

FREEDGE MANUAL

*A comprehensive guide to implementing
a community refrigerator*



Acknowledgments

What started as an idea to ease access to prepared foods became a reality through the hard work, dedication, and willingness to try something new by many individuals and organizations. Thank you to Tom Kunesh at Whatcom County Health and Community Services and Kassandra Church at Skagit Public Health for collaborating creatively with our team to turn our concept into an approved plan. Thank you to the leadership teams at The RE Store, Upper Skagit Library, and the North Fork Library for being willing to host a community project. And the biggest thank you to all the staff and AmeriCorps VISTA members who helped build the character of such a joyful program: Brandi Hutton, Jenna Deane, Delaney Skordal, Derek Long, Isabella Slisz, Chelsea Hilmoie, Connor Hoemann, Suzi Tanski, Rose Lathrop, Amy Vergillo, Elodie Cerauskis, Audrey Madison, and Katy Tiernan.

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Thanks to our Funders



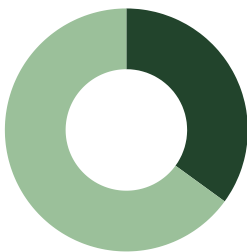
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INTRODUCTION

Every day, food service providers, such as supermarkets, hospitals, universities, restaurants, and food preparation companies, make decisions about what to do with surplus or leftover food. This surplus food includes items like prepared foods, produce, bakery and dairy items, and meat. An average of 30-40% of the food we produce globally goes to the landfill. In the US alone, we produce around 74 million tons of surplus food annually which is valued at \$382 billion. Additionally, food businesses lose \$108 billion worth of revenue each year due to unsold food (8).



73.9M

Total tons of US surplus
food generated in 2023



\$382B

Value of US surplus food
generated in 2023

There are multiple ways that food service providers can save money by reducing the amount of surplus food sent to landfills. Food banks and hunger relief organizations often provide free pick-ups for excess food, purchasing costs are decreased when only buying what is needed, and businesses can claim tax deductions for food donations. Recovering surplus food can also eliminate potential issues associated with dumpsters such as odors and pests.

Recovering and redistributing surplus food benefits the environment in a variety of ways. Not wasting food also means that the resources that went into growing the food are not wasted - water, electricity, labor, fuel, and more. By using up the food we have already produced, we put less stress on an already overworked system of production. Rescuing food prevents the embodied natural resources used to produce the food from going to waste and helps to mitigate climate change by eliminating potential green house gas emissions. (3).

Sustainable Connection's Food Recovery Program specializes in rescuing this prepared food, which makes up an estimated 80% of the food waste puzzle (4). Prepared food is traditionally harder to rescue due to the need to keep food held at the proper temperature to meet health and safety standards. However, picking up small quantities using volunteers and delivering it directly to group shelters or community refrigerators (Freedges!) helps to reduce food waste and ensure it gets into the hands of folks that need it most.



Our Food Recovery Program Team: Connor, Izzy, Brandi, Chelsea, and Jenna

Learn more about how to start a Food Recovery Program

<https://bit.ly/3GqFabl>





OVERVIEW

What is a Freedge?

A Freedge is a community refrigerator packed with free surplus food from local restaurants, schools, farms, and other area food producers. Freedges reduce barriers to food access by giving the community a second chance at food that would have otherwise gone to waste. Freedges are self-serve and give the public a chance to access food outside of normal food bank hours, skip the long lines, and receive food more discreetly. While a Freedge will not feed a family for a week, it can consistently provide a snack or meal for people most days of the week.

Why does food go to waste?

Food goes to waste for a variety of reasons. Some instances include overproduction, poor storage, overstocking shelves, stores encouraging people to buy more than they need (think buy one get one deals!), to name a few. Another major reason that food goes to waste is the misconceptions around sell-by and best-by dates. Many people believe that once these dates pass, the food is no longer safe to eat, but that's not the case!

Here are some examples of commonly used phrases:

"Best if Used By/Before"

dates indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

"Sell-By"

dates tell the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. It is also not a safety date.

"Use-By" dates are the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date except for when used on infant formula.

"Freeze-By" dates indicates when a product should be frozen to maintain peak quality. Again, it is not a purchase or safety date.

As described, none of these dates indicate that food is no longer safe for consumption (5). If the date passes during home storage, a product should still be safe and wholesome if handled properly until the time spoilage is evident. Spoiled foods will develop an off odor, flavor or texture due to naturally occurring spoilage bacteria. If a food has developed such spoilage characteristics, it should not be eaten. Grocery stores and restaurants immediately dispose of these items when they reach the date indicated, even though they are still edible. Therefore, this type of short dated surplus food is perfect for a Freedge!

Bill Emerson Food Donation Act (Good Samaritan Act)

One of the biggest concerns people have when starting a Freedge or donating to one, is getting sued if someone gets sick from eating food they obtained from the Freedge. However, they need not to worry as they are protected by the Bill Emerson Food Donation Act! This Act establishes Federal protection from civil and criminal liability for persons involved in the donation and distribution of food and grocery products to needy individuals when certain criteria are met. To receive protection under the Act, a person or gleaner must donate in good faith food that appears wholesome or grocery products that seem fit for consumption to a non-profit organization for ultimate distribution to needy individuals. The Act also provides protection against civil and criminal liability to the non-profit organizations that receive such donated items in good faith (7).

Some states provide additional protection such as Washington State and California through their organic management legislation actions. For example, if you are in Washington State, HB 1799 allows for direct donation allowing businesses to bypass non-profit donation with additional permitting. This law also allows for food to be donated past date suggestions on labels as long as the food is in good condition and donated in good faith. Check in with your local health department if you need additional reassurance.

GETTING STARTED BASICS:

- Follow health guidelines
- Pick a site
- Get a fridge
- Obtain donors
- Obtain volunteers
- Promote your Freedge



HEALTH DEPARTMENT APPROVAL

The first step in planning a Freedgedge is obtaining approval from the health department. While it's not uncommon for Freedgedges and pantry libraries to bypass health department approval – often relying on the old saying, "It's better to ask for forgiveness than permission" – this approach wasn't an option for our established Food Recovery Program and non-profit. For long-term sustainability and funding, it's always best to be transparent and follow the rules. Plus, you'll have peace of mind knowing you're doing things the right way.

Since health departments vary by county, it's important to know that each one interprets state codes differently. While federal and state regulations set general guidelines, it's up to local health departments to apply them as they see fit. With this in mind, it's crucial to be upfront about your project's goals and learn what specific criteria your health department requires to approve a Freedgedge in your community.

Use these topics as a starting point:

Commercial Refrigeration

Commercial refrigerators hold temperatures better than home refrigerators. While there are several options for fridges out there, Sustainable Connections chose to purchase beverage refrigerators with glass doors for their Freedgedges. The public can easily look with their eyes first and then grab what they need. Additionally, beverage refrigerators are less expensive and come in a variety of sizes from small countertop coolers to large double door units. Choosing a beverage cooler will allow you to right size the refrigerator to match the need in your location.



Commercial Donors

Work with established businesses that are approved through the health department and prepare their food in a commercial kitchen. Possible donors include: restaurants, grocery stores, schools, nursing homes, convenience stores, manufacturers, and medical centers. Don't be intimidated by asking a business, all you need is one yes to start!

Food Handler's Cards

Some states require food service employees to have safe food handling certification. It may be required to have one of these certified staff members or volunteers check on the Freedge daily. Volunteers can also get food handling certification to fill this role.

Supervision During Operating Hours

It may be required to have someone on-site with a line of vision to the Freedge. This role is often a responsibility of host staff.

Portioning

Food that is not already individually portioned for sale will need to be portioned by the donor business or in a commercial kitchen before being transported to the Freedge. Large bulk donations are generally not a good fit for Freedges.

Labels

Label food that does not have a commercial label with a date, contents, and allergens. This label will help to signify that this food is commercially prepared food by approved donors. Commercial labels are also acceptable.



Tip: You may be able to install a camera aimed at the contents of the Freedge that will snap a photo every time it is opened to help monitor the contents. Check with your local Health Department to see if this would be a suitable alternative.

Example of a label:

DATE PREPARED:	ALLERGENS:
	<input type="checkbox"/> NUTS <input type="checkbox"/> MILK <input type="checkbox"/> SESAME
	<input type="checkbox"/> WHEAT <input type="checkbox"/> EGGS <input type="checkbox"/> SHELLFISH
	<input type="checkbox"/> SOY <input type="checkbox"/> FISH <input type="checkbox"/> _____
ITEM DESCRIPTION:	
	



Permits and Supportive Documents

Most states require charitable food organizations to hold Donating Food Distributing Organization (DFDO) permitting of some kind. These are typically free and easy to obtain. When implementing a community refrigerator you may need to apply for additional health department approval. You may be asked to complete forms similar to what would be required for opening a restaurant. The application process may take six to ten weeks for approval.

This form is likely to have few sections that directly apply to your specific project. In such cases, you'll want to provide additional supporting documentation, such as a:

- Plan with the roles and responsibilities for stocking, cleaning, and maintaining the Freedge
- List of the donors and food types
- Supervision plan
- Site map and host contact information
- Guidelines for donors, volunteers, and visitors



Permit Renewal:

Once you obtain a permit for your project you may need to renew this permit on an annual basis. Make sure to check with your permitting health department to ensure your permit is up to date.

FINDING A HOST LOCATION

When selecting a host location you will want to consider a few key factors:

Ease of Access

Look for a central public location for the intended community you envision serving. Consider transportation options and parking.

Number of Donor Businesses and Volunteers

Conduct a survey of nearby potential donors. A small number of regular donors can keep a Freedge sufficiently stocked. Recruiting volunteers from the nearby community ensures efficient transportation.

Who to Partner With?

It is important to find an enthusiastic host site, as they will be responsible for day-to-day oversight. Host tasks can include opening and closing the Freedge, promoting the Freedge to their community, paying energy bills, as well as general communication about the Freedge to new visitors. Write up a list of considerations to prepare yourself for conversations with potential host sites or reference Sustainable Connections [Checklist for Prospect Planning](#).



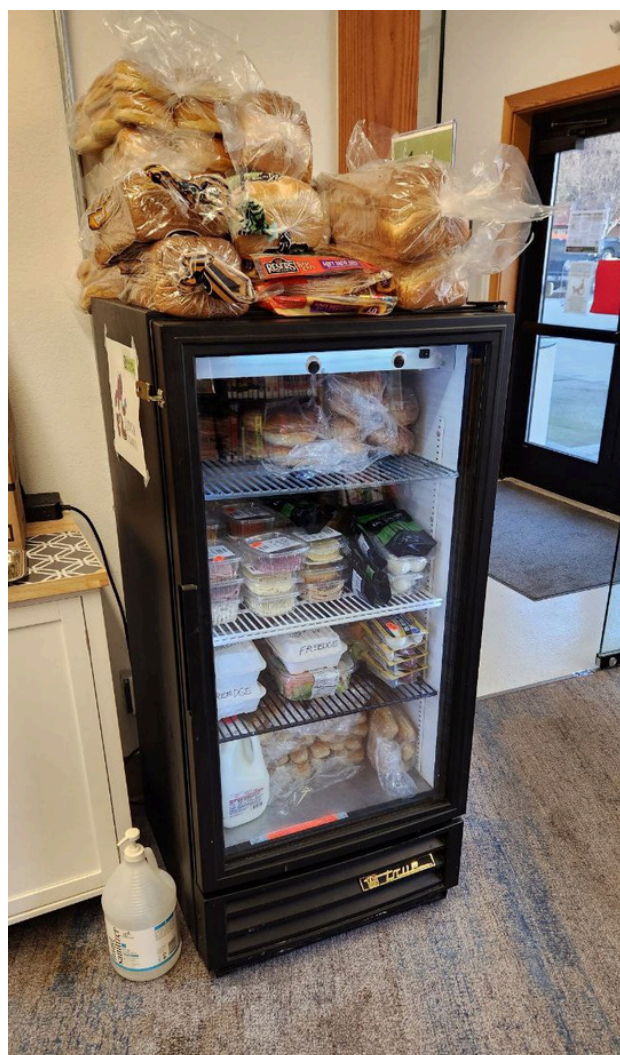
Sustainable Connections has found successful host sites at local libraries and another local non-profit focused on waste reduction! Libraries are ideal locations because they serve as hubs for free community resources. Local non-profits, schools, fire stations, and businesses dedicated to increasing food security could also make excellent hosts for a Freedge.

Selecting a Fridge

When selecting a fridge to use as your Freedge, there are several important factors to consider—most notably, whether it will be placed indoors or outdoors.

Indoors or Outdoors?

If locating a Freedge inside a building, consider ease of supervision by staff, volunteers, and visitors. Measure the intended space to ensure the unit will fit well and consider including shelving for shelf-stable free foods.



Outdoor Freeidges

Locating a Freeidge outside is more challenging. Refrigerators don't last as long outside because if temperatures dip below freezing, it can damage the unit beyond repair. The average life of a cheaper refrigerator outside can be 6-18 months. Higher quality models are designed to be worked on with replacement parts or can be retrofitted for outdoor use.

Housing the unit within a shed is a great option. The shed not only gives the ability to close and lock it outside of operating hours, but can keep it insulated during cold weather or keep it out of direct sun in summer or hot climates. You will want to consider building the shed big enough to house a standard size refrigeration unit rather than custom building to the size of the Freeidge you have at the moment, just in case you need to replace the unit down the line!

Product descriptions on refrigerators will list if the unit is rated for outdoor use. However, the outdoor temperature rating may only be for low temperatures of 60 degrees Fahrenheit.

Local refrigeration repair companies can retrofit the unit for a wider range of outdoor temperatures. Retrofits can include adding head pressure control or a fan cycling control, bypass valves for cold weather, and pressure adjustments for warm weather. Ask the refrigeration repair company for recommendations for efficiency and life of the refrigerator for your climate.



Tip: There is a lot of used equipment out there! Peruse your local online marketplaces for deals. You can also look for used restaurant equipment stores. Used equipment stores will typically run diagnostics and give you a limited warranty.




Add a Pantry

A free pantry is a great complement to a Freedge, as it allows for the donation and distribution of a wider variety of non-perishable items. Setting one up can be simple and affordable—a used filing cabinet makes an excellent pantry structure. It's typically rodent-proof, weather-resistant, and offers multiple compartments for organizing items.


Extreme Weather

Make a plan for extreme weather events. In the case of extreme cold temperatures, leaving the shed closed keeps the unit insulated. Let the host site, volunteers, and visitors know the plan to keep it closed until temperatures warm up through email, social media, and a sign on the shed door. In the case of extreme heat, locate the Freedge in the shade out of the direct sun, build a large overhang on the shed roof, or get a shade cloth to keep the Freedge cool.





INCLEMENT WEATHER



VOLUNTEER GUIDE

- WE DO NOT EXPECT YOU TO COMPLETE YOUR SHIFT IF THERE ARE UNSAFE DRIVING CONDITIONS
- IF YOU CHOOSE TO DO THE SHIFT, CALL THE DONOR LOCATION FIRST TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE OPEN
- IF YOU DECIDE NOT TO DO THE SHIFT, NO NEED TO LET US KNOW, JUST ALERT THE DONOR THAT YOU WILL NOT BE PICKING UP (YOU DON'T NEED TO LOG THE RUN EITHER)

STAY SAFE & THANK YOU!



ART INCLUSION

Art inclusion is an excellent way to beautify a space and foster community involvement, ensuring that the host community feels a sense of ownership. This is crucial for the project's long-term success. When your Freedge reflects the community's culture and aesthetic, it is more likely to receive ongoing support. Additionally, well-maintained spaces are less prone to vandalism or damage.

Consider inviting a local artist or a nearby school group to contribute to the artwork. Options include painting the shed, creating a sign to explain the project, or hanging pictures near the Freedge. Explore some of the remarkable artwork featured in our past projects.

RE Store Freedge



RE Store Freedge

A group of students from the local art school, Robert William School of Art, helped us design and paint the outside of the shed doors at our first Freedge.

Upper Skagit Library Freedge

Another Freedge partner asked the local library patrons to make art themed for the Freedge to help celebrate its one-year anniversary.



Upper Skagit Library Freedge



OBTAINING FUNDING

Funding

Funding can be used to cover costs such as purchasing the fridge itself, a pantry to store shelf stable items, equipment for volunteers like scales and coolers, building a shed if the fridge will be outside, creating materials with guidelines, and even mileage reimbursement for volunteers.

The types of funding you will want to search for include opportunities that focus on food access and security, waste reduction, and even climate mitigation.

- **Federal**
 - US Environmental Protection Agency
 - US Department of Agriculture
- **National**
 - RE Fed (national non-profit leader in food waste reduction)
- **State**
 - Environmental Government Council of the State
 - Charitable Foundations and/or Philanthropy Organizations
- **City/County**
 - Local Solid Waste Division
 - Community Foundations and/or Philanthropy Organizations
- **Crowd Sourcing**
 - Go Fund Me Campaigns
 - Non-profit Board Fundraiser
 - "Round up at the register" campaigns at local grocery stores
 - Businesses willing to donate a percentage of the day's sales
 - Community events
- **Private:**
 - Private Foundations focused on climate or food security
 - The Foundation Directory is a great resource for prospecting (9)

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Once you have determined a host location, make a clear plan of expectations for all responsible parties. This will ensure all the work is done and will act as a support document when submitting your paperwork to the health department. This may also help to illuminate roles and responsibilities that you had not yet thought of.

Some questions to consider:

- Who is paying the electric bills associated with the Freedge?
- Who will recruit and manage donors?
- Who will recruit and train volunteers?
- Who will promote the Freedge to the community?
- What materials, such as signs, need to be created?
- Who is the contact person if visitors have questions?
- Who will clean and monitor the Freedge?
- Who will pay for supplies and repairs?
- Who will build and monitor the donation tracking system?



An example of a [Freedge MOU](#) can be found in the resources section of this manual.



DONORS

Consistent food donations are essential to keeping a Freedge reliably stocked. Surplus food is created at more businesses than just restaurants and grocery stores. Potential donors include restaurants, grocery stores, schools, farms, medical centers with cafeterias, long-term care centers or nursing homes, coffee stands, gas stations and convenience stores, manufacturers, distributors, and food banks with limited distributions.

Some other considerations include:

Distance

When making a list of potential donors to ask, consider the distance to your Freedge. The closer the donor the more time and fuel efficient it is for your staff and volunteers. You are also likely to get better buy in when donors feel like they are helping out their own neighborhood and community.

Type of Food Donation

What types of food will you distribute? You will need to decide the right items and target donors that generate those items. For example, Sustainable Connections does not have a commercial kitchen to portion out bulk food items, therefore we primarily focus on preportioned grab and go style items.

Right Size Donation

Next you may want to consider potential size of donations. Large donors can donate more but will it overwhelm the size of your Freedge? Right sizing is best unless you have additional channels to send excess short dated food. This may mean picking up smaller quantities more often.



Tip: It may be better to pick up smaller portions more frequently to ensure regular stocking of the Freedge and fresher items.

Packaging and Labeling

If you find a potential donor that wants to participate but does not have items already portioned, you could consider purchasing packaging for the donor to portion items in their kitchens. Once items are portioned and donated, you will need a way to label these items.



Incentives

There are many benefits to donating surplus food. Be sure to highlight these advantages, which include reducing waste (and lowering disposal costs), getting promoted to the community, receiving tax incentives, and mitigating climate change.



Window decal for donor businesses

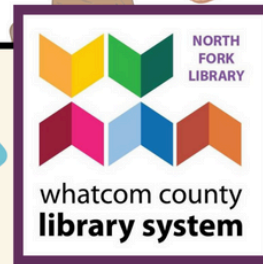


Home Donors

While we do not allow home donors to contribute prepared foods, home donors are allowed to donate whole produce to the Freedge and unopened shelf stable items to the pantry side. They are also allowed to donate baked goods due to the Bake Sale Clause. Bringing awareness to the plight of food waste is the aim of our project and often visitors become donors after they themselves visit the Freedge and become more aware of the issue. Donating unwanted shelf stable home goods before they go to waste is a fabulous way to reduce waste.

Donor guidelines Posted Next to the Freeedge

NORTH FORK LIBRARY FREEDGE DONOR GUIDELINES



HOME DONORS CAN DONATE

FREEDGE:

- Washed whole fruits and vegetables from the store or garden.
- Baked goods from home and commercial donors.
 - Items must be individually wrapped, labeled, and dated.
 - No temperature-sensitive items.

PANTRY:

- Unopened, commercially packaged items, including boxes, cans, and bagged grains and cereals.
- Baked goods from home and commercial donors.

COMMERCIAL DONOR?



LEARN MORE HERE

WHAT ITEMS ARE NOT ALLOWED?

Please be sure your donation meets these requirements:

- No pre-opened home items
- No home cooked meals
- No raw meats
- No rotting food
- No non-perishable items more than 6 months past expiration date

HOW TO REPORT YOUR DONATION

Commercial and home donors need to report donations made to The Freeedge.

Home donors -
select "Other/Home Donor"
for the business name.

Commercial donors -
Select your business from
the list of businesses.

Please use this QR code
and fill out the form.



WHATCOM COUNTY
HEALTH AND
COMMUNITY
SERVICES



WSU EXTENSION
Whatcom County



This material is funded through a Public Participation Grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology. Ecology reviewed the content for grant consistency but does not necessarily endorse it.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers can perform several roles for a Freedge. They can pick up and deliver donations, portion and label food if space and program allows, maintain the cleanliness of your Freedge by cleaning surfaces and emptying trash bins, and can help recruit donors through their networks.

Recruitment

Social media, tabling at community events, reaching out to the local volunteer center, or putting up posters in universities and places frequented by the retired community are great options for volunteer recruitment.

Communication

When you obtain volunteers, it is key that you establish regular communication with them to make sure they are aware of opportunities and changes to the program. Make sure they are also aware of how to best contact you in a timely manner.



Some communication needs to keep in mind are:

- How will volunteers sign up for shifts and be notified of potential changes?
- How will you alert volunteers about open shifts or special events?
- Will you need to send out shift reminders or prompts to report their food recovery data?
- How will volunteers be informed of extreme weather procedures?
- What is the best way for volunteers to let staff know if they can't make it to a shift due to illness or other scheduling issues?

Site and Maintenance Tasks

Volunteers may be expected to keep the Freedge clean and well maintained. Clear guidelines should be established and provided to keep the Freedge project running smoothly.



Tip: Keep cleaning supplies in a locked cabinet or nearby for easy access.

Volunteer Appreciation

Volunteers are an important resource for non-profits helping community impacts go further. Make sure to find fun ways to incentivize and celebrate your volunteers.

Some ideas we have implemented:

- Volunteer of the Month who receives a gift card from a participating donor business
- Holiday cards and branded apparel
- Annual party to celebrate volunteers and program success
- Annual volunteer satisfaction survey



Our annual Food Recovery party



Volunteer Guidelines

Here is an example of some volunteer guidelines that we provide for our volunteers. We also have a copy of it attached near the Freedge itself.



NORTH FORK LIBRARY FREEDGE VOLUNTEER GUIDELINES



All volunteers are pre-scheduled and trained by the Food Recovery Program. To find out how you can get involved as a volunteer please contact the Food Recovery Program.

1. FREEDGE STOCKING PROCEDURES:

- Donations will be picked up daily from Food Recovery Program participating businesses and driven directly to the Freedge.
- All items need to be labeled for contents and date prepared by the commercial donors or by volunteers using program specific labels.
- Report Food Recovery Program recovery data using the QR code

2. MONITORING PROCEDURES:

- Temperature needs to be taken daily.
 - Temperature is best taken by stacking two wrapped items together and waiting a few minutes for a correct reading.
- Check Freedge for spoiled food, eliminating items that are no longer suitable for consumption or do not fit donation rules.
- Sort all removed food items into the waste station provided by the library. Please pay close attention to what is recyclable or landfill material.




3. CLEANING PROCEDURES:


- Wipe out the Freedge and pantry using the cleaner and towels provided. Be mindful to clean drawers, shelves, and handles.
- When garbage receptacles are full, please check in with library staff.

For all Freedge related questions, please contact the Food Recovery Program Team at: [REDACTED]

Or the North Fork Library at: [REDACTED]

Sun	-CLOSED-
Mon	
Tue	10:00 AM-8:00 PM
Wed	10:00 AM-6:00 PM
Thur	10:00 AM-8:00 PM
Fri	10:00 AM-6:00 PM
Sat	10:00 AM-5:00 PM





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TRACKING

Track donations for reporting or story telling. This could be a physical paper spreadsheet that volunteers mark down donations and weight at the Freedge or it can be an online tracking system. Here are some options:

Google sheets and forms (or something similar)

This is free and simple way to track data. Anyone with a Google account can access the spreadsheet. Rather than filling out a spreadsheet directly, volunteers can be provided with a Google Form to fill out after each delivery, which can then be turned into a spreadsheet.

Food recovery tracking applications

A few examples of this are Careit and Food Bank Manager. These apps are designed for food donation coordination and can make it simple for tracking food and volunteers.



Piecing multiple software platforms together

Sustainable Connections layers several systems together. We use a volunteer scheduling platform called Better Impact for volunteers to fill out applications, self-schedule, read shift descriptions, and find program updates and news. We use Form Assembly to report donations. Volunteers can access the reporting link anchored to the top of the Better Impacts homepage. Finally, the data from the form is then auto populated into Salesforce, which is for internal organization use.

VISITORS

Visitors may include homeless individuals, seniors, families, low to middle income folks and climate-minded people that want to reduce food waste. Labeling people who utilize the Freedge as Visitors de-stigmatizes their role and highlights the practice of consuming rescued food for food security or climate impacts.

To make visitors feel welcome and confident in using a Freedge, display colorful signage in multiple languages that educate visitors about what rescued, short-dated foods are, how to use the Freedge safely, and hours and days of operations.

NORTH FORK LIBRARY FREEDGE VISITOR GUIDELINES



- All welcome! This food is for everyone in our community.
- Please do not visit the Freedge if you are sick.
- Please take only what you will eat!
- Please look with your eyes and read labels first. Do not touch what you don't plan to take.
- It takes a community! Feel free to clean out any spoiled items and put them in the appropriate waste bin.
- Wipe up any spills or messes you create.

OPEN / ABIERTO

Tue	Mar	10:00 AM-8:00 PM
Wed	Mie	10:00 AM-6:00 PM
Thur	Jue	10:00 AM-8:00 PM
Fri	Vie	10:00 AM-6:00 PM
Sat	Sab	10:00 AM-5:00 PM

CLOSED

Sunday
Monday

CERRADO

Domingo
Lunes

Another common question with a self-service Freedge is: how do you prevent people from taking all the food? The simple answer is, we don't. While some individuals may take more than their share initially, we've found that, over time, consistency builds trust. Regular visitors begin to see the Freedge as a dependable resource and typically take only what they truly need.



Our Freedge is stocked with recovered foods, which are short-dated surplus items sourced from local restaurants, grocery stores, and medical centers. These foods are best consumed within a day or two of receiving. While they may remain safe beyond this time frame, it's best to trust your senses; if they look, smell, or taste spoiled, please discard them.

Recovered foods play a crucial role in our community by reducing food waste, enhancing food security, and combating climate change. The production of food demands significant natural resources such as water, land, labor, and transportation. By minimizing food waste, we conserve these precious resources.

PROMOTION

It is important to get the word out fast when you first open your Freedge. Once you are stocking it with short-dated food the clock is ticking!

Consider promoting the Freedge by:

- Sending a press release to local radio stations, newspapers, and online publications.
- Posting on social media and sharing and tagging donors and other partners.
- Hang up posters at local shelters, schools, and libraries.
- Ask your local food bank to help spread the word.
- Put out balloons, sandwich boards, or yard signs near the physical locations.



Tip: Translate materials into other commonly spoken languages in your community to reduce barriers in accessing.

It's important to think about a long-term promotional strategy as well. For our Freedge, Instagram and Facebook have been crucial! These platforms help us spotlight our donors, acknowledge our volunteers, and share educational content about our mission. We also create fun videos to celebrate our successes and milestones. Additionally, we post daily updates on the Freedge's contents, including the time and date, so visitors can quickly take advantage when it's fully stocked and avoid making a trip if it's empty.

Check out these social media accounts for examples:



@The Freedge from Sustainable Connections



@frp_freedge



RE STORE FREEDGE



EST. OCTOBER 2022

10-12k

**LBS OF FOOD
RECOVERED
ANNUALLY**

Conveniently located in the geographical center of our community—close to a major bus line and the city's largest homeless shelter—this Freedge is intended to support individuals experiencing homelessness, seniors, families, and nearby minimum wage workers during their lunch or dinner breaks.

Our flagship Freedge - we manage this site with opening and closing help from staff at the host location.

PARTNERS



WSU EXTENSION
Whatcom County



WHATCOM COUNTY
**HEALTH AND
COMMUNITY
SERVICES**



CHALLENGES

- Keeping it filled, free food is popular. We use social media stories to alert regular users when it's been refilled, which helps the food get picked up more quickly.
- Use of waste bins for personal trash. We have learned to accept this. Bins are small so they cannot be overused and we consider it a neighborhood service to not have the trash be littered on the ground. Plus, our three bin system and signage helps to teach the public about proper waste sorting .

SUCCESSSES

- We get messages from visitors telling us what a game changer this has been for them and letting us know how much they depend on it.
- We have enough donors and volunteers that we are able to stock the Freedge multiple times a day from Monday to Friday.
- There is growing community awareness of this resource. Many of the visitors have told us that they found out about the Freedge via word of mouth.



UPPER SKAGIT LIBRARY FREEDGE



CONCRETE, WA

EST. DECEMBER 2023

5,000

LBS OF FOOD
RECOVERED IN THE
FIRST YEAR

Upper Skagit library manages the Freedge with our support. We helped launch it and continue to consult as needed. The USL community has really taken ownership!

PARTNERS



In the agriculturally rich and diverse Skagit County, the small town of Concrete is a food desert. The geographically isolated Concrete School District has an enrollment of about 550 students spread over 1,915 square miles with only one grocery store.



CHALLENGES

- The remote location has a limited number of possible donors. Additionally, nearby food service businesses tend to temporarily close during seasons of decreased tourism.
- The biggest donor to this Freedge is a nearby grocery store that tends to have large volume donations. Large amounts at one time can overwhelm small Freedges. The library host has overcome this hurdle by purchasing a larger refrigeration unit.

SUCCESSES

- Has engaged the local co-op to run a “round up at the register” fundraiser.
- The library hosts youth programs throughout the week. The youth love the Freedge and have helped to make promotional videos, posters, and artwork.
- We have found success by routing food from nearby towns and utilizing volunteers commuting between communities.
- The library has great volunteer retention! They have managed this by reimbursing volunteers for miles driven to help rescue food.



NORTH FORK LIBRARY FREEDGE



KENDALL, WA

EST. NOVEMBER 2024

1,200

LBS OF FOOD
RECOVERED IN THE
FIRST SIX MONTHS

Spanning approximately 620 square miles and about 15,000 people, the region is characterized by low population density, with homes and properties dispersed across vast rural areas. This expansive layout, combined with limited access to resources, contributes to a notable portion of the population living below the poverty line, making food insecurity a concern in some parts of the community.

Our first Whatcom County library partnership.

PARTNERS



WSU EXTENSION
Whatcom County



WHATCOM COUNTY
HEALTH AND
COMMUNITY
SERVICES



whatcom county
library system



CHALLENGES

- With the town being so spread out, identifying donor locations within a reasonable distance of the Freedge has been challenging. Additionally, visitors typically need access to a vehicle or other form of transportation to reach the site.
- Obtaining regular volunteer support for the Freedge has been a challenge. However, we've found that staff from nearby businesses are often willing to drop off surplus food when commuting home.
- Due to its location, this site experiences colder and harsher winter weather. In cold temperatures, the fridge struggles to maintain appropriate temperatures. As a result, some food like produce freezes and becomes unsuitable for human consumption.

SUCSESSES

- We've established a partnership with NW Fruit Rescue, which prepares jams and stews using gleaned fruit and surplus produce from raw processing. They donate individual portions to the Freedge each week, providing community members with regular access to nourishing meals—especially during times when other donation streams are slow.
- In addition to business and organizational support, individual community members have begun contributing food themselves! These home donors play an important role in keeping the Freedge stocked with a variety of items, helping to create a sense of shared responsibility and local ownership.
- In the rare event that any food spoils, library staff with chickens are able to repurpose it as feed, ensuring that nothing ever goes to waste.





REFERENCES

1. Wasted Food Scale | US EPA
<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/wasted-food-scale>
2. Reducing and Recovering Surplus Food | US EPA Archive
<https://archive.epa.gov/wastes/conserve/tools/rogo/web/pdf/food-guide.pdf>
3. Estimating the Cost of Food Waste to American Consumers | US EPA
https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2025-04/costoffoodwastereport_508.pdf
4. Set Up Your Own Food Recovery Program | Sustainable Connections
<https://sustainableconnections.org/squatchfoodwaste/setup-your-own-food-recovery-program/>
5. Food Product Dating | USDA
<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/food-product-dating>
6. Household Food Waste | MITRE
<https://sites.mitre.org/household-food-waste/>
7. Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act | E2SHB 1799
<https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2021-22/Pdf/Bill%20Reports/House/1799-S2.E%20HBR%20PL%2022.pdf?q=20250310161843>
8. From Surplus to Solutions: 2025 ReFED US Food Waste Report | ReFED
<https://refed.org/downloads/refed-us-food-waste-report-2025.pdf>
9. Candid's Foundation Directory
<https://fconline.foundationcenter.org>
10. Freedge.org
<https://freedge.org/>
11. Use Food Well Washington Plan | Washington State Department of Ecology
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/2107027.pdf>



RESOURCES

Setting up a Food Recovery Program

- <https://sustainableconnections.org/squatchfoodwaste/setup-your-own-food-recovery-program/>

Tracking

- <https://careit.com>
- <https://www.foodbankmanager.com/>
- <https://www.formassembly.com/>
- <https://www.betterimpact.com/>

Print Resources

Find downloadable PDF versions of all our print resources at the link below

[**https://sustainableconnections.org/freedge/**](https://sustainableconnections.org/freedge/)

- Donor Guidelines
- Volunteer Guidelines
- Donor Outreach Flyer
- Pickup Best Practices
- Visitor Guidelines
- General Outreach Flyer
- Food Labels
- Short Dated Food Sign
- Donor Pick Up Date/Time Sign
- Memorandum of Understanding Template

Checklist for Prospect Planning

Here's a quick checklist to help you get ready for your meeting with a potential host. It covers a few important things to bring up, questions you might want to ask, and what to have with you so you can head into the meeting feeling prepared and confident:

- **Bring examples of what other communities are doing**
- **Health department plan**
 - Have the application packet with you. This can be obtained at your local health department. Our program used a standard restaurant plan.
 - Because this project is so far outside of the questions asked in the application, you will need to create supporting documents for the following:
 - A supervision plan: How will the host monitor the Freedge? What are the hours of operation? What will opening and closing look like? What foods will be accepted?
 - Site Map
 - MOU for roles and responsibilities
- **Location for Freedge on site**
 - Size: Bring a tape measure. Can it fit a commercial unit?
 - Power supply: Is there an outlet nearby? Will an extension cord be needed? If so, it will need to be a UL listed 3-wire grounding appliance extension cord.
 - Place: Will it be inside the building or outside under a shelter?
 - If it will be outside, who will build the shelter and how will the supplies and labor be paid for?
 - Public accessibility: Is it easy to approach and visible? Is it ADA accessible?
 - Other: What else will go with the Freedge? A pantry shelf or cabinet, table, chairs, community board, waste stations, a microwave?
- **Hours of operations**
 - The Freedge will need staff supervision during operating hours. What are the intended hours and plans for opening and closing?

- **Guidelines and expectations for each participating group**
 - How will this information be communicated?
 - Participating groups include:
 - *Host:* Roles and expectations
 - *Donors:* How to donate and follow health guidelines
 - *Visitors:* How to follow safety guidelines when using the Freedge
 - *Volunteer:* Expectations of duties and how to sign up

- **Donors**
 - Who will be donating to the Freedge?
 - Make contact with local food banks for donations.
 - Who will conduct outreach to local bakeries, coffee shops, and restaurants?
 - If items need to be portioned, who will do this, where, and who buys the packaging?

- **Tracking data and volunteers**
 - How will the donations be tracked?
 - Our program uses Form Assembly and Salesforce for Whatcom County and Careit for Skagit County
 - Who will schedule and organize volunteers?
 - We chose Better Impacts for Whatcom County and Careit for Skagit County

- **Promotion**
 - How will the Freedge be promoted?
 - Some ideas:
 - Posters
 - Social media
 - Radio
 - Word of mouth
 - Tip: look for partners who are capable of reaching others that don't speak English such as migrant communities.

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
BY AND BETWEEN**

_____ & _____

THIS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (this "MOU") is made and entered into by and between _____ and _____.

1. **Goals and Scope.** _____ and _____ will conduct a 12-month pilot program to implement a free refrigerator (or "FREEDGE") program at _____. The intent is to increase access to food to people in the _____ and reduce food waste.

2. **Term; Termination.** After the 12-month pilot program, the parties will determine the effectiveness of the program and whether it will continue. Should the parties determine that the program will continue, a new MOU between the parties will be developed to incorporate lessons learned. Should the parties decide to discontinue the program, each party will remove their assets from _____ property at the respective parties' cost.

3. **Duties of** _____.

For the duration of the pilot program, _____ will:

- Work with the _____ Health Department to acquire necessary permits;
- Assist in providing a shelter for the Freedge;
- Provide funds needed to purchase a refrigerator to be used as the Freedge;
- Arrange and pay for maintenance and repair of refrigerator as needed;
- Recruit and train volunteers needed to maintain and clean the Freedge;
- Recruit and coordinate food donations;
- Provide templates for donor, volunteer, and visitor guidelines;
- Promote location and opening on website, social media, and in newsletters regularly;
- Provide up to \$_____ for supplies for cleaning the Freedge as well as packaging and labeling food;
- Build a data tracking system; and report out to partners periodically with metrics;
- Coordinate with _____ when volunteers and food donors are unavailable;
- Provide up to \$_____ in mileage reimbursement to qualified volunteers;
- Facilitate periodic meetings with partners to discuss management and needs for Freedge operations.

4. **Duties of _____.**

For the duration of the pilot program, _____ will:

- Perform site prep to accommodate the Freedge, including making any necessary electrical improvements and pouring a concrete pad;
- Maintain site and shed exterior in a clean manner that promotes use of the Freedge;
- Report issues with refrigerator to _____;
- Design, print and laminate printed materials;
- Design and provide blueprints to _____ Builders as well as coordinate delivery to _____;
- Pay for _____ staff to obtain Food Handler's Permits;
- Assist _____ as needed in the permitting process;
- Open and close the Freedge each day in concurrency with the open hours;
- Promote the Freedge and contents regularly to community, including hosting information about the program on website;
- Pay the electric bill associated with keeping the unit plugged in and operating;
- Check on the Freedge when volunteers aren't available. Tasks include checking temperature, cleaning out old food, wiping up spills, organizing supplies;
- Share challenges and successes with partnering organizations.

5. **Notices.**

All notices under this MOU shall be in writing and sent to the address listed below for each party:

Name of Organization

ATTN: Contact

Title

Address

Address

Name of Organization

ATTN: Contact

Title

Address

Address

6. **Entire Agreement.** This instrument contains the entire agreement between the parties hereto and may be modified only in a document executed by all parties.

7. Facsimile and Scanned Signatures. This MOU may be executed in one or more counterparts and via facsimile signature, the counterparts and facsimiles of which, when taken together, shall be deemed to constitute an entire and original of this MOU.

Signatures of organizations' authorized representatives

Organization

By

Printed Name & Title

Date

Signature

Organization

By

Printed Name & Title

Date

Signature

****This is an example document to be used as a reference point for an organization, business, or individual wanting to establish a community refrigerator. Please consult a law professional when considering a legally binding agreement.