



OPTIMIZING FOOD RECOVERY:

A Best Practice Guide for Food Recovery
Organizations and Services





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INTRODUCTION



This **Best Practice Guide for Food Recovery Organizations** is a resource designed to empower organizations dedicated to reducing food waste and alleviating hunger. As the global challenges of food insecurity and environmental sustainability intensify, food recovery organizations (FROs) play a critical role in bridging the gap between surplus food and those in need.

This guide has been developed by gathering best practices from various FROs and Food Recovery Services (FRSs). It encompasses actionable strategies and proven methods to enhance operational efficiency, expand recovery capacity, and maintain compliance with health and safety standards. From addressing common challenges like volunteer recruitment and retention and to navigating state regulations, this guide equips organizations with the tools to build their resilience and scalability.

By implementing the practices outlined in this guide, organizations can streamline their operations and deepen the impact on their local communities and the environment. Whether your organization is just starting to recover food or looking to enhance existing operations, this guide is a valuable resource for driving success at every step of your organization's journey.



MEETING SB 1383 REQUIREMENTS



California Senate Bill 1383 is a law that requires certain food generators, like grocery stores and large restaurants, to donate surplus edible food to food recovery organizations. Additionally, this law requires the food recovery organization/service to maintain records for their donations.

A food recovery **organization** shall maintain a record of:

- (A) The name, address, and contact details of each commercial edible food generator or recovery service supplying edible food to the organization.
- (B) The quantity in pounds of edible food received from each commercial edible food generator per month.

A food recovery **service** shall maintain a record of:

- (A) The name, address, and contact details of each commercial edible food generator served.
- (B) Monthly pounds of edible food collected from each generator.
- (C) Monthly pounds of edible food delivered to each recovery organization.



Note: SB 1383 does not prohibit a food recovery service or organization from refusing to accept edible food from a commercial edible food generator



FOOD SAFETY



Food safety is key to successful food recovery endeavors. This section covers strategies for meeting health codes, proper food handling, and fostering a safety-first culture. Learn to implement protocols, train staff, and build trust while reducing risk.

SAFE FOOD HANDLING:

→ Hygiene Protocols:

- Ensure that all staff and volunteers wash their hands thoroughly before and after handling food.
- Use gloves, hairnets, aprons, and close-toed shoes to prevent contamination of any food goods.

→ Segregation of Foods:

- Separate raw foods (e.g. raw meat) from ready-to-eat items such as cooked eggs during storage, transportation, and handling. This helps to prevent cross-contamination.

PROPER FOOD STORAGE:

→ Temperature Control:

- Maintain cold foods at or below 41 degrees Fahrenheit (refrigeration) and frozen food at or below zero degrees Fahrenheit.
- Use calibrated thermometers to monitor storage temperatures.
- To prevent food spoiling, use refrigerated trucks, coolers or thermal blankets when transporting food from a donor.

→ First-In First-Out System:

- To minimize spoilage, use the first-in, first-out system to ensure that older items are used first.

→ Safe Shelving:

- Store foods at least 6 inches off the ground and away from walls to ensure proper air circulation and prevent pest access.
- Dry storage food should be kept between 50–70 degrees. For more information, review the Food Safety and Inspection Service website:
www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation





FOOD SAFETY

PLACE
CLEAR
LABELS
ON FOOD



LABELING AND DOCUMENTATION:

→ Labels:

- Place clear labels on foods that showcase food type, storage instructions, date of receipt, and a use-by date.
- Use the Careit app to record all donated food temperatures.

→ Signage

- Post health and food safety requirements in food preparation spaces for staff and volunteers to reference as needed.
- Print a poster with information on when products are still safe to eat after expiration dates:
www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/foodkeeper-app

SECURE
FOOD TO
PREVENT
SHIFTING



TRANSPORTATION PRACTICES:

→ Sanitized Vehicles:

- Regularly clean and sanitize vehicles used for food transport to prevent contamination.

→ Temperature Maintenance:

- Utilize insulated containers, coolers with ice packs, or refrigerated trucks to maintain food quality.

→ Secure Donations in Transportation:

- Secure food to prevent shifting, damage, or contamination during transit.

→ Regular Facility Inspections:

- Conduct periodic internal inspections to ensure facilities meet food safety standards, including cleanliness, pest control, and proper equipment maintenance.



DONATION TRACKING AND RECORD-KEEPING



Efficient donation tracking and accurate recordkeeping are key components of maintaining compliance with SB-1383, optimizing food recovery efforts, and ensuring a smooth workflow for your organization. Although there are many helpful software available for recordkeeping, we recommend utilizing the Careit app as your one-stop shop for managing food recovery donations.

WHAT IS CAREIT?

Careit is a food recovery software that connects donors—such as restaurants, grocery stores, and food producers—with nonprofit organizations. By reducing food waste and addressing food insecurity, Careit serves as a simple, effective platform for tracking donations and maintaining compliance with SB-1383 regulations.

Key Features:

- **Real-Time Tracking:**
Monitor and log donations as they happen.
- **Notifications:**
Stay informed about new donation opportunities.
- **Centralized Records:**
Store agreements, reporting forms, and key documentation in one accessible location.

SUPPORT INFORMATION:

Careit Support:

Access help directly through the app or on the Careit website.

Phone Support:

Call 1-833-FOOD-365 for assistance.

Free Technical Support:

You can also contact Zane, at Blue Strike Environmental for onboarding assistance or any app-related questions.

→ CONTACT: Zane Cintas: zane@bluestrikeenvironmental.com

CAREIT

FOOD RESCUE PLATFORM

Careit helps charities find food, track donations, and engage volunteers. It's free to donate and rescue food. Careit is extremely user-friendly, and offers additional upgrades for advanced food rescue organizations.

STEP 1. CREATE FREE ACCOUNT

Download Careit on iOS or Android devices. Click "Create Account" and select Nonprofit. Fill out profile information.



STEP 2. RESERVE A DONATION

Find and click "Reserve" on any desired posted donation. Or, receive alerts when a business has posted a scheduled or one-off donation directly to you.



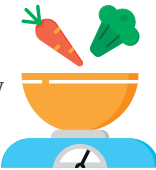
STEP 3. ASSIGN & TRANSPORT

Add volunteers or staff to your account to assign reserved pick-ups. Click "Begin Rescue" to alert the donor you're on your way. View maps for navigation.



STEP 4. COMPLETE DONATION

Click "Complete." Weigh each donation by food-type category, and record temperatures, add photos, or add notes.



STEP 5. VIEW RECORDS

Visit My.CareitApp.com to view your auto-generated agreements with your food donors. View partners, contact info, and donation data in-app.



DOWNLOAD TODAY!
CareitApp.com



LEVELLED-UP DATA & OPERATIONS

- Manage a calendar of all scheduled donations, donors, drivers, redistribution partners in one simple dashboard
- Match donations to the right agency and driver
- Alert drivers or volunteers to self-schedule pick-ups with built-in reminder notifications
- Maintain and edit a list of all partners and instantly share data with them in an interactive app
- Create and download customizable reports
- Design custom features to enhance your operations



Discover why food recovery organizations across the nation are connecting with each other on a unified digital network for food distributors, restaurants, celebrity chefs, institutions, car share programs, pantries, shelters, and change-makers. Careit makes food rescue easier. Together, we're better.



FAQ'S

- All agencies must inspect accepted food donations for quality and safety
- Agencies do not need to accept food donations they do not want
- Agencies can use Careit to continue to accept food from their previous donors



DONATION TRACKING AND RECORDKEEPING



Simplify food donation tracking with this example food recovery donation tracker.

Food Recovery Service Donation Tracking Template : Sheet1

Delivery Date	Food Recovery Organization	Donor	Type of Food	Amount Delivered (lbs)	Delivered By	Notes
YYYY-MM-DD	Organization Name	Organization Name	Fresh Produce/Dairy, etc.	###	Staff/Volunteer Name	Any issues/comments
YYYY-MM-DD	Organization Name	Organization Name	Fresh Produce/Dairy, etc.	###	Staff/Volunteer Name	Any issues/comments
YYYY-MM-DD	Organization Name	Organization Name	Fresh Produce/Dairy, etc.	###	Staff/Volunteer Name	Any issues/comments
YYYY-MM-DD	Organization Name	Organization Name	Fresh Produce/Dairy, etc.	###	Staff/Volunteer Name	Any issues/comments

MAINTAINING COMPLIANCE AND STREAMLINING RECORDS

Accurate recordkeeping is critical to ensuring compliance with SB-1383. The Careit app helps organizations easily track essential information such as donation details, donor agreements, and food quantities. Below are key practices to optimize your recordkeeping efforts:

- 1. TRACK ESSENTIAL INFORMATION:** Use Careit to record the name, address, and contact information of each donor, along with the quantity of food received.
- 2. KEEP AGREEMENTS ON-SITE:** SB 1383 requires food recovery organizations to maintain a valid donor agreement form on-site at all times. These agreements can be stored virtually through Careit or in a physical binder for backup.
 - **Record Tax ID Information:** While not required, logging tax IDs for each donation can streamline donor access to tax incentives and improve overall record management.
 - **Track Transportation:** Maintain a separate spreadsheet to document the amount of food transported/delivered each month. Include delivery dates, donor and recipient organization names, and quantities delivered for detailed reporting. An example sheet is included below.

BEST PRACTICES FOR WEIGHING DONATIONS

Weighing food donations is essential for maintaining accurate records and ensuring compliance with SB 1383. Follow these tips to streamline the weighing process:

- **Use a Commercial-Grade Scale:** A calibrated, durable scale ensures precise measurements and saves time.
- **Categorize Donations by Food Type:** Sort donations into categories like fresh produce, dairy, or baked goods to improve reporting and analysis.
- **Log Data in Careit:** Document weights and donation details directly in the app to centralize and simplify your record-keeping.



DONATION DUMPING



Donation dumping is when donor organizations or individuals donate unusable, expired, or inappropriate items to food recovery organizations. This can overburden food recovery organizations, requiring organizations to throw away unusable or unwanted items. To remedy the issue of donation dumping, food recovery organizations can utilize the techniques listed below:

ENHANCE PHYSICAL BARRIERS:

- Secure drop-off areas with gates or designated bins to control how donations are deposited.
- Post “no dumping” signage and highlight the potential fines that will occur on those who dump unwanted or unusable donations.

EDUCATE DONORS:

- Develop specific guidelines for what donations are acceptable for your organization.
- When partnerships are set up write donation limits and requirements into the contract

UTILIZE Careit:

- Careit allows FROs to select donations that meet their needs and capacity.
- Through the app, nonprofits can review available donations, view clear photos, and only claim what they know they can use to serve their community.¹
- Careit allows nonprofits to leave notes on completed donations to alert the donor of any important information, such as a request for better sorting in the future.²

¹ Arledge, Ben. “Donation Dumping: The Hidden Harm to Nonprofits and the Environment.” *Careit*, 5 Nov. 2024, www.careit.com/2024/11/donation-dumping-the-hidden-harm-to-nonprofits-and-the-environment/.

² Arledge, Ben. “Donation Dumping: The Hidden Harm to Nonprofits and the Environment.” *Careit*, 5 Nov. 2024, www.careit.com/2024/11/donation-dumping-the-hidden-harm-to-nonprofits-and-the-environment/.



VOLUNTEERS



This section outlines best practices and resources for recruiting, training, retaining, and showing appreciation for volunteers so that your food recovery organization can acquire and maintain the volunteers it needs to run efficiently.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS:

✓ Use Effective Outreach Channels:

- Leveraging social media channels such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook will help garner the attention of interested volunteers.

✓ Partner With Schools and Community Groups:

- Collaborate with schools for extra credit opportunities or with community organizations like churches and sports clubs.

✓ Volunteer Fairs and Websites:

- Host a booth at a local community event or college fair. Attendees may be more likely to join if they can learn about your organization and its impact in person and engage with staff and volunteers face-to-face.
- Posting opportunities on platforms like VolunteerMatch and Idealist are good ways to reach a wide audience.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING:

✓ Create an On-boarding Packet

Include essential documents and information such as:

- **Safety and Food Handling Guidelines:** Guidelines for safe food handling can be found within this guide and can be shared with volunteers.
- **Provide Role-Specific Instructions Or Checklists:** Whether the volunteer will be a driver, cook, or general helper, it is best to have a general checklist or set of instructions to help them understand their role.
- **Volunteer Code of Conduct:** The volunteer code of conduct should include all the rights reserved for the volunteer and the food recovery organization. It should entail all the responsibilities of the volunteer and the food recovery organization's responsibilities to the volunteer.



VOLUNTEERS



WELCOME AND ORIENTATION:

✓ Welcome Letter

- Send a welcome letter outlining the organization's goals and mission to the volunteers. This will help them feel that their role is impactful and important.

✓ Group Orientation Session

- Share the organization's mission, goals, and impact on the local community.
- Explain how food recovery addresses hunger and waste.
- Introduce the key staff members and other volunteers.

✓ Tour the Food Recovery Facility (can be a virtual walk-through)

- Conducting a walk-through of the facility and pointing out where all the equipment, storage areas, and vehicles are located will help familiarize the volunteers with these key components.



TRAINING FOR ROLE-SPECIFIC TASKS:

✓ Hands-On Training:

- Pair new volunteers with experienced team members to take part in a ride-along or to show them physically how to perform their tasks, whether it's sorting food, operating equipment, or logging donations correctly.

✓ Food Safety Training:

- Teaching essential skills like the proper temperatures required for each food type, how to avoid cross-contamination, and following hygiene protocols will help reduce the amount of food loss in the future.
- Provide visual aids and posters around vehicles and on-site so that volunteers can easily reference relevant information while handling donations.



VOLUNTEERS



VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION AND RETENTION

Recognizing volunteers for the great work that they do will keep them engaged and feeling appreciated. Here are some tips on how to show appreciation to the hardworking volunteers at your organization.

✓ Share The Impact of Their Work:

Sharing the importance or impact of the volunteers' work can make them feel like their time spent with the organization is well worth the effort. Share available metrics like how many people they provided food for or the total pounds of food they sorted to provide a sense of accomplishment.

✓ Recognize Volunteers' Hardwork:

Offering benefits to your volunteers shows recognition of their hard work and boosts their morale. Some ways to do this include:

- Providing free drinks and food or throwing a pizza party after meeting a certain number of hours
- Highlighting their work on social media platforms or creating a volunteer of the month board showcasing their impact in the local community (e.g. X amount of edible food recovered leading to x amount of greenhouse gas emissions saved from entering the environment.)

✓ Solicit Volunteer Feedback:

Allow volunteers to give transparent feedback about their experiences with your food recovery organization. This will help to create a better understanding of their needs and also help to improve the volunteer experience for future volunteers.

QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE SURVEY:

- What part of volunteering did you enjoy the most?
- What could have made your experience of working with us better?
- How can we better train you to perform your duties?
- How can we show our appreciation for your work?



TRANSFORMING FOOD RECOVERY: Tips for Success

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH GENERATORS

Building strong, reliable relationships with food generators like grocery stores, restaurants, and schools requires time and intentional effort. To support your food recovery organization in fostering these connections, here are some practical tips and strategies to ensure success.



✓ Understand the Generators' Needs and Challenges

- **Research Their Operations:** Ask to hold a meeting to learn about the type of food generated, hours of operation, and logistical constraints.
- **Address Safety Concerns:** Educate them on liability protections like the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act,³ which shields donors from legal risks if they donate in good faith.
- **Simplify the Process:** Make the donation process as easy as possible, offering clear instructions and minimizing additional effort for the donor.

✓ Create Mutual Benefits

- **Marketing Opportunities:** Offer to highlight their contributions on your website, social media, or newsletters.
- **Tax Benefits:**⁴ Help them understand tax deductions for food donations and provide clear documentation to support claims.

✓ Be Reliable and Professional

- **Timely Pick-Ups:** Ensure collections are punctual and professional to avoid disruptions to their operations.
 - Place one staff member, volunteer, or a set of volunteers to be solely in charge of food donation pickups. This will help to improve the relationship between the food donor and your organization, create a reliable system of food transportation, and ensure that a steady supply of donations will remain.
- **Transparency:** Keep detailed records of donations and how they're being used to build credibility.
 - Make sure to detail what donations are acceptable and NOT acceptable at your organization, this will help to reduce donation dumping. Post this on your website, and signage outside the donation drop-off points

✓ Build Trust Through Communication

- **Regular Contact:** Maintain consistent communication through emails, phone calls, or in-person visits to check in and address concerns.
- **Provide Feedback:** Share updates about the impact of their donations, such as how many meals donors helped provide or the environmental benefits of waste reduction

³ www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/FAQs-GoodSamaritanAct.pdf

⁴ <https://policyfinder.refed.org/federal-policy/federal-tax-incentives>



DONATION DISTRIBUTION AND REGULATION



Efficient distribution and compliance with food safety regulations are essential for maximizing the impact of food recovery. This section highlights best practices to ensure the safe and effective redistribution of edible food for food recovery organizations and services.

TIPS FOR PANTRIES TO REGULATE THE AMOUNT OF FOOD RECIPIENTS TAKE:

✓ Create Donation Bags

- Create pre-set donation bags with items based on family size (small, medium, large)
- Separate perishable and non-perishable goods, or goods that are “scarce vs. not scarce”
- Use consistent measurement tools such as containers, bags, or weights to allocate food fairly.

✓ Provide education on food preservation tips:

- Share food preservation and preservation tips with recipients to reduce food waste and maximize their food usage.

✓ Communicate Guidelines Clearly

Signage:

- Post clear instructions at distribution points about quantity limits.

Staff and Volunteers:

- Train staff and volunteers to explain guidelines to recipients

Digital Communication:

- Share rules via social media or apps used by your organization.

Monitor Demand and Supply:

Adjust Guidelines:

- Adapt distribution rules based on food availability to prevent shortages or over-distribution.

✓ Collect Data

- Regularly track recipient numbers and food quantities to refine allocation strategies.



FUNDING AND TIPS TO SAVE MONEY



Here are a few helpful tips and practices for a food recovery/service to scale fundraising efforts as well as tips to operate efficiently and effectively to save money.

SHOWCASE IMPACT TO ATTRACT FUNDING:

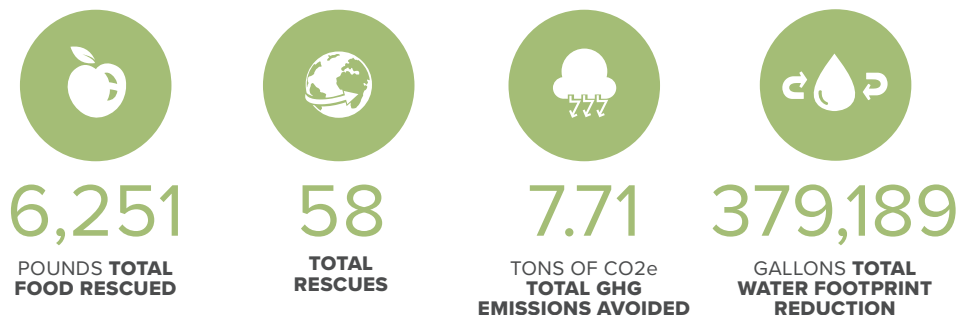
- **Quantify Success:** Provide data on meals distributed, waste diverted, or environmental benefits achieved to demonstrate effectiveness.
- **Share Stories:** Use testimonials from beneficiaries or donors to highlight your organization's tangible impact.
- **Environmental Metrics:** Highlight carbon emissions saved or waste diverted from landfills to appeal to sustainability-focused funders.

FOCUS ON REDUCING WASTE IN OPERATIONS TO DECREASE COSTS AND INCREASE EFFICIENCY:

- **Assess Food Recovery Practices:** Regularly audit food recovery operations to identify wasteful practices such as over-ordering containers, inefficient use of staff time, and unnecessary storage steps, and to understand which foods are commonly being wasted and why.
- **Improve Sorting Efficiency:** Train staff and volunteers on best practices for sorting donations quickly and efficiently to reduce labor costs and minimize food spoilage.
- **Ensure Food Safety is Prioritized:** Ensure that all staff and volunteers are properly trained on food safety handling procedures to ensure that food received will not spoil or become cross-contaminated.

CARE  T

EXAMPLE OF SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT METRICS RESULTS





FUNDING AND TIPS TO SAVE MONEY



MAXIMIZE RESOURCES:

- **Collaborate with Other Organizations:** Seek to collaborate with Food Recovery organizations to share equipment, resources, and donations.

IMPROVE FUNDRAISING FOR OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

- **Targeted Fundraising:** Seek grants or donations specifically for operational support, such as purchasing equipment, maintaining storage facilities, or paying for technology that enhances efficiency.
- **Grant websites:**
 - ReFED Nonprofit Food Recovery Accelerator: <https://refed.org/accelerator>
 - Home | Grants.gov: www.grants.gov

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH DONORS TO ENSURE CONSISTENCY

- **Ongoing Partnerships:** Establish long-term, dependable relationships with grocery stores, restaurants, and other donors to ensure a steady and predictable flow of donations, reducing the need for last-minute logistics or emergency collections.
- **Donation Commitments:** Work with donors to establish regular donation schedules or standing orders, reducing uncertainty in donation availability.



SPECIAL THANKS TO THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS GUIDE!



Gathering for Women · Monterey

Providing homeless women with supportive resources and a caring community



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