Or Nearby)?

There are a handful of cities known for their vegan food scenes – Portland, L.A., NYC – and they're great. But some of the **best** places to launch a Dine Vegan campaign are cities that **aren't** yet recognized for vegan excellence – even if the vegan community there is already buzzing.

If you know a nearby city where:

- There's a strong vegan or plant-curious community,
- Local restaurants have vegan entrees and are open to new ideas,
- And there isn't a coordinated vegan dining campaign...

These cities often have passionate eaters who are excited to support local vegan efforts. Restaurant owners are always looking for a fresh way to bring people in, and a Dine Vegan campaign is a great way to tap into an underrepresented cuisine. Basically, the best cities have a lot of *potential* that just needs a little spark.

When you launch something like this in a place that's never had it before, people notice. Restaurants get excited. Diners show up. And suddenly, your city becomes just a little more vegan friendly!

If you're looking to amplify the vegan foodie scene in a town near you, I hope this toolkit helps guide you on your journey to organizing such a pivotal campaign. Being a trailblazer in your community is difficult work. But trust in the processes, use this toolkit as a guide, and don't give up!

If you're looking for more information, are interested in help, or need guidance outside of this toolkit, please [contact McKenzie!](#)

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Planning & Vision

First thing's first – get clear on your goals. Starting a campaign like this might feel big at first. But trust me, it's totally doable when you get clear on your goals and start small. This section helps you figure out what kind of Dine Vegan event you want to run, what success could look like, and how to pull it off (even if you're flying solo at first).

Before you start messaging restaurants or designing a logo, take a breath and zoom out. What do you want this to become?

Your Short-Term vs. Long-Term Goals

Your short-term goals might be something like:

- Get 5-8 local restaurants to participate
- Create buzz around the delicious, local vegan food in your city
- Get coverage in your local newspaper or blog

These are great goals. Anything that can amplify vegan food in your community is a win. These short-term goals are where other Dine Vegan initiatives, like [Dine Vegan Nashville](#), really found their footing. We weren't trying to be the next major Veg Fest or host a splashy event. Smaller goals are often more attainable, and a smaller, more successful event is always better than a bigger event that gets lost in its complexity.

Your long-term vision could look like:

- An annual vegan restaurant week with dozens of participants
- A growing local coalition of plant-forward businesses
- Transforming your city into a top destination for vegan-friendly food culture

Make sure to write these goals down, even if they're not quite perfect yet.

Pro Tip:

If you're a team of one, focus on scalable outreach like pre-written email templates and mass messaging. Use free tools like Canva, Airtable, and Google Drive to keep organized.

Defining Success

Think about how you'll know if this is working. Not everything needs to be measured in numbers, but here are a few benchmarks that can help:

- Number of restaurants that sign on
- Total vegan dishes featured or sold
- Media or influencer coverage
- Social media engagement (likes, shares, comments)
- Feedback from diners or restaurant owners
- Growth in participation year over year

Choose Your Campaign Style

One of the most important initial steps to take when planning your Dine Vegan event is determining your campaign style, or structure, of the event. There are a few different ways to structure your Dine Vegan event – and it's okay to keep it simple to start. Here are some common formats:

- **All-vegan restaurant week:** Only fully vegan businesses participate
- **Veg-friendly spotlight:** Include any restaurant willing to promote one or several of their plant-based dishes
- **Pop-up partnerships:** Collaborate with vegan chefs or bakers to create special one-night events inside existing restaurants or with a booth at a local festival

At this point in the process, you need to look at your city's food scene. It's time consuming but create a list or spreadsheet of every restaurant in your city that offers at least *one* vegan-by-default menu item. That is, a menu item that doesn't require any modifications to be vegan. Once this task is done, analyze your restaurant list. Are there more vegan-friendly restaurants than fully vegan ones? That might shape your decision.

Assembling a Core Team (Even If It's Just You!)

I would've struggled to organize Dine Vegan Nashville without my Core Project Team. With a campaign like a Dine Vegan week, teamwork truly makes the dream work. But you don't need a big team to get started! If you can pull in a few friends or community members with useful skills, it'll help things move faster.

Consider having a communications person on board. Someone who is a strong writer, is familiar with local news outlets, or who has a great social media following. Do you need help with outreach? Recruit someone comfortable cold calling or visiting restaurants, building relationships, and persistent about following up. Another critical person to add to your team is someone who is visually creative, like a graphic designer. Someone who can make flyers, logos, or cute Instagram graphics. Lastly, do you know someone who is a strong project manager? This involves keeping timelines organized and things on track (even just using a free Trello board or Google Sheet).

If you're all these people right now – that's okay! Just pace yourself and prioritize what moves the campaign forward.



Finding Partners or Volunteers

Early in the process, reach out to local external stakeholders who might be able to guide your initial planning. Is there a vegan social club or MeetUp group? Perhaps a chapter of a state-level vegan or animal advocacy organization? Do you live in a college town? There may be student groups eager to be involved. Tapping into those networks can be invaluable. They might have inside scoop on vegan restaurants in the area, who to pull into your Core Project Team, and the right messaging that resonates with your community.

Leverage What Already Exists

During this process, don't reinvent the wheel if you don't have to. Look around and see who's already doing aligned work in your area. Is there a local VegFest organizer you could team up with or learn from? Maybe there's a plant-curious food blogger or Instagrammer in your city who'd be excited to help promote the campaign, especially if they get early access or a behind-the-scenes look.

Also think about the broader picture – food intersects with a lot of issues. Are there local coalitions working on things like food access, health equity, environmental justice, or climate action? If plant-based eating is even loosely connected to their mission, there may be a natural opportunity to collaborate or cross-promote.

The more you connect the dots between your campaign and other local movements, the stronger your foundation will be – and the more likely it is that your city will rally behind what you're building.

Funding Your Campaign

Creating your Dine Vegan initiative without spending a dime is possible. If you're keeping your first event small-scale, able to rely on friends and volunteers to help create materials, and building buzz via free promotion channels like social media, that's amazing!

Scaling up the event, boosting promotion via paid advertising, and designing, printing, and posting event materials can add costs, so you may consider raising some funds to support yourself.

One of the best ways to fund this campaign is by seeking out a grant. If you're reading this and thinking, *"But I've never written a grant before,"* – same. I had minimal experience going into this, and the idea of writing a full grant proposal was intimidating at first. But here's the thing: with the right support and a clear idea of what you're building, it's absolutely doable.

Finding Grantors

Start by thinking locally. Are there community or animal advocacy foundations? What about food access organizations in your city or state? Many of them offer small grants for events or projects that align with health, sustainability, animal advocacy, or equity – and a Dine Vegan initiative can check all those boxes.

You can also do an online search for "community grants + vegan" or "animal advocacy grants."

How to Structure Your Proposal

Many foundations have an application portal or form for you to fill out, so you don't have to worry about starting from scratch. If you do have to create your own, here's a sample grant proposal outline you can follow:

Pro Tip:

It might be worth sense-checking with the restaurants in your chosen city if they'd be interested in participating in this event early. If your grant is approved but you don't have any restaurants interested in your project, you'll have to chat with your grantor about how to proceed.

Project Summary

This is your elevator pitch – a paragraph or two explaining what you're proposing, who it's for, and why it matters. Be clear, vivid, and specific.

Need & Opportunity

Describe the problem or gap you're trying to address. Why does your city or community need a vegan dining campaign? Maybe there's growing interest in plant-based eating, but few restaurants offering options. Maybe there's no centralized way to highlight the ones that do. Show funders what's missing – and how this campaign meets that need.

Activities & Timeline

This section maps out how you'll make your campaign happen. Break it into phases if needed:

- Planning (restaurant recruitment, partnerships)
- Promotion (flyers, social, PR)
- Event Week (launch activities, daily themes, content, etc.)
- Wrap-Up (surveys, thank-yous, reporting)

Goals & Success Metrics

What does success look like for this project? Be honest and clear – and make it measurable wherever you can. Foundations want to know where their money is going and how far its reach is. Instead of vague goals like “raise awareness,” aim for specifics like

- Recruit 12 participating restaurants
- Drive 300+ diners to try vegan meals
- Reach 10,000 people through social media

Budget Overview

Lay out where the money's going. A simple table is perfect – no need to overcomplicate it. You can use the template below. Make sure to customize it to your exact project needs and create your estimates based on a little research! For example, how much does your local printer charge for 100 posters? What are the registration and rental costs to set up an informational booth at your local farmers' market?

Line Item	Description	Estimated Cost
Project Management	Time for outreach, coordination, etc.	\$1,000
Marketing & Promotion	Posters, postcards, digital ads	\$1,500
Restaurant Stipends	\$500 each for up to 10 restaurants	\$5,000
Event Supplies	Tabling materials, signage, etc.	\$250
Total		\$7,750



Other Funding Options

Local Sponsors:

Natural grocers, vegan-friendly brands, or even restaurants who want a spotlight can all make great partners. Ask for small sponsorships (even \$100–\$500) and offer to include their logo on materials or shout them out on social.

Community Fundraising:

Launch a simple GoFundMe! Frame it as “Help bring [Your City]’s first Dine Vegan Week to life!” and be specific about where the money goes. People love supporting grassroots ideas like this. Helpful tip: create incentives to give to people who donate, like branded t-shirts or stickers.

Restaurant Outreach

Finding the Right Restaurants

Getting restaurants on board is the most important (and sometimes trickiest!) part of launching a local vegan dining campaign. Whether you’re inviting fully vegan spots or convincing omnivore places to highlight a plant-based special, the key is being clear, enthusiastic, and most importantly...**patient**.

Emphasize what’s in it for them. The event is bound to bring in new customers! Social media exposure (and tagging restaurants’ accounts) will boost their social media platforms.



Starting Your Outreach

When it’s time to approach the restaurants, pick a method of communication that works best for you. Prefer email? Having everything in writing is great to look back on for reference, but restaurants may be slow to respond. Some restaurants also have simple contact forms integrated on their website rather than an email inbox. If calling is more your speed, that’s a great method too! Be mindful of when you’re calling. Lunch hour rush or happy hour might not be the best time to chat with a manager. If in-person is your style, drop in to speak with the team during a quieter time of day (and maybe order something while you’re there to help build rapport!).

Now, if there’s anything I learned from this experience, it’s that you have to follow up. **Frequently**. Restaurant owners and managers are incredibly busy and might not be paying attention to their inboxes.

The next page has several templates to jumpstart your outreach. Be sure to customize them to meet your project needs!

Template Email #1: First Outreach Message

Hi [Name/Restaurant Team],

I'm organizing an exciting new event called [Name of Your Event] – a weeklong celebration of [city]'s plant-based food scene happening [Month + Dates]! We're inviting local restaurants to feature at least one vegan dish for the week to help highlight all the amazing plant-forward options our city has to offer.

You don't need to be a vegan restaurant to join – in fact, part of the goal is to spotlight the creative plant-based options on menus at all kinds of places!

I'd love to send you more info if you're interested. It's low-lift, free to join, and we'll be promoting the event heavily through local media and social channels.

Let me know if I can send over more details or if you'd like to schedule time for a deeper conversation!

Thanks,
[Your Name]

Template Email #2: Follow-Up

Subject: Quick follow-up – [Name of Your Event]

Hi [Name], just checking in to see if you saw my note about [Name of Event]? We're excited to get a great lineup of restaurants and would love to include [Restaurant Name]. Let me know if you have questions or want more info – happy to talk it through!

Hope to hear from you,
[Your Name]

Script #1: Phone Outreach

Hi! My name's [Your Name] and I'm organizing a local Dine Vegan event in [Month]. We're inviting restaurants to feature a plant-based dish for the week and take part in a big citywide celebration of vegan food. It's free to join, and we're doing all the promotion. Just wanted to see if I could send more info your way – are you curious to hear more?

Script #2: Leaving a Voicemail

Hi! My name's [Your Name] and I'm organizing a local Dine Vegan week in [Month]. We're inviting restaurants to feature a plant-based dish for the week and take part in a big citywide celebration of vegan food. It's free to join, and we're doing all the promotion. Just wanted to see if I could send more info your way. When you have a moment, please [text/email/call] at [your phone number or email address]. I'm eager to hear from you!



Pitching to Restaurants

Similar to how you structured your grant, you need to persuade the restaurant to hop on board. What's in it for them? Even if it seems obvious to you, many restaurants are going to need **buy-in** to participate. In your conversations following the outreach phone call or email, be sure to tell them about:

- What you're planning for the event. What's the overall theme or goal?
- The restaurants' responsibilities. How much work is this going to be for them? What do you need from the restaurants in order for this event to succeed?
- Your responsibilities. How much workload are you and your Core Project Team taking on?
- What's in it for them? Highlight all the value and benefits they would get from participating.

Arranging an in-person or virtual meeting is a fantastic next step after your initial outreach. Taking the time early on in the process to get everyone on the same page is critical to a successful and smooth event.

Securing Commitments

After restaurants seem eager to participate and have given the green light, it's important to secure those commitments in writing. It can be an email or a simple online form, but you should be sure to gather clear sign off from each restaurant confirming that:

- The restaurant will participate during the proposed dates.
- The restaurant's logo and information will be included in promotional materials, such as posters, social media posts, and flyers.
- The restaurant will offer at least one discounted, fully plant-based menu items to diners participating in the initiative.
- The restaurant representative has the authority to agree to participate and make decisions about the event.

Marketing & Promotion

This is your moment to get loud. A strong, inviting campaign presence helps diners feel excited *and* gives restaurants confidence that participating will be worth it.

Branding Your Campaign

Create a simple but eye-catching logo and color palette. Consistent branding makes your campaign feel polished and trustworthy. Canva is a great tool for designing social graphics, flyers, and email templates. If social media marketing or graphic design isn't in your skillset, this is an excellent role to add to your Core Project Team.



Reaching Out to Local Media

Local newspapers, radio, TV stations, and community blogs are powerful allies in spreading the word about your Dine Vegan event. Media coverage lends credibility, builds excitement, and reaches audiences beyond your

existing network. When pitching, keep your message short, clear, and community-focused—highlight the participating restaurants, the special vegan menu items, and the positive impact on local businesses.

Sample Outreach Email

Subject: Local restaurants come together for [Your City]'s Dine Vegan Week!

Hi [Reporter's Name/Outlet Team],

I'm reaching out to share a unique and delicious story happening right here in [City]. From [event start date] to [event end date], local restaurants will participate in Dine Vegan [City]—a week-long celebration highlighting creative vegan dishes and showcasing the talent of our local food scene.

Participating restaurants include [insert a few key names], each offering a featured vegan menu item designed to surprise and delight both plant-based eaters and curious food lovers alike.

This event isn't just about great food—it's about building community, supporting local restaurants, and making dining more inclusive for everyone. We'd love for [Outlet Name] to help us spread the word!

Thank you for considering covering this exciting event. Please let me know if you'd like more details—I'd be glad to provide them.

Social Media Playbook

Your social media presence is the heartbeat of this campaign — it's where people get excited, restaurants feel supported, and the buzz really takes off. This doesn't mean you need to go viral or post constantly. It does mean you'll want to show up consistently, clearly. The *first* step is creating a Facebook Page via your own personal account. That unlocks more digital marketing tools and insights. Create a Facebook Event for your initiative, too! If you're not quite sure what to touch on, consider the following posts:

- Save-the-date graphics teasing the event
- Announcements like "Restaurants are signing up now — tag your faves!"
- Educational content: "What is [Name of Your Event]?" "Why plant-based?" "How to participate."
- Restaurant spotlight posts with a dish photo and short caption
- A carousel of dishes with "swipe to see what's on the menu"
- "Which one would you try first?" polls or Q&As in Instagram Stories

Here are a few captions to get you started:

Mark your calendars, [City] — something delicious is coming 🌱 [Name of Your Event] kicks off [dates] celebrating the amazing plant-based foods in our local restaurants!

First look at @RestaurantName's special for [Name Of Your Event]! 🥰 Crispy jackfruit tacos with avocado crema and pickled red onions. Delicious! Who's trying this?

Pro Tip:

Ask participating restaurants to post a few times about the event! These restaurants have a robust following of their own and it's a wonderful opportunity to increase your event's awareness.

Create a Content Calendar

A content calendar is a tool that allows you (or your Communications expert) to create and schedule your social media content. If you do all the work ahead of time, you can focus on engaging with people who interact with your content. It's best to have a strategy when creating a content calendar – sometimes quality over quantity is key. You can use a free spreadsheet like Google Sheets, or even a social media calendar like Metricool (free but has paid features).

Template Content Calendar

- **6–8 weeks out:** Announce the event + save the date
- **3–4 weeks out:** Start revealing participating restaurants
- **2 weeks out:** Share sneak peeks of dishes, teaser videos from restaurants, etc.
- **Event week:** Post daily! Spotlight restaurants, share diner photos, and answer FAQs
- After the event, don't let the momentum die. Post a simple thank-you, share highlights, and celebrate the community effort.

Sample caption:

Wow, [City] – you showed up **BIG** for plant-based food this week 🍷 Thank you to all the restaurants who participated and every single diner who tried something new. Until next time, keep tagging us when you eat vegan out there!



Event Week Logistics & Planning Timeline

Planning a citywide vegan dining event can feel like a massive undertaking, but when you break it into steps across a six-month window, it becomes a manageable – and genuinely exciting – project. This section outlines when to make decisions, what to focus on at each stage, and how to keep your event week running smoothly once it launches.

While more time to plan is always ideal, we worked with a six-month lead time. That gave us enough breathing room to handle outreach, gather materials, and promote the event without scrambling at the last minute. Below is a suggested planning timeline to help you stay on track. Adjust based on your bandwidth, the size of your event, or whether you're doing this solo or with a team.

Timeline	What to Focus On
6 Months Out	Identify target dates for your restaurant week. Create a shortlist of restaurants to approach and begin crafting your outreach materials (email templates, one-pagers, and an FAQ if needed). Decide what kind of incentives or gamification you'll offer to drive public engagement.
5 Months Out	Begin outreach to restaurants via email or phone. Start tracking responses and commitments in a shared doc or other tracking tool. Share the basic outline of what participating entails and request a short call if they're interested.
4 Months Out	Confirm at least a handful of restaurants to begin anchoring your event. Set a deadline for participation commitments. If offering prizes or giveaways, now's a good time to begin sourcing or pitching local sponsors. Outline your marketing and social media approach.
3 Months Out	Collect key details from participating restaurants: their featured vegan menu item(s), photos, special hours or deals. Begin designing your print and/or digital assets: flyers, menu inserts, social media graphics, signage, etc. Reconfirm plans for the dining participants experience (e.g., punch cards, social media tagging) and clarify any rules of participation.
2 Months Out	Finalize your list of participating restaurants. Order any printed materials (allowing time for design revisions and shipping). Begin teasing the event on social media and build your email list. If you're running a giveaway, start to promote it.
1 Month Out	Deliver any printed materials to restaurants (menu inserts, flyers, table tents). Begin posting more frequently across your channels and reminding restaurants to do the same. Consider sending an email to local partners or press for extra exposure.
2 Weeks Out	Follow up with all participating restaurants: confirm their feature, hours, and make sure they've received all materials. Share a short promotional checklist with them. Post final reminders and countdowns. Encourage your audience to tag friends and plan their visits.
Event Week	Monitor daily social posts and restaurant engagement. Encourage diners to tag you, submit punch cards, or enter giveaways. Repost customer content and visit participating restaurants if you can. Keep the momentum going online.
Post-Event	Thank restaurants and supporters publicly. Share impact stats (e.g., how many meals sold, social reach). Ask restaurants for feedback and testimonials. Consider running a short survey for diners. Begin compiling learnings for next time.

Early steps should focus on restaurant outreach—getting those first yeses on the calendar sets the foundation for everything else. From there, you can build out your promotional strategy, finalize design assets, and decide how to gamify the experience for locals (think social media contests, punch cards, or passport challenges). As you get closer to the big week, make time for restaurant check-ins, material distribution, and ongoing engagement across your channels.

Engagement & Follow-Up

The work doesn't end once Restaurant Week is over. The way you follow up will shape relationships for next year, boost community goodwill, and show your supporters (and local partners) that their participation mattered.

Here's how to close things out meaningfully and keep the momentum going:

Thanking Restaurants

Send a heartfelt thank-you message to every participating restaurant. A short email is great, but even better if it's paired with a public thank-you on social media. If they posted during the event, re-share their best content and tag them with appreciation.

Gathering Impact

You'll want to collect stories, numbers, and feedback – not just for your records, but to celebrate what you accomplished together. Ask each restaurant:

- How many of the featured dishes they sold
- What feedback they got from diners
- Whether they'd be interested in participating again

Lessons Learned from Nashville

We ran our first Vegan Restaurant Week in Nashville, and it taught us a lot – about what to plan early, what to communicate clearly, and leave flexible. Here's a quick download of what worked and what we'll do differently next time.

What Worked

Highlighting just 1–2 dishes per restaurant helped keep things focused and prep manageable for kitchens. It also made it easier for diners to decide what to try.

Offering giveaways tied to participation drove more traffic – our punch card component was well received by both diners and restaurants alike.

What We'd Improve

I did my restaurant outreach totally digital. Next time, I'd focus more on face-to-face engagement to build strong relationships. Building those foundations goes a long way!

Rather than requiring a completed punch card to be entered to win our gift card giveaway, we'd have each punch be one entry. The more restaurants a person can visit, the more entries they receive!

We're Here to Help

If you have any questions about organizing your own vegan restaurant week, don't hesitate to [contact McKenzie!](#)

Join Our Community

Want to connect with like-minded advocates across the United States? Sign up for our [exclusive community group](#) for the latest news, petitions, and a space to share your work in our movement.

