



Grocer and Food Bank Tools and Tactics

TO IMPROVE FOOD DONATIONS



Volunteers sorting food donations at Ballard Food Bank. Photo credit: Sarah Schu



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 <http://www.seattle.gov/utilities/food-rescue>  (206) 343 - 8505  SPU_FoodRescue@seattle.gov





Project Background

Grocery stores and food banks play a vital role in our local food system to help feed our neighbors. [Across Seattle, a vast network of businesses and non-profit partners work together to help keep food out of the garbage.](#) Grocers and food banks can face many challenges when partnering to donate unsold food and redistribute it to the local community. At grocery stores, food donation is an added task for grocery staff, which often lacks training, standardization across departments, sufficient equipment, and reinforcing support from store managers. Staff turnover, changes in food safety guidelines, or inconsistent donation guidelines across grocery departments can further complicate donation logistics.

These challenges can lead to an increase in likelihood that food separated for donation will be poor quality, or that additional unsold food will go to waste.

This case study highlights how incremental changes to [standardize protocols, messaging, and tools](#) can help grocery stores streamline donation efforts and develop stronger relationships with their food bank partners in service of feeding people in need.

With these challenges in mind, Seattle Public Utilities provides food rescue technical assistance to keep food out of the garbage and edible food out of compost collection, improve the quality and quantity of donated food, and foster partnerships that bring expertise for new and larger scale solutions.

In 2023 and 2024, SPU supported [the donation partnership](#) between Ballard Town & Country Market and the Ballard Food Bank by providing ongoing technical assistance via Cascadia Consulting Group.

Partner Spotlight: Ballard Food Bank

Ballard Food Bank picks up donations 4 days a week at Ballard Town and Country Market.

- Ballard Food Bank is Ballard Town & Country's largest donation partner
- In 2024, the food bank distributed over 4.5 million pounds of food, enabling 112,566 household shopping visits and deliveries
- In 2024, the food bank had 6,559 new households sign up to receive food



Ballard Food Bank's proximity to Ballard Town & Country Market means that food bank volunteers can make frequent and efficient visits to the grocery store to pick up food donations.

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Key Ingredients for Successful Food Donation Programs



ORGANIZE A STORE WALKTHROUGH

Assess your store's existing food donation practices with a store walkthrough. Review donation protocols and training, signage, and storage with each grocery department. Note where additional clarification and standardization is needed.



COLLECT FEEDBACK FROM PARTNERS

[Request food bank feedback](#) to provide additional coaching and clarity for store staff and encourage high-quality donations



DEVELOP AND SHARE TOOLS

Based on feedback from each grocery department, [provide tools to standardize donation practices](#) and clarify department FAQ's, such as:

- [Department-specific donation posters](#) to provide clear guidance to department staff
- [Bold signage](#) to indicate food donation storage areas for grocery staff and/or donation pick up areas for food bank volunteers
- Dedicated shelving and/or carts to consistently store or transport unsold food intended for donation
- [Contact information for each food donation partner](#)



PROVIDE TRAINING FOR STAFF

[Host an in-person training with grocery department leads](#) to review and get their feedback on the materials provided, answer questions, and further strengthen their knowledge of their store's food donation program



OPERATIONALIZE IT

Check in on your store's food donation program progress as part of a regularly scheduled touchpoint such as a department manager, safety team, or sustainability meeting.

Key ingredients for successful food donation programs include **clear communication**, **standardized practices**, and ample **opportunities for feedback** and discussion between the store and food bank.

Follow these steps that donation partners Ballard Town & Country Market and Ballard Food Bank took to improve food donation at your store.



Outcomes from Ongoing Technical Assistance

By utilizing the tactics and tools outlined above, Ballard Town & Country Market vastly improved the quality and quantity of donations to partners like Ballard Food Bank.

- Improved labeling of food separated for donation provided clear communication for grocery store and food bank staff and volunteers.
- Consistent messaging of food donation protocols and best practices improved the quality and increased the quantity of donations from each grocery department.
- Standardization of donation areas, signage, and department donation guidelines posters provided consistent messaging for experienced and new staff alike.
- Engaged store and food bank project champions requested and provided ongoing feedback, and coordinated training, and improved logistics.
- After adopting tactics and tools at Ballard Town & Country Market, staff adopted food donation best practices at all other Town & Country Market locations across the Puget Sound!

PRODUCE: Food Donation Guidelines

Food Safety Requirements

- *Fresh fruit and vegetables:* Can be stored at shelf-stable temperatures
- *Cut fruit and vegetables:* Must be maintained at a temperature of 41° F or below.

DO NOT DONATE

- Moldy products
- Heavily damaged products
- Products with an off color or smell

Donation Steps

1. Pull imperfect produce and over-ripe items, immediately separating items for donation and compost in two different boxes.
2. Pack multiple donation boxes at the same time to ensure heavier produce is on the bottom and fragile produce remains undamaged at the top.
3. Store items to be donated (clearly labeled for donation) in the donation pick-up area.

GROCERY PULL BY DATE	FOOD BANK PULL BY DATE
Date on package	Date on package
Can't donate 2 days past expiration	

Questions?

Ask Department Donation Lead

Food donation guidelines give clear instructions to grocery staff about when and how to donate food.



The Ballard Food Bank van picks up surplus edible food Monday through Thursday at Ballard Town & Country. Photo credit: Sarah Schu

Ballard Town & Country Market consistently donates items from the following departments:

- Meat & Seafood
- Dairy
- Produce
- Pantry
- Frozen
- Bulk
- Deli
- Bakery

NEW! Ballard Town & Country Market now donates seafood, cut fruit, bath and body products, and supplements.

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