# DRAFT Food Donation Work Group Consensus Survey #2 Recommendations

**Ecology is conducting surveys from January to April 2025 and holding monthly meetings to refine recommendations. By May 2025, we will finalize recommendations for the legislative report, ensuring broad agreement and addressing concerns.**

Attending meetings and completing surveys are essential for members to influence the final report. Given legislative session priorities, 1:1 meetings are available upon request. Email FoodCenter@ecy.wa.gov to schedule.

Of 41 workgroup members, 25 organizations and two public submissions resulted in 25 recommendations for Survey #1. Key themes include increased funding, staffing, and incentives to strengthen food donation efforts, aligned with the Use Food Well Washington (UFWW) Plan. Focus areas include logistics, transportation, partnerships, and infrastructure challenges.

After the first survey, 18 recommendations were refined into a more streamlined approach. This document supports the voting and discussion from Consensus Survey #2. The recommendations are clustered by similar focus areas but are in no particular order. The final report will reflect consensus, with areas of concern noted.

**Work Group Recommendation Themes**
Through the [Organics Management Law 2.0](https://ecology.wa.gov/waste-toxics/reducing-recycling-waste/organics-and-food-waste/2022-organics-management-law), the legislature assigned specific topics for the work group to discuss:

* Logistics for phasing in edible food donation programs and incentives
* Building the food recovery network to support increased donations from commercial generators
* Assessing gaps in food infrastructure and developing solutions
* Creating partnerships to address gaps
* Developing innovative models and partnerships
* Lessons learned from U.S. jurisdictions with policies to reduce edible food waste

**Timeline:**

* [**Consensus Survey #2**](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/R6RNKRC): March 20–30, 2025
* [**March Meeting**:](https://waecy-wa-gov.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwpde-rpjMuG9TH8EU22k7jyFQklSDET34E) March 25, 2025, 10 a.m.
* **Consensus Survey #3**: TBD (final vote on recommendations)
* [**April Meeting**](https://waecy-wa-gov.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwpde-rpjMuG9TH8EU22k7jyFQklSDET34E): April 22, 2025, 10 a.m. (final meeting before report process begins)

### Fund the Washington Commodities Donation Grant Program

**Recommendation:** Fund the [Washington Commodities Donation Grant Program](https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.23.330).

Washington farmers and processors are eager to donate nutritious food, but transportation costs to hunger relief organizations create an economic barrier. Sustaining funding for the Washington Commodities Donation Program (WCDP) would help eliminate this barrier and increase food donations to those in need.

Run by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), the WCDP redirects surplus food to Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs), preventing waste. Initially funded with one-time money in state fiscal year 2025 (SFY2025), sustained funding through the [Climate Commitment Act (CCA)](https://ecology.wa.gov/Air-Climate/Climate-Commitment-Act) could significantly increase donations of locally sourced food ([Food Lifeline](https://foodlifeline.org/article/food-lifeline-endorses-campaign-to-maintain-washingtons-climate-commitment-act)).

This recommendation supports diversifying outreach and applicants as funding is maintained. The Work Group found that applying the [HEAL Act](https://ecology.wa.gov/about-us/who-we-are/environmental-justice/heal) to the RFP process could expand the program to diverse groups. Collaborations with the [Department of Enterprise Services](https://des.wa.gov/about/agency-overview/initiatives/supplier-diversity-state-contracts), which specializes in supplier diversity, equity, and expanding RFP access, could also strengthen the program.

### Develop State-Level Tax Incentives to Increase Donation of Edible Food

**Recommendation:** Develop state-level tax incentives to increase donation of edible food by:

* **Develop Tax Deductions for Food Donations**: Partner with the Department of Revenue to create state-level tax deductions or credits for businesses donating edible food to hunger relief organizations, incentivizing donations over disposal.
* **Tax Credits/Breaks**: Offer tax incentives or credits for businesses investing in food donation and waste prevention training, including deductions for training expenses and subsidies for meeting state food waste reduction goals.
* **Cover Donation-Related Costs**: Allow businesses to claim tax deductions for transportation, storage, and other donation-related expenses, reducing financial burdens and encouraging more donations.
* **Broaden Eligibility**: Expand tax incentives to include more types of businesses, such as small businesses, senior care facilities, and convenience stores, ensuring donated food meets current nutritional guidelines.
* **Simplify Process**: Streamline the tax deduction process for food donations by reducing paperwork, making it easier for businesses to participate.

### Create a Voluntary State Food Rescue Fund Through a Point-Of-Sale “Round Up” Fee

**Recommendation:** Create a food donation and rescue fund through a voluntary point-of-sale "Round Up" fee at the register.

This recommendation aims to create a sustainable funding source for food recovery by implementing a voluntary "Round Up" fee at the point of sale for food retailers. Customers would have the option to round up their purchase totals to the nearest dollar, with the difference going into a state-controlled fund. The Washington State Department of Agriculture would then distribute these funds annually to eligible and registered Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs) across the state.

To avoid competing with existing fundraising efforts or placing a burden on customers, the initiative would be centered around specific events or periods focused on food waste prevention, recovery, and environmental awareness, such as Food Waste Prevention Week (4/7-4/11), Earth Day/Week (4/22-4/25), World Environment Day (6/5), and International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste (9/29).

The funds raised would directly support HROs in rescuing and recovering surplus food, addressing the critical need for sustainable funding to bolster food recovery efforts and reduce food waste. This initiative aligns with broader efforts to expand funding for food recovery programs and strengthen Washington’s food donation infrastructure, while engaging consumers in supporting these vital causes.

### **Evaluate Opportunities for Carbon Offset Credit Generation From Food Donation**

**Recommendation:** This recommendation calls for funding at least one full-time employee (FTE) at Ecology to evaluate opportunities for voluntary credit generation from food donation through ongoing international, national, and regional carbon markets.

By identifying opportunities for food donation to generate offset credits, we can create strong incentives for businesses to donate edible food, while providing Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs) with a sustainable revenue stream. This initiative would encourage more donations of edible food and significantly reduce food waste, benefiting both the environment and those in need.

The Work Group finds it crucial that HROs retain the credits associated with food donations, as they are the ones directly diverting food from landfills and providing it to communities. This policy would not only foster collaboration between public and private sectors, but also ensure that the organizations doing the vital work are recognized and rewarded for their efforts.

Note: rephrasing was considered from comments with Department of Ecology Senior Environmental Planner involved with the Cap and Invest Offsets of the CCA

### Expand Washington State’s Farm to School Program

**Recommendation:** Expand the [Washinton State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) Farm to School program](https://agr.wa.gov/departments/business-and-marketing-support/farm-to-school-toolkit) by providing grants to support the purchase of surplus local food for schools. The program brings locally produced foods into K-12 school cafeterias, childcare centers, and preschools while educating students about food, agriculture, and sustainable practices.

Incorporating surplus food into this program reduces waste by diverting it from landfills, supports local farmers by creating a market for surplus produce, and strengthens the local economy. Additionally, it helps combat food insecurity by providing nutritious meals to students and offers educational opportunities for students to learn about agriculture and sustainable food systems.

By supporting the purchase of surplus food, we foster a healthier, more sustainable future for students and communities, while reducing food waste and supporting local agriculture.

### Invest in School Food Rescue Infrastructure and Programs

**Recommendation:** Invest in food rescue infrastructure and programs within schools to reduce food waste, promote sustainability, and strengthen community engagement.

* **Food Share Programs:** Encourage school districts to implement food share tables, allowing students to donate their uneaten food, reducing waste and fostering a culture of sharing.
* **Develop Best Practices:** Collaborate with the health department to create standardized food recovery guidelines for schools, ensuring consistency and effectiveness across districts.

Schools play a pivotal role in addressing food waste in Washington State. By adopting food rescue strategies like food share programs, schools can directly contribute to meeting state waste reduction goals while nurturing a sense of community. These initiatives engage students, families, and staff in reducing waste and sharing resources, creating a culture of sustainability that extends beyond the classroom.

Moreover, as students learn about waste reduction at school, they carry these lessons into their homes, multiplying the impact throughout their communities.

By leveraging existing school infrastructure, such as kitchens, community partnerships, and local organizations, we can enhance the effectiveness of food rescue programs while minimizing costs.

This recommendation aims to fill critical gaps in the food recovery system, building a robust, sustainable network that strengthens communities and ensures the responsible use of resources. Funding for these efforts could be sourced through initiatives like the Food Center Grants.

### Support a Comprehensive Approach to Food Donation Transportation Infrastructure

To address the critical transportation and infrastructure challenges faced by Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs) and food donors, this recommendation outlines a comprehensive approach to strengthen food donation systems across Washington State. By improving transportation networks, expanding cold storage facilities, and leveraging existing resources, we can increase the efficiency and reach of food recovery efforts, ensuring that more nutritious food is diverted from landfills and reaches communities in need.

**Key Recommendations:**

* **Expand Transportation Infrastructure:**
	1. **Cover Transportation Costs for HROs:** Provide funding or tax incentives to support HROs in hiring drivers, purchasing vehicles, and covering maintenance costs. This will help address the high costs of long-distance trucking and last-mile delivery, ensuring food reaches those in need quickly and efficiently.
	2. **Develop Smaller Drop-Off Sites:** Fund the creation of additional drop-off locations, particularly in rural areas and food deserts. These sites could include refrigerated lockers for food safety and accessibility, reducing transportation costs and easing last-mile delivery challenges.
	3. **Launch Managed Transportation Systems:** Implement an independent managed transportation system to optimize food donations, ensuring that food is delivered to HROs within 24 hours. This system would use data matching and community demographics for equitable distribution, while providing Commercial Driver’s Licensing (CDL) training opportunities.
	4. **Create Centralized Networks for Municipalities:** Establish a centralized transportation network that allows municipalities to share trucks and routes for food pickups and deliveries to HROs. This will improve coordination, reduce redundancy, and streamline the logistics of food recovery efforts.
* **Develop Cold Storage and Refrigeration Solutions:**
	1. **Create Statewide Incentives and Grants for Cold Storage:** Provide grants or incentives to help HROs and food donors fund refrigeration, freezers, and refrigerated transport. This will address the challenge of preserving perishable food for donation, ensuring fresh food is available for redistribution and reducing food waste.
	2. **Decentralized Cold-Chain Facilities:** Advocate for cold storage facilities closer to the consumer rather than relying on large, centralized warehouses. This will improve access to refrigerated storage for HROs and food donors, reducing logistical challenges and ensuring food safety.
	3. **Address High Electricity Costs for Refrigeration:** Offer support for HROs to manage the high costs of refrigeration and freezing, particularly in areas where food donations and recovery are more concentrated.
* **Leverage Existing Infrastructure and Explore Cost-Sharing Opportunities:**
	1. **Utilize Underutilized Infrastructure:** Identify and repurpose existing underutilized warehouse spaces for food storage and distribution. This can include partnerships with commercial entities to incorporate their unused spaces into the food recovery network.
	2. **Explore Cost-Sharing with Retail Partners:** Facilitate partnerships between HROs and retail businesses to share the costs of transportation, cold storage, and food diversion. By incentivizing retailers to contribute financially, we can reduce the financial burden on HROs.
* **Optimize Food Donation and Recovery Logistics:**
	1. **Develop Third-Party Transportation Solutions:** Explore partnerships with logistics companies and others to reduce HRO reliance on volunteers and improve the efficiency of food transportation networks.
	2. **Focus on Resilient Local Hubs:** Invest in building capacity for resilient local hubs throughout the state, decentralizing food recovery and last-mile distribution. This will help ensure more equitable access to food donations across all regions.

Transportation remains one of the biggest challenges in food recovery efforts. Many HROs struggle with high transportation costs, staff shortages, and limitations on refrigerated storage. By funding transportation infrastructure, creating smaller drop-off sites, and improving cold storage capacity, this recommendation aims to reduce logistical barriers, improve food safety, and ensure that more nutritious food reaches those in need. These efforts will also reduce food waste, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and promote more sustainable food recovery practices.

By funding these initiatives through existing resources, such as the Food Center grants, and fostering public-private partnerships, Washington State can build a more robust food donation transportation network that benefits both donors and hunger relief organizations while improving the efficiency and scalability of food recovery efforts.

### Fund Food Center Grants and Pilots to Support Transportation, Cold Storage, and Food Donation Infrastructure

**Recommendation:** This recommendation focuses on funding the Food Center Grants for pilot programs to support essential infrastructure improvements in the food donation supply chain. By increasing funding for transportation, cold storage, and food donation processes, we can help Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs) improve their operations and meet the growing demand for rescued food. This approach will also incentivize the donation of quality food, reduce food waste, and improve the efficiency of food recovery programs.

**Key Actions:**

1. **Increase Funding to Support Research and Pilot Programs:**
	* **Pilot Transportation and Logistics Systems:** Fund pilot programs that test new food transportation networks, including small load delivery solutions and decentralized cold-storage hubs. These programs will optimize food rescue and increase efficiency.
	* **Pilot Small Load Delivery Programs:** Provide funding or incentives for pilot programs that support smaller, more frequent food deliveries. Smaller loads are easier to manage and can be more efficient for HROs that struggle with large food donations due to capacity limitations.
	* **Support Research for Food Donation Practices:** Increase funding to research best practices in food donation and waste prevention. This will help develop scalable models for food recovery across the state.
2. **Fund Food Donation and Waste Prevention Initiatives:**
	* **Incentivize Food Donation and Waste Prevention Training:** Use Food Center Grants to assist smaller businesses or schools in implementing standardized food donation practices, providing training on food waste prevention and safe donation practices.
	* **Promote Education on Food Disposal Options:** Offer grants for educational programs that teach businesses and HROs about affordable and sustainable food disposal methods, including composting, donations to local farmers, and food recovery partnerships.

This recommendation focuses on leveraging Food Center Grants to address key infrastructure gaps in food donation transportation, cold storage, and waste prevention. By supporting transportation networks, cold storage solutions, and streamlined donation processes, we can create a more efficient and sustainable food recovery system. Increased funding for pilot programs, research, and grants will help HROs expand their operations, improve food donation practices, and reduce food waste. This holistic approach will not only benefit HROs and food donors but also strengthen hunger relief efforts across the state.

### Support the Department of Health to Provide Local Health Jurisdictions Guidance on Standardized Best Practices for Food Donations

**Recommendation:** Support the Department of Heath to provide guidance for the local health departments on standardized best practices for food donation.

Local health jurisdictions interpret food safety laws differently, leading to confusion and inconsistency across counties, businesses, and Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs). This lack of standardization can contribute to food waste and safety concerns. The Department of Health (DOH) will work with local health jurisdictions on providing guidance for best practices and standardizing of communication between donors and HROs.

Focus on collaboration and partnerships with the DOH, to provide guidance on responding to questions, procedures, and review processes with local health jurisdictions. By identifying challenges and barriers between the donors, HROs, and LHJ the DOH can prioritize best practices and standardizations that are needed to improve consistencies in interpreting food safety regulations. DOH will work within the RCW code and provide guidance on traceability, create standards for food labeling for de-packaging, temperature control, and adherence to the Good Samaritan Law.

Additional multi-year funding opportunities can provide an increase in prevention-focused technical assistance, both web based and physical pamphlets to reach additional food businesses providing additional clarity and consistency in donatable practices~~. Increased~~ Collaboration between DOH, LHJ, donors and HROs will help reduce uncertainty in what is donatable and encourage more food donations.

Note: Final wording will be reviewed in collaboration with DOH after the survey – rephrasing was considered from comments with DOH

### Provide Alternative Funding Mechanisms to Help HROs Hire Staff to Secure More Donations

**Action:** Provide funding mechanisms to help Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs) hire staff, enabling flexible pickup schedules (including evenings and weekends) and supporting job training programs, such as a 6-month Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) program, transportation contracts, and food safety training for new employees.

HROs often rely on unreliable volunteers, leading to missed pickups, spoilage, and instability. By funding staff positions with fair wages and benefits, HROs can improve operations, reduce turnover, and increase food donations, benefiting both employees and the communities served.

To ensure sustainability, this funding should offer flexibility in staffing, including multi-year grants, and integrate with broader funding models to provide long-term stability. 8Additionally, the program should prioritize hiring from existing client or volunteer pools to create local employment opportunities.

Transportation remains a key challenge, and trained drivers are essential for efficient operations. Long-term, sustainable funding for staffing and transportation services should be prioritized over short-term grants.

This recommendation addresses gaps in food rescue infrastructure, fostering a self-sustaining employment model that encourages innovation and collaboration.

**Note:** Ecology will collaborate with DOH to identify Public Health Grants that align with this initiative.

### Support HROs in Properly Managing Inedible Food by Reducing Waste Management Costs

**Recommendation:** Support Hunger Relief Organization’s (HROs) in managing inedible food by reducing waste management costs through the following actions:

* **Subsidize Waste Management Fees for HROs:** Provide subsidies or grants to lower tipping fees and waste management service costs. As food donations increase, many HROs will need more frequent or larger waste removal services. Reducing these fees will alleviate financial burdens and ensure proper disposal of inedible food.
* **Develop Flexible Diversion Programs:** Create guidelines that support various methods for diverting inedible food, including composting, anaerobic digestion, and animal feed. Allow HROs to choose the best diversion method based on their specific needs, resources, and capacity. This will enhance flexibility and efficiency in managing food waste.
* **Encourage Cost-Sharing with Retail Partners:** Facilitate partnerships between HROs and retail businesses to share the costs of waste management and food diversion. Incentivize retailers to contribute financially to the disposal of inedible food, helping reduce HROs’ financial burdens.
* **Clarify Diversion Partnerships and Expectations:** Clearly define the role of "diversion partnerships" for HROs, ensuring these collaborations are practical and manageable. Provide clear guidelines to help HROs efficiently manage inedible food.

Despite food rescue efforts, much of the donated food remains inedible or spoiled and must be disposed of properly. HROs often bear high disposal costs, creating a financial and logistical burden. By subsidizing waste management fees, developing flexible diversion programs, and fostering cost-sharing with retailers, this recommendation ensures that inedible food is diverted from landfills and managed sustainably. These measures will reduce HROs' financial strain, enhance food waste reduction efforts, and help build a more sustainable food recovery system in Washington State.

### Enhance Accessibility and Flexibility of Public Grant Funding

**Action:** Enhance accessibility and flexibility of public grant funding through the following measures:

* **Equitable Access:** Simplify the application and reporting processes, eliminate matching requirements, and offer flexible funding that covers both food purchasing and administrative costs. This will ensure smaller organizations, including those serving non-English-speaking communities, can access critical resources for infrastructure and food recovery.
* **Extend Grant Cycles:** Increase grant cycles from two to four years to provide stability and allow organizations to focus on long-term food recovery. Include a mid-cycle check-in to assess progress and adjust as needed.
* **Support for Smaller Organizations:** Provide targeted technical assistance to help smaller organizations navigate the application process successfully. These organizations often face challenges due to limited resources, and simplifying the process will encourage greater participation.
* **Operational and Personnel Funding:** Increase funding for long-term support, including facilities, transportation, and personnel costs. Funds should incrementally increase to support staffing levels and ensure sustainability.

By simplifying grant processes, extending grant cycles, and increasing operational support, these changes will improve access to funding for a wider range of organizations, particularly smaller ones. This approach will enhance the sustainability of food recovery efforts and promote long-term capacity-building, ensuring a more equitable and effective food system.

### Identify Barriers and Standardize Food Donation Best Practices

**Recommendation:** TheFood Center will use a collaborative approach to develop a cohesive, statewide approach to overcome barriers to standardized food donation best practices by integrating research, incentives, and technical support for food donors and Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs).

Standardizing food donation processes will significantly improve food recovery efforts in Washington State, reducing food waste, increasing donations, and supporting hunger relief. By providing technical assistance, fostering partnerships, and ensuring the adoption of consistent procedures, we can create a sustainable, scalable solution to food waste reduction that benefits both donors and hunger relief organizations.

This collaborative approach, with its emphasis on flexibility and inclusivity, will foster long-term sustainability, positive environmental impact, and community-driven solutions to food insecurity.

This streamlined approach highlights the need for a collaborative, flexible strategy to overcome barriers in food donation. By combining research, technical support, and incentives, it ensures that food donation best practices can be easily adopted across different sectors. This recommendation makes the case for a sustainable, scalable solution to food waste and hunger relief through the following key actions:

* **Best Practice Research & SOP Development:**
	1. Collaborate with Food Businesses & Local Organizations: Direct the Food Center to research effective food donation practices and create standardized SOPs for food donation, rescue, and recovery. Ensure SOPs are adaptable for both small and large operations.
* **Focus on Prevention & Tracking:**
	1. Prioritize Waste Prevention: Encourage businesses to focus on reducing food waste at the source while using tracking systems to monitor donation streams (donated food, animal feed, compost, landfill).
	2. Implement Reporting Systems: Encourage businesses to report donation data, ensuring transparency and accountability, and offering insights into the program's effectiveness.
* **Free Audits & Technical Support:**
	1. Offer Free Support: Provide free or subsidized waste audits, technical assistance, and employee training to encourage voluntary participation in food donation best practices.
	2. Support Food Donation Apps: Partner with tech companies to create user-friendly mobile apps for tracking food waste and donations.
* **Public Recognition & Industry Collaboration:**
	1. Reward Excellence: Establish state campaigns to recognize businesses excelling in food donation and waste reduction, inspiring others to follow suit.
	2. Collaborate with Industry Groups: Partner with food industry associations to integrate standardized food donation training and best practices into their existing programs.
* **Partner with Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs):**
	1. Support Donor-HRO Collaboration: Facilitate partnerships between food businesses and HROs to streamline donations and ensure food safety.
	2. Provide Training & Resources to HROs: Equip HROs with the knowledge and resources to handle food donations effectively, focusing on food safety and best practices.
	3. Co-Develop resources: Create media, handouts, and toolkits to support donation. Resources are also needed for starting a food recovery program, including sample community agreements, and other best practices.
* **Inclusive & Multilingual Resources:**
	1. Ensure Accessibility: Provide SOPs and training in multiple languages to ensure broad accessibility, especially for communities with limited English proficiency.
	2. Adopt State Guidelines: Work with the Department of Health (DOH) and local health jurisdictions (LHJs) to create consistent, clear food safety guidelines.
* **Leverage Existing Funding:**
	1. Utilize Food Center Grants: Tap into existing funding programs like Food Center Grants to support these initiatives efficiently, avoiding the creation of new funding streams.
* **Monitor & Provide Feedback:**
	1. Track Progress: Regularly monitor businesses' food donation efforts, providing constructive feedback and recommendations to improve donation volume and food safety.

### Support the Food Center Education and Outreach Campaigns

**Recommendation:** Fund and expand the Food Center’s education and outreach initiatives to build strong community partnerships and drive local engagement:

* **Continue Food Waste Reduction Campaigns:** Expand the ["Use Food Well"](https://ecology.wa.gov/waste-toxics/reducing-recycling-waste/organics-and-food-waste/sustainable-food-center/food-waste-reduction/holiday-food-waste) campaign to help individuals and businesses reduce food waste, emphasizing cost savings, practical strategies, and food rescue. Encourage surplus food donations to local food banks and hunger relief organizations, preventing waste and supporting communities.
* **Raise Awareness on Food Donation Quality:** Educate donors on the importance of quality and safety in food donations. Promote early donations through incentives and education on tax credits to encourage businesses to donate edible food earlier in its lifecycle.
* **Promote Safe Food Handling Education:** Offer training for businesses and consumers on safe food handling practices throughout the entire food lifecycle, fostering accountability and reducing waste.
* **Build and Strengthen Partnerships:** Support ongoing work to forge stronger partnerships between governments, local organizations, and food businesses. This can include initiatives like the [Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment](https://pacificcoastcollaborative.org/food-waste/) (PCFWC), which connects food businesses, government agencies, and non-profits to tackle food waste together and [Eat Local First](https://eatlocalfirst.org/). Building these local, cross-sector partnerships ensures a collective and sustained effort to reduce waste.
* **Public Recognition and Awards:** Acknowledge and celebrate businesses and community organizations that excel in food waste reduction and donations, elevating their efforts in state campaigns and events, and encouraging others to follow suit.
* **Expand ReFED Resources:** Direct the Food Center to expand [ReFED resources](https://policyfinder.refed.org/?_ga=2.186634414.685498087.1742328769-505915872.1724687035) on existing state and federal policies and incentives, ensuring local businesses and organizations are aware of available support.

The Food Center’s programs are essential in reducing food waste across Washington. By fostering community partnerships and local engagement, these efforts will raise awareness, improve food handling, and empower individuals and businesses to act, contributing to sustainable practices that benefit both communities and the environment.

### Support the Food Data Hub to increase access to standardized data tracking

**Recommendation:** Support the Food Data Hub research to increase access to standardized data tracking. Data tracking supports food donation by:

* **Optimizing Logistics:** It helps coordinate collection, manage inventory, and ensure timely delivery to reduce waste and improve efficiency.
* **Identifying Needs:** It tracks donation patterns to target resources effectively and address food gaps.
* **Enhancing Accountability:** Provides detailed records for reporting to stakeholders and ensures transparency.
* **Building Partnerships:** It helps align donations with community needs and facilitates collaboration with businesses and nonprofits.
* **Measuring Impact:** Allows organizations to evaluate their success and improve strategies.
* **Incentivizing Donors:** Provides feedback to donors on the impact of their contributions, encouraging more donations.
* **Ensuring Food Safety:** Tracks handling, storage, and expiration to comply with safety regulations.

Currently, tracking donated food lacks standardization and often misses key data, like tracking inedible food quantities. The Food Center’s Food Data Hub research can support food donation by sharing best available data, data collection best practices, and increase access to standardized metrics for improved coordination. This will help Washington State meet its food surplus goals, improve food rescue efforts, and support informed decision-making across the food donation system.

### Fund a Statewide Collaborative Food Donation and Recovery Map

**Recommendation:** Fund a statewide map to connect food donation organizations, distributors, Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs), transporters, and compost facilities, integrating key contact information and resources. This tool will create a centralized, accessible platform for food donors and partners to connect with local organizations, improving the efficiency of food recovery efforts.

The Food Center is currently researching the development of a map to link surplus food generators with local HROs. This recommendation expands that effort into a collaborative network of community partners, leveraging infrastructure across sectors. Key partners like the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), USDA, EPA, local health departments, and organizations such as Eat Local First and the Seattle Good Business Network will be involved, with a focus on food safety, equity, and logistics.

This map will facilitate cross-sector collaboration, connect food donors and recipients, and support disaster preparedness and emergency housing needs. It will also streamline donation processes, addressing gaps in food rescue and recovery efforts.

To maximize efficiency, existing mapping tools should be integrated to avoid duplication and enhance outreach. Integrating systems like Feeding America's proprietary data and the Eat Local First initiative will expand the map's reach and encourage greater adoption by making it useful for both sales and food rescue.

Data transparency is crucial—donation data should include context (e.g., why donors have high or low donation numbers) to foster better understanding and usage. Sustainable management and maintenance of the data must be ensured, with clear funding and long-term support plans in place.

By enhancing food donation coordination, supporting collaboration, and integrating with existing resources, this statewide map will strengthen food recovery efforts across Washington, ensuring long-term success.

### Strengthen and Streamline Food Rescue by Supporting Existing Infrastructure and Collaboration

**Recommendation:** Strengthen and streamline food recovery efforts by supporting existing infrastructure and creating a 24/7 food rescue system that improves donation coordination, food safety, and data tracking:

* **Enhance Existing Non-Profits and Hubs:** Focus on improving the efficiency of existing food hubs and non-profit organizations. Support and strengthen current food hubs to better connect small farmers with consumers.
* **Incorporate Commercial Kitchens and Permitted Food Processing Facilities:** Ensure that commercial kitchens and food processing facilities are integrated into the food recovery process to enhance food preservation and extend shelf life.
* **Equity and Inclusivity:** Ensure that food recovery efforts are equitable, providing access to all communities, including underserved areas. This includes avoiding the creation of new hubs and instead leveraging existing infrastructure to promote greater accessibility.
* **Collaboration and Coordination:** Avoid duplicating existing food hubs and directories. Explore partnerships to maximize the impact of available resources. Consider integrating private marketplaces to connect food donations to a wider audience, stimulating local economies and supporting small-scale producers.
* **Logistics and Transportation:** Use refrigerated trucks to quickly move perishable items from hubs, ensuring minimal spoilage. A hub-and-spoke model for transportation may offer a feasible solution to overcome budget limitations while improving distribution efficiency.
* **Clearing House for Non-Food Bank Operations:** For organizations not handling distribution, establish a clearing house to efficiently allocate food to local distribution points, ensuring a streamlined, community-based approach to food recovery.
* **Centralized Communications and Secondary Marketplace:** Create a platform to notify users about available food, improving transparency and coordination. An open, live inventory system will allow recipients to view available food, fostering equitable and efficient food distribution.

Mapping and sharing existing food rescue infrastructure is essential to avoid duplicating resources. By leveraging and improving current systems, we can ensure that food rescue efforts are efficient, equitable, and sustainable while increasing overall capacity for food donations.

### Create a No-Fee Certification Process for Food Donation

**Recommendation:** This recommendation supports Ecology partnering with Department of Health (DOH), Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), and local health jurisdiction partners to create a state-supported, no-fee certification process for organizations receiving and distributing donated food. This process would provide a clear and streamlined pathway for organizations, ensuring food safety and supporting increased food recovery efforts across the state without creating unnecessary barriers.

The certification process would aim to address challenges related to food donation liability and provide consistency across Local Health Jurisdictions (LHJs). It would also clarify the responsibilities of Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs) and donors, ensuring they meet food safety standards without imposing extra costs or creating burdens on small organizations like church soup kitchens or gleaners. Certification would be voluntary for organizations, and no fees would be charged to HROs or donors.

The process would complement existing regulations (such as the [WAC 246-215](https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=246-215)) and build on best practices from programs like the Public Health Seattle King County (PHSKC) registration system, ensuring consistency in registration without duplicating efforts. It would focus on nutrition and safe handling practices while promoting equity and accessibility, particularly for underserved communities.

By focusing on reducing liability concerns and enhancing the coordination of donations, this certification process will support and strengthen food recovery efforts, ultimately increasing the volume of food recovered and redistributed to those in need.