



Insider tips on
*running a food rescue
and distribution
program*

How to be circular without re-inventing the wheel

In the journey to a climate resilient circular economy, you can never underestimate the power of community action.

Community efforts to tackle climate change and create a sustainable future are on the rise, and if you are inspired to be part of this movement, this guide is for you.

In this guide you will find practical information and key learnings for groups and organisations that want to establish a community-based food rescue and redistribution initiative, including how to approach the critical planning, implementation and evaluation phases. There are also useful resources and networks to support your planning, knowledge building, and communications.

The knowledge in this guide comes directly from the experiences of local community groups, social enterprises and other not-for-profits who were supported by Sustainability Victoria's Circular Economy Communities Fund – we will refer to them as our “CE insiders” throughout this guide. The communities fund, delivered on behalf of the state government, challenged local communities to explore creative solutions for waste management with activities that built local skills, encouraged social connections and created new social enterprise opportunities.

There is no single solution to any challenge or opportunity. Your initiative should take into account your stakeholders and communities, sector, resources, capacity, and overarching goals.

About Sustainability Victoria

Sustainability Victoria shapes Victoria's circular economy on behalf of the state government. We partner across industry and the community as a transition broker for the circular economy. Our goal is to reduce or stop waste before it starts, in every part of the system.

Sustainability Victoria leverages community and industry action to reduce emissions. Whether we are creating education campaigns to deliver better recycling, investing in repair cafes, embedding sustainability across Victorian schools, or providing solutions for the safe disposal of e-waste and chemicals, we empower Victorians to design their own circular future.

You can also download guides for other types of community-based circular economy initiatives:

- Bicycle repair/recyclers
- Repair hubs and cafes
- Food waste organics/composting
- Hard waste recovery
- Textile waste
- Special waste streams

Food rescue and distribution

Australia's annual food waste is more than 7.6 million tonnes each year, emitting significant levels of greenhouse gasses and costing our economy more than \$36.6 billion.

Whether your initiative focuses on food rescue/diversion or food relief/distribution, it is important to consider all of the following steps on your path to success. For both food rescue/diversion and relief/distribution initiatives, we have highlighted specific key learnings that are worth further consideration because they may present more challenges and opportunities along the way.

Phase 1: scope and plan

Establish a baseline community need and capability

The primary purpose of your initiative may be food relief or tackling food insecurity, or it might be keeping organics out of landfill. Identifying your primary purpose will help to measure your community's need and awareness.

CE insiders recommend learning about your employees, volunteers, cooks and food collection partners in your target area. Find out about their knowledge of food waste, buy-in to circular economy ideals, and attitudes and behaviours regarding consuming near-end-of-life groceries.

Understand the food waste networks, regional hubs and distribution chains in your area so you can define your role in this food rescue and distribution ecosystem and build complementary relationships. Also, understand how your initiative fits into the broader food industry and consider how you will differentiate yourself to the general public and potential partners. Consider where your stock is coming from and how it will get to you.

Plan your program

Before you plan your program, determine if you will focus on food diversion or food relief, and if your product will be free or for sale.

Understand the legislation

As well as understanding your local government's Food Organics Garden Organics (FOGO) program, you should understand different state and federal legislation that applies to working with food.

Generally, all organisations dealing with food in Victoria are subject to the provisions of the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and the Food Act (Vic) 1984. But charities may be able to rely on protection from liability when donating food under the Civil Liability Amendment (Food Donations) Act 2005, known as the Good Samaritan Act.

And always consider your workplace safety requirements.

Choose your activities

Think about what kind of activities you might want to run. This will also help you determine your financial viability and business model.

You could consider some of the things other food rescue and distribution programs do:

Tick those that apply to your program

Arrange collection and delivery of end-of-use groceries. This may include running and maintaining vehicles or running a pool of volunteer drivers.

Run a drop-off centre or warehouse to collect unwanted food items.

Assess and sell donated 'best before' grocery items.

Run cooking and nutrition workshops to encourage eating fresh food before it expires.

Provide community lunches using rescued food items.

Inventory and store materials, e.g. groceries and sanitary items.

Liaise with case workers and donor organisations to assess donor needs.

Pick and pack relief.

Pop-up markets and donation events.

Run a store to sell left over items.



Prepare for the work

To understand which kind of program suits you, CE insiders say it's important to consider your capacity and what the community needs. Understand what equipment and facilities you have access to, and your location.

Whether you run pop-up workshops or decide to run a permanent kitchen and warehouse, you should take into account:

- Having a space that's usable, secure, hygienic, and accessible to workers.
- The needs of your local demographics and key stakeholders.
- Your shopfront – it must be visible and accessible if food relief packages are part of your plan.
- Having a visible and accessible dining space, if community lunches are part of your plan.
- Demand and need for specific dietary requirements.
- Availability of employees, volunteers and warehouse staff and cooks.

Food rescue and distribution organisations must be nimble, for example, dealing with large amounts of a single item in one day. Plan how you will manage excess products. Can you expand and retract to handle that flow of product? You will need to engage people who can pick up end products. Building this community workforce takes time and attention.

The peaks and troughs of food donation mean that sometimes unexpected surplus leads to less than ideal food disposal. Get to know your local FOGO requirements and make partnerships with local composters and plastic waste programs. For example, South East Food Hub has an arrangement with Reground to take their donated soft plastics for recycling.

Manage risk and maintain memorandums of understanding (MOUs)

Assess your risks

CE insiders say it's important to understand the risk profile of your intended activities and take steps to mitigate risk through appropriate insurance, disclaimers and management processes.

One of the most important risks is protecting the cold chain. If you are picking up refrigerated items, they must stay cold or the food could make people sick. Any partner picking up food must also maintain the cold chain. If they can't, don't trust them with any items.

It's crucial that your staff and volunteers receive food safety training to understand and follow the practices. Mitigation can also include staff and volunteer induction, registration or certification.

Understand your agreements

MOUs are the agreements you have with your key partners, such as donors and volunteers. They are useful in establishing clarity around everyone's roles and responsibilities to help you minimise risk and build productive partnerships.

Your retailer partner donors will expect you to hold all the risk. You need MOUs so that end users can't sell food that is only meant to be given away.

To strengthen partnerships and ensure MOU compliance, CE insiders recommend you consider:

Tick those that apply to your program

Making sure your staff, coordinators and volunteers are aware of any contractual and MOU arrangements relating to their facilities, tools and equipment.

Continuing education and relationship building with partners. This will ensure your supplies are consistent, that you understand supermarkets' changing rules, and that new supermarket staff is appropriately trained.

Managing communication. Often your partners are complex organisations with different levels of management and changing teams. This requires ongoing communication with a range of people.

Training staff and volunteers so they have the communication skills to manage relationships, negotiate and influence people.



Design activities to change behaviours

The aim of food waste rescue and distribution is to encourage behaviour change around waste.

To encourage waste behaviour change you could consider:

Tick those that apply to your program

Teaching people to safely store and then donate excess food.

Educating the community about responsible donating to reduce food dumping by manufacturers and retailers.

Working with retailers and manufacturers to adopt more sustainable processes to prevent end-of-life-grocery dumping.

Appropriately disposing of food items your program can't cook or donate.

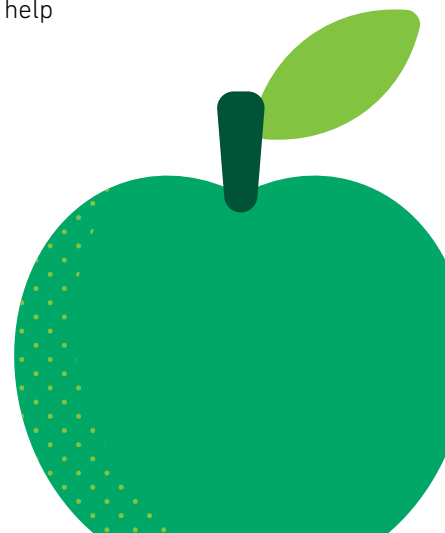
Changing purchasing behaviour, i.e. only buy what is needed.

Attending community events to increase the awareness of your services.

Using education resources to promote the above, e.g. workshops and posters.



Try to design your engagement activities, programs and initiatives in a way that you can evaluate their usefulness and effectiveness in impacting behaviour change. This will also help you demonstrate your value to key stakeholders, including funders.



Phase 2: implement your program

Run an efficient program

Most food waste rescue and distribution programs operate on thin margins, so administering resources carefully is important.

Important systems and resources

CE insiders recommend you build a system to assess the donated groceries as they arrive, and to manage inconsistent supply. This is a fundamental and key learning for all food waste prevention initiatives. You can quickly solve problems if you have good relationships with other agencies that can help with more storage and volunteers. You can also share food between other local food hubs to even out the distribution.

Key systems and resources to consider:

Tick those that apply to your program

A warehouse team to sort, stock and distribute goods.

Health and safety equipment for your staff, for example heavy-lifting equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE) for your volunteers, such as gloves.

A stock and inventory system to keep track of food made and donated to demonstrate the value of your waste-prevention activity.

A sound business and marketing plan, and a budget.

A plan for managing soft plastic waste coming from suppliers. Check with your local council for options, or consider programs like [Reground](#) and [RecycleSmart](#) which collects for a fee, and [Cirque Du Soil](#), which collects in the City of Yarra.



Looking after your partners and customers

Manage your stakeholders and corporate partners well to ensure that the relationships are equally productive.

Clear communication can help to manage expectations and supply chains. You can also educate your industry partners in safe food handling to increase food viability and minimise food and packaging waste. For example, one food rescue and distribution initiative ran a workshop where store managers sifted through donated waste to help them understand how they can improve their system to create better outcomes.

Build your program to consider the user experience. The stigma around receiving food donations is disappearing, but it's still important to think about how to make it a pleasant, dignified and easy experience for people collecting food.

Engage diverse communities

Food staples are not the same for all communities. Dietary requirements vary, so it's important to ask your community what they need.

Consider the most appropriate platforms for communicating about your program and whether or not you plan to target certain groups – different demographics use different types of media and channels. If you know your local community's demographic profile you can tailor information about events and about food waste and leftover use to make it accessible for groups like migrants and refugees.

Set your team up for success

Your team is vital to the success of your program.

CE insiders recommend the staff and volunteers who run your program have access to appropriate training, manuals and resources. Have clear position descriptions for your volunteers that outline their roles, responsibilities and required skills.

Consider safe food handling regulations, your specific insurance requirements, and what workplace safety requirements you may need for your cooks and pickers.

Think about the needs of the volunteers and staff who deal with donors and recipients of goods, and what guidance they may need. Ensure the organisation carries the cost of pick-up and delivery, not your volunteers. Supervisors and coordinators should also help to manage their volunteers' workload.

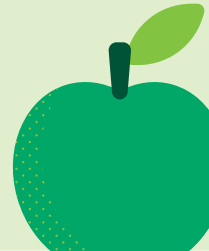
Circular collaboration

Food rescue and distribution programs are more effective when they work together. Consider other food rescue/distribution initiatives as a supportive and informative network that can help you achieve your shared circular goals.

Promote collaboration with each other:

Tick those that apply to your program

- Share food supplies to even out the distribution.
- Help each other with consistent messaging.
- Share public event opportunities.
- Share cooks and recipes.
- Provide local support to broader education campaigns.



Another key learning is understanding that your program will be much stronger and achieve more if you identify opportunities for partnership with existing organisations, such as local government, state government, grocers and supermarkets, manufacturers, community centres, and neighbourhood houses.



Phase 3: evaluation and improvements

Use your learnings to make improvements

Program managers do well when they think about how they might improve future practice. This might mean sharing knowledge gained during the day with your team, or debriefing later with other programs and providers. It may also mean developing case studies for best practice.

When a new or unexpected donation issue arises, think about ways you can record or document the solution so that it can be repeated. Try to set up an easy-to-use document management system so that everyone can access information quickly. There are free document management systems that you can use, such as Google Drive and OneDrive.

Understand your finance and business obligations

A key tip from the CE insiders we spoke to is having people on your team who understand finance and the obligations of running a business. Complement strong business and finance knowledge with good financial systems that help you to understand quickly how your organisation is performing so that you can respond appropriately.

All programs rely on fundraising, grants and donations, so this will become an important part of your activities.

Financial viability is important to all food waste prevention programs. You can encourage this:

Tick those that apply to your program

Being aware of funding opportunities from philanthropic organisations and different levels of government.

Recording data and doing stock inventory to communicate its value and show the quantity of goods you've saved from landfill.

Training your volunteers and staff to apply for grants.

Setting up ways to encourage donations.

Putting a dollar value on waste from donors, especially corporate donors.



Demonstrate your value

By collecting data on waste avoidance, you can show key stakeholders – such as the venue, community and funding bodies – the value of your work. This measuring and storytelling can help you build your community and secure funding and resources for your program.

Diamond Valley Community Services



Over 58 weeks, Diamond Valley Community Services' program diverted 177 tonnes of food waste, coffee grounds and packaging from landfill. It also helped over 17,000 people. Coordinator Kerri Wellington says, "We did not expect that we would achieve these figures. Community engagement and collaboration with key stakeholders have played vital roles in achieving and surpassing waste reduction and food rescue targets." Read more. www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/news/news-articles/saving-food-from-landfill-through-food-relief-packs-for-people-in-need