



Swansea University
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How to:

Start a Food Surplus Scheme

*A Guide for
Student Volunteering Organisations*





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Introduction

Introduction

This handbook is a brief guide on setting up a food redistribution scheme within a UK University, utilising student (and potentially staff) volunteers.

What is Food Surplus Redistribution?

Food surplus is food which remains in the food chain. It is either unsold by a retailer or food provider, or food which is unused by the farmer, manufacturer or supplier. Food surplus is collected by a charitable organisation and then redistributed to end users. This may be through a food bank, delivered direct to individuals or cooked in a community café.

Why should we set up a scheme?

Food redistribution and food poverty are becoming increasingly high on both social and political agendas. Figures suggest that in the UK over 500,000 people rely on food parcels to survive with over 2 million people considered to be malnourished and that 1 in 6 parents have gone without food to feed their children. Pair this with the fact that around 10 million tonnes of food waste is generated per year, of which 60% could have been avoided shows that a disparity arises.



When looking at food waste it is worth bearing in mind that we are not just wasting a valuable commodity, but also when the food is sent for destruction it increases its carbon footprint, both in the transportation and destruction of food stuffs not utilised. Add in the footprint of the manufacturing and distribution processes and the issue is doubled.

Why student volunteers?

Student volunteers are active and numerous, and there is a University in or near all major conurbations as well as many rural areas. Many student volunteer organisations already work in similar schemes – such as community food growing or environmental initiatives.

Food surplus redistribution schemes are an excellent way to provide benefits to both the environment and local community, whilst providing students with valuable volunteering experience.

Student volunteers can also act as facilitators by collecting and distributing food surplus – working for a number of charities. This can increase the amount of food collected and allow the charities to concentrate on their specialist areas.

What are the challenges?

Most student volunteer schemes have challenges with transport and ensuring continuity during vacations, and a food surplus scheme is no different.

However examples exist of universities who take part in schemes themselves, either through donating their own food surplus or through working with their local SVO to provide support with transport and other logistics.

Every University has a catering and facilities department, and working closely with them can help support a scheme.

How big can a scheme be?

Food surplus redistribution links into many different volunteer areas and themes. It can fit easily into an existing environmental volunteer scheme or act as a catalyst to a larger scheme. While we advise that the scheme starts off small, interest can grow quickly. Further developments may include widening the initiative to include self-run growing, reuse or community café schemes. In the US the Campus Kitchens Project is a great example of a large successful food surplus scheme. The Project works across 51 universities – with student volunteers using university kitchens during off-peak times to create community meals using food surplus. Further information is available at www.campuskitchens.org.

The background features a close-up of several blueberries. A large, semi-circular yellow rectangle is positioned in the center, containing the text 'Steps to Success' in white. The bottom portion of the image is a solid blue color, with three thin, white, curved lines that sweep across the lower half of the frame from left to right.

Steps to Success

Step # 1

Identify major external stakeholders

The external stakeholders will take the form of both the donor organisation(s) and recipient organisation(s). Donor organisations can be from a variety of sectors – using more than one sector will allow a wider range of produce to be collected;

- Supermarkets
- Local Shops
- Local cafés and restaurants
- University outlets
- Suppliers – farmers and manufacturers

Examples of donor charities include;

- Community Cafés
- Vulnerable groups
- Refugee programmes
- Homeless charities
- Substance misuse projects
- Church groups

It is advisable that the recipient charity is close to the location of the university or student volunteer base, allowing minimum transportation of produce.



Step #2

Identify potential internal stakeholders

Many student volunteer schemes are very independent and distinct from their host university's day to day businesses. Food is different.

Every University has a catering department, and those catering departments will all have kitchens, storage, transport, chefs, food hygiene training schemes, plus of course, their own food surplus.

Engaging with the University on this scheme can therefore provide additional support which may not normally be available for other student volunteering schemes. Potential staff to engage include:

- VC or relevant PVC
- Head of Sustainability
- Head of Catering
- Head of Commercial activity
- Head of University Volunteer Services
- Head of Employability
- Community Liaison representative

Explain the benefits; communicate why this is a good scheme to be involved in including how the reduction of waste food in and around the University and local community will help address a number of social and environmental issues. Ensuring University staff are engaged may help to leverage space and resources.

Step #3

Choose your partners

The key to choosing the partners suitable for the scheme is to ensure that each organisation understands what the aim of the scheme is and each can fulfil what is required.

Most SVOs will already have strong links with their local community and choosing a willing and reliable partner should not be challenging.

Step #4

Legislation and Documentation

Food needs to be fit to eat when it is collected and then when it is distributed. It can be past its 'Best Before' date but not past its 'Eat By' or 'Use By' date. Some surplus food providers have recommendations as to how far past the 'Best Before' date their food should be consumed. Freezing food on its 'Use By' date can lengthen its life. Most foodstuffs can last far beyond their 'Best Before' dates – it is how the food is stored or prepared which is important.

When the food surplus is delivered to the end user, in whatever form, it is then their responsibility to keep it safe – they will need to make sure they transport it, store it and cook it properly.

An SVO may therefore need to set up and sign two types of agreements – one with the organisation supplying the food surplus, and then a separate one with the organisation they are distributing it to. However these documents can be very simple. Further advice on finding sample agreements is available through the contact on page 14.

Step #5

Ensure your donor is ready to donate

Do your research on potential local food surplus organisations which you think are suitable.

Many will already have plans in place to support a scheme, including the majority of major supermarkets. These include;

- Tesco
- Morrisons
- Marks & Spencer
- Waitrose
- Sainsbury's

Each however have a different methodology of delivering the schemes, this will need to be taken into account when approaching and setting up your scheme.



Step #6

Start Small



By starting with a small scheme, possibly one or two donors and one or two recipients, you can control the outputs and build trust and consistency.

The schemes depend on reliability from all areas; evidence from case studies shows that if there is a break down from one partner this has a detrimental effect on the success of the scheme.

Start your scheme with regular, but perhaps once or twice weekly collections and deliveries. Trying to commit to daily collections may stretch your volunteers and resources and may be detrimental to its long term sustainability.

Step #7

Record and Monitor

A key to measuring success is recording and monitoring the goods and items you are redistributing. This can be monitored in several ways;

- Monetary value - recording the prices attached to the items
- Weight – weighing the items which come through your scheme
- Number of units – recording the number of individual items passing through you scheme

This allows a method of empirically recording the good work you are doing, and provides a method of reporting accurately the difference being made in your local community.



Report accurately & celebrate the difference being made to the community

Step #8

Communication is King

Throughout all of the steps it is vitally important that clear, effective and regular communication takes place between all parties involved.

Ensure an effective communication plan is developed not only to ensure all parties know what is happening but also communicating good news stories and successes to the wider community and stakeholders.

Swansea University in collaboration with Discovery (Swansea University Student Volunteer Charity) have a scheme in place and are available for further advice if required, contact; cateringmanagers@swansea.ac.uk.





