

How to set up a back-of-store surplus food project: a guide for retailers



Overview

This guide provides information on how food retailers can set up back-of-store surplus food projects with local charities or similar organisations. The guide provides:

- information on the benefits of local back-of-store surplus food projects to you and the local community,
- how to identify charities or similar organisations who would benefit from surplus food donations,
- the agreements and procedures that are likely to be needed,
- how projects might be monitored and
- other key success criteria for projects of this nature.

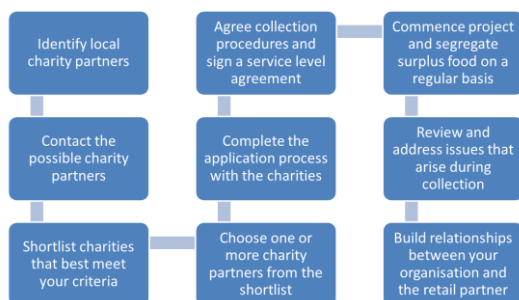
Back-of-store surplus food projects are relatively easy to establish and the regular receipt of free, good quality food provides real benefits to those in need in your community. They also allow your organisation to make the most of unsold food and to help vulnerable groups in society.

The process of deciding whether to set up a back-of-store surplus food project consists of the following



steps:

The key steps in planning and setting up a back-of-store surplus food project are given in the flow diagram below, and the individual steps are described in more detail in the guide.



Is a back-of-store surplus food project right for my store?

There is mounting evidence that much of the surplus food in the UK that could remain in the human food chain goes to less beneficial uses such as animal feed, or even to waste. As a food retailer you will be keen to make best use of this food and your company could work in partnership with locally based charities to make the food available to people in need.

A back-of-store surplus food project is very simple in concept but there are certain actions that you will need to take in setting up and running such a project:

- Identify and build relationships with one or more local charities that can use the surplus food.
- Put in place procedures and agreements for the collection and use of the food.
- Segregate surplus food from food waste for collection by the charity or charities daily or at least several times a week.
- Work with the charities to iron out any issues that might arise in the early stages of the project.

The major benefit is that you provide food to local people in need, build links with the community and avoid food going to waste or less beneficial uses.

Finding the right partner for you

If you've decided that a back-of-store surplus food project is likely to be right for your store then the next step is to identify local charities or similar organisations that could benefit from receiving the surplus food that you wish to donate. The types of organisations that are currently benefiting from using surplus food are listed below, though other types of organisations might also wish to redistribute surplus food.

- Community support organisations
- Homelessness organisations
- Children's/ young people's charities
- Organisation for those in crisis
- Food banks
- Charities for older people

The geographic area in which you would identify charity partners will depend on the size of your store and the amount and retail value of the surplus food that you will generate on an average day. The greater the amount and value of food the further a charity is likely to be able to travel to collect the food. Most charities however also have limited resources, so longer travel distances are unlikely to be realistic even for collections from larger stores.

Your store or company may have already been approached by charities requesting food donations, and these charities would be a good place to start. You can also identify charities in each UK local authority region serving different groups by searching on the Charity Commission website (www.charitycommission.gov.uk/find-charities).

Homelessness charities in each local authority of the UK can be found on the Homeless UK website (www.homelessuk.org). Commercial directories such as Yell and Cylex are also useful to find charities in different towns and near any postcode in the UK.

Once you have identified candidate charity partners the next step is to draw up a list of those to contact. The list should include at least ten charities to give

you the best opportunity of finding a partner that can both benefit from receiving the amount of food that you are likely to donate daily and is able to collect from your store at the times that the food is available. The websites of each short listed charity can be used to identify an appropriate person to contact in the first instance. Once in contact with the charity you will usually be guided to the right point of contact to discuss the potential for the charity to accept and use surplus food.

Opening the door to a successful partnership

Although some charities or similar organisations have already been involved in surplus food distribution projects locally or elsewhere in the UK, you will find that many have not. You will therefore need to explain the key benefit that the charity will regularly receive free, good quality food for its clients, as well as the other key aspects of back-of-store surplus food projects. These include:

- Collecting the food will be the responsibility of the charity.
- Collection times are often after the store closes in the evening.
- The range of food available will vary, but will often contain bakery products, fresh fruit and vegetables.
- The amount of food will vary daily and the charity will not know the quantity of type in advance.
- Regular and frequent collection is required if a surplus food project is to be successful.

At this stage it will also be important to decide the number of charities that you would like to involve in the project. This will depend on the amount of food that you are likely to have as surplus each day, the amount of food that can be used by each charity each day and the ability of each charity to collect every day. You may therefore wish to have different charities collecting on set days of the week, or more than one charity collecting on each day. Involving more than one charity also spreads the benefit within the community and keeps the project going if one charity drops out for any reason.

Defining procedures and agreements

If your company has already been involved in surplus food donation projects, you are likely to have access to appropriate procedures and agreements. If not you will need to draw up the procedures and associated agreement, and links to documents used in previous WRAP co-ordinated projects are provided at the end of this guide. The procedures to be set up or already used by your company for the donation of surplus food are likely to include:

- The requirement for the charity partners to complete an application form to receive surplus food, requiring information on the charity and possibly a charity number.
- The signature of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between your company and the chosen charity partners.
- Agreement of additional local arrangements for the food collections not contained in the SLA.

The SLA will cover a range of legal and practical aspects of the surplus food project, potentially including the following:

- Responsibilities for the transportation, receipt, storage and security of donated food.
- Conditions on where and how food can be consumed.
- Restrictions on the exchange of donated food.
- The option for monitoring by the retailer.
- The requirement for staff handling food to be knowledgeable in food hygiene.
- The need for collection staff or volunteers to carry identification.

Local arrangements such as collection days and times, and contact details in case of problems in supplying or collecting food, may form part of the main agreement or could be agreed separately between the charity partners and your company. Whatever the procedure it is important that your agreement and associated procedures require the charity partners to:

- Arrive at the agreed time on each collection day.

- Have appropriate transport to carry the amount of food that might be available.
- Be able to get fresh produce and other food nearing its use by date to those requiring the food quickly, or be able to freeze items that cannot be used relatively quickly.
- Have good lines of communication if there is no food to collect or if the charity cannot collect on a given day.
- Provide clear and succinct information to relevant members of your staff on the procedures for the segregation and collection of the surplus food and the logistical arrangements.
- Ensure there are good points of contacts between your store and the partner charities and that there is regular liaison.
- Work closely with your charity partner and communicate the benefit of surplus food redistribution to staff so that they better understand the value of the project to the individual charity and the wider community.
- Communicate and celebrate the success of your surplus donations and the positive impact it has in your community.
- Encourage your staff to visit your charity partners, reinforcing the social message of surplus food redistribution and its benefits.

Monitoring and evaluation

Your SLA with the partner charities can include the requirement for monitoring, and the data required can take several forms. It could be a simple register to indicate that surplus food was collected by the charity partners on a given day or the charity partner signing a checklist of food items collected. Alternatively, it could entail your charity partners weighing food subsequent to collection and providing the daily weights to you for a fixed period of time.

The benefit of a more formal monitoring approach, including weighing of food, is that it provides reliable data for other organisations considering involvement in back-of-store surplus food projects. It is also useful information for promoting the scheme and generating positive publicity for the organisations involved.

Lessons from other projects

There are many food retailers just like yours that have been effective in establishing successful relationships with charities and similar organisations to donate good quality food to people in need. The information in this guide builds upon the lessons from previous back-of-store surplus food projects. To help make your project even more of a success don't forget to:

Summary

Setting up a back-of-store surplus food project can have real benefits for those in need in your local community and can also help local charities to assist this often vulnerable group. The guidance outlined in this document gives you a straightforward process for establishing successful and sustainable projects and provides a route for regularly providing good quality food to those local people in need.

WRAP guidance is also available for charities on how to set up successful back-of-store surplus food projects, with the focus on the responsibilities of the charities and information on how to identify and engage with retail partners. This guide is entitled "How to set up a back-of-store surplus food project: a guide for food charities", and is available on the WRAP website.

Further information and templates

1. The Food Connection Programme, piloted the redistribution of surplus food from grocery retailer stores to charities. The resulting reports can be accessed via the following link:

<http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Food%20Connection%20Programme%20Final%20Published%20Report.pdf>

2. A template for a typical Service Level Agreement is available here <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/piloting-retail-store-surplus-food-redistribution-and-use-wales>

3. A template for a document containing typical additional local arrangements and contact details is available here <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/piloting-retail-store-surplus-food-redistribution-and-use-wales>

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