

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



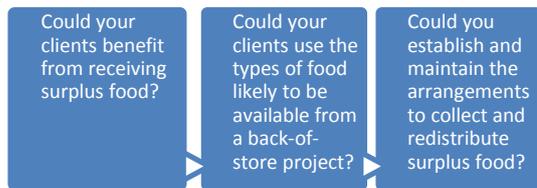
Overview

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

- criteria on which to decide whether a back-of-store surplus food project meets your needs and those of your clients,
- how to identify local food retailers that might donate surplus food,
- 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 for your clients provides real benefits to those in need in your community and helps your organisation to assist this often vulnerable group.

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 me?

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. Food retailers are often keen to make best use of this food and your organisation could work in partnership with food stores 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 aspects you need to be aware of before becoming involved in such a project:

- Collecting the food will be your responsibility.
- Collection times are often after the store closes in the evening.
- The range of food available varies, but will often contain bakery products and fresh fruit and vegetables.
- The amount of food will vary daily and you will not know the quantity or type in advance.

- Regular, frequent and most importantly, reliable collection is required if a surplus food project is to be successful.

In making your decision you should have uppermost in your mind that the important benefit is that your organisation will regularly receive free, good quality food for your clients.

Finding the right partner for you

If a back-of-store surplus food project is likely to be right for your organisation then the next step is to identify local food stores you could work with in the areas in which you operate. The steps you need to take in choosing partners are:

- Plan your transport, the location of your clients and the greatest distance you can travel to collect the food.
- Estimate how much food you can use each day.
- Review your capacity to store the food; if you can chill or freeze then it can be used over a longer period.

This information will allow you to set the geographical area within which you should search for food stores and to make a good decision on the size of store for which you are looking. To avoid you wasting food it is worth considering the following options if you cannot freeze or chill food:

- Look for a food store that can provide quantities of food you are confident you could use on a single day
- Agree with the store to set aside only the amount of food you can use

The average amount of food likely to be available each day will vary with the size of the store, with smaller stores generally having an average of less than 5 kilogrammes of surplus food per day (5 kilogrammes is typically one full bag of food) and large supermarkets 25-35 kilogrammes (5 to 7 bags of food) per day on average.

Once you have set your criteria, you can identify the stores and obtain contact details of the major supermarket chains, convenience stores and bakery brands in your defined geographic area by searching on the company websites. If you would like to work with regional or local independent food stores or supermarkets, contact details of these stores can also often be found on the internet or from the telephone directory.

To prioritise, short list the stores that you would like to contact within your ideal transport distance and store size range and make contact with the local store manager or community liaison staff member. Once in contact with the store you will be guided to the right point of contact to discuss partnership opportunities. Also bear in mind that smaller stores can find it harder to set up surplus food redistribution partnerships, due to location, accessibility, numbers of staff and store size.

Opening the door to a successful partnership

You may find that a number of food retailers have already been involved in surplus food distribution projects locally or elsewhere in the UK. In these cases you could find it a fairly quick process in opening dialogue with the stores, as they will generally have established procedures in place.

In other cases you may find that local store managers are potentially less aware of existing projects and procedures within their overall organisation or the retailer has not taken part in such projects before. In these cases the store manager may be able to liaise with a regional or head office charity or community co-ordinator to obtain guidance on company procedures. Links to WRAP documents and information that you may find useful in initial discussions with food retailers are also provided at the end of this guide.

Defining procedures and agreements

The procedures of the various food retailers for the donation of surplus food to charities and similar organisations will vary in the amount of information to be provided and documentation required. You should expect to find procedures that include:

- Completion of an application form to receive surplus food, requiring information on your organisation and often requesting a charity number.
- Signature of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the food store and your organisation before the project can begin.
- 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 food can be consumed.
- Restrictions on the exchange of donated food.
- The option for monitoring by the food 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 food store and your organisation. Whatever the procedure it is important that your organisation:

- Arrives at the agreed time on each collection day
- Has appropriate transport to carry the amount of food that might be available.
- Is 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 soon.

- Have good lines of communication so that you can always let the store know if you cannot collect for any reason and for the store to contact you if there is no food to collect.

Retailers may also want your support in helping them report on the impact of their work with you. The monitoring and evaluation requirements of a surplus food project will depend on the retailer, but are likely to be light touch and easy to implement.

Monitoring and evaluation

The SLA might include the requirement for monitoring, though it may or may not be enforced. The collection of monitoring data as evidence for the evaluation of a project can take several forms. It might be a simple register to indicate that surplus food was collected by your organisation on a given day or signing a checklist of food items collected. Alternatively, it could entail your organisation weighing food subsequent to collection and providing the daily weights to the retailer 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 organisations just like yours who have been successful in establishing successful relationships with food stores to access quality food for people in need. The information in this guide builds upon the lessons from a range of previous back-of-store surplus food projects. To help make your project even more of a success don't forget to:

- Provide clear and succinct information to relevant members of your staff on the procedures for collection of the surplus food and the logistical arrangements

- Ensure there are good points of contacts between your organisation and the food retailer and that there is regular liaison.
- Work closely with the food store and communicate the benefit of surplus food redistribution to staff and volunteers so that they better understand the value to your clients and the financial value to your organisation.
- Educate staff that the amounts of food will vary from day-to-day and not to be dis-heartened on days when there is less food.
- Communicate and celebrate success of your surplus food use and the positive impact it has in your community.
- Encourage staff from the food store to visit your organisation, as this can reinforce the social message of surplus food redistribution and the benefits it can bring.

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 your organisation to assist this often vulnerable group. The guidance outlined in this document gives you a straightforward process for establishing successful and sustainable projects and regularly accessing free, good quality food.

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

Further information and templates

1. Alternative options to a back-of-store surplus food project include accessing food via FareShare (<http://www.fareshare.org.uk>) or subscribing to Plan Zheroes (www.planzheroes.org).
2. The Food Connection Programme piloted the redistribution of surplus food from grocery retailer stores to charities. Resulting reports can be accessed via the following link:
<http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Food%20Connection%20Programme%20Final%20Published%20Report.pdf>
3. 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>
4. 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>
5. Information of food safety can be found on the Food Standards agency (FSA) website (<http://www.food.gov.uk>).

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