

**City of Federal Way
King County Solid Waste Division
2018 Commercial Food Waste Grant**

Final Report

Grant Information	
<i>Grantee:</i>	City of Federal Way
<i>CPA Number:</i>	5989307
<i>Project Title:</i>	City of Federal Way Commercial Food Rescue Grant Program
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<i>Date report prepared:</i>	October 11, 2019
<i>King County Solid Waste Division Grant Manager:</i>	Lucy Auster

Project Information
<p><i>Please provide an overall summary of the accomplishments of the project, based on project goals and objectives as outlined in the grant agreement. Include the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <i>a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the impacts of the project</i> · <i>internal and external factors that contributed to or impeded the success of the project</i> · <i>an assessment of the success of the Equity and Social Justice element of the project, if applicable</i> <p><i>Your grant manager will contact you if more information is needed.</i></p>
<p>Food rescue is an excellent way to reduce the amount of edible food thrown in the landfill. According to the EPA food recovery hierarchy, feeding people is the highest use diversion for food. Additionally, this rescued food goes to nonprofit organizations where they feed underserved populations.</p> <p>When working with commercial food service establishments, there are a number of barriers to setting up food rescue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · One of the largest struggles for food rescue outreach was reaching and meeting with a decision maker. When mailing the food rescue program flyer, a lot of mail was returned as undeliverable since the mailing lists was based off the business license list for physical location. Of the materials that were received, only a couple businesses responded. Small business owners are inundated with sales calls, so it is often difficult to reach them via email or phone. When stopping by, employees often say the manager is not available or they are too busy to talk. City staff worked hard to overcome these barriers, but it was time intensive and other priorities limited the amount of time that could be spent on promoting food rescue with decision-makers. Having a personal connection or an introduction is the best way to promote the program. Unfortunately, City staff was not able to build on established connections via Economic Development staff as initially planned.

- Nearly all food service establishments stated concern about the health department not allowing food rescue, despite explaining that food rescue was only pre-consumer food and that the health department was ok with it. City staff worked with a health inspector early in the grant to ensure an understanding about food safety and this was helpful. Once that inspector left his position, City staff attempted to reengage with the health department but calls and emails went unanswered. On the positive side, to date, there have not been any issues with the health department, nor have there been any inspections that related to food rescue. In the future, it would be helpful to have the health department logo on flyers to show that they are supportive of the program.
- Food service establishments also expressed concern about liability. City staff shared the federal and state laws that provided protection. This was acceptable for some local businesses, but many chains sent this concern to corporate where their legal teams maintained this opposition.
- Many food service establishments declared that they did not have enough unwanted edible food to merit a pickup. City staff congratulated them on the food waste reduction success, then asked them to reach out if they ever had excess food to donate.
- City staff overcame the barrier of the cost of containerizing food by providing either durable or disposable containers to jump start food collection practices. Many restaurants were grateful for these pan inventory and did not require additional containers. City staff were initially advised that green tinted food pans were the industry standard for donation. The only green food pans available were melamine which are extremely heavy and therefore not preferred by either food service establishments or nonprofit feeding programs. There was initial concern about providing these somewhat expensive pans to food service establishments, but this grant showed providing pans is an easy to overcome one-time barrier.
- Concerns about coordinating pickups were expressed by food service organizations. Most nonprofit organizations that provide pickups are extremely good about scheduling volunteers, but occasionally there are issues. One common issue is that volunteers on a pick up can't find the proper person at the food service establishment to confirm the donation, and then the food service establishment thinks the nonprofit was a "no-show". Keeping frequent communication with both nonprofits and food service establishments is essential in avoiding frustrations that may lead to canceling the program.
- "Unwanted, but edible" food is a difficult concept to explain, and language barriers make it even more difficult. After receiving 500 pounds of spoiled refrozen seafood, the grant contract was amended to include translation for printed materials and translators. City staff was originally going to offer stipends to native-Korean and Spanish language speaker who live in the local community, but these speakers were then unable to meet their commitments. Some Korean-owned food service establishments confided that as sole proprietors, their staffing is very lean, plus they do not generate recoverable quantities of edible food as compared to larger restaurants.
- While many businesses reported reducing food waste over time once they started separating out donations, the need to gather data to document efforts was difficult to communicate to owners/managers.
- Many businesses think they are already doing a good job in this area, so this topic doesn't work as a universal talking point.

Many nonprofit feeding programs were responsive, but about half were not interested in participating in food rescue for a variety of reasons:

- Programs that received federal funding reported that food must be cooked from scratch and menus must have prior approval, so they were not interested in participating unless guaranteed certain foods. Also, many of the ethnic senior meal programs said their services were more of a social period among participants rather than a focus just about eating, and that they didn't need more food.
- The coordinators for certain feeding programs had set menus that were planned in advance, so they were not flexible enough to participate. However, most program coordinators and volunteers were more flexible and welcomed receiving a variety of foods.
- Feeding program schedules made collection difficult. For example, some feeding programs only run during the school year, while others were only one or two days a week. It is difficult to get a daily food service establishment to commit to food rescue with an inconsistent schedule. City staff worked around this by finding backup organizations that could share collection duties.
- After purchasing large tote bins and folding hand carts for nonprofit organization pickups, it became clear that folding utility wagons were much easier to setup and maneuver for smaller donations. While large tote bins are good for stacking donations, the folding hand trucks are not adequate for this purpose.

One of the core challenges arising from this grant is coordination among multiple feeding programs while not being an integral part of the organization. Each program has their own schedule, food restrictions/targets, and varying levels of staff support. The County should consider focusing future funding in this manner: Providing staff and overhead funding for a roving food bank staff member who can coordinate weekend and evening pickup (a dedicated cell phone is a must) plus have immediate (and, if necessary, shared) access to refrigerated storage (usually these facilities are locked or closed during the off hours when most food donations become available). Though 'roving' this staff person would be housed at one foodbank (in our local example: the Multi-Service Center) and would then coordinate among the food generators and the non-profits - this would be the most efficient approach toward achieving the largest diversion of recoverable food waste from a diverse set of restaurants.

Food rescue requires relationships to be built with food service establishments as well as nonprofit organizations. It is time intensive to build these relationships since each are unique. Just like setting up a recycling program for the first time, there is a lot of upfront effort and maintenance, but it basically runs itself once set up and staffing remains consistent. Funding a dedicated position at the food bank to focus on building and maintaining these relationships seems like the ideal investment for reducing commercial food waste through food rescue.

When proposing this grant, it seemed natural to implement composting as part of food rescue. However, the cost for composting service plus the additional work required to separate out compostables were clear barriers. City staff was also concerned that establishments would simply turn to composting in lieu of food rescue for efficiency as many people don't grasp the waste hierarchy. As a result, the focus centered on food rescue rather than pushing for composting service, in accordance with the limited time and resources available.

When proposing this grant, City staff planned to compare container sizes and tonnages before and after the program. However, our contract hauler, Waste Management, changed their reporting and weight allocations in the middle of this project which made the data non-comparable. We tried to compare tonnage changes in the garbage container at the mall, but there is widespread confusion over the purpose and use of their side-by-side compactors and the data we gathered wasn't reliable.

298 food service establishments were identified in Federal Way. Of these locations, 18 have composting services and 29 previously participated in food rescue. During this grant, City staff mailed information to 270 locations, corresponded via emails to 93 locations, made cold calls to 29 locations, and made site visits to 51 locations. Many of these food service establishments receiving multiple contacts. The final results were that food rescue is now set up at 21 new food service establishments during the grant period – which is over double the initial goal. However, these locations tended to contribute relatively small donations, so estimates show that the tonnage recovery goal was not met.

Please provide any other information that the grant manager should know about this project.

The timing of this grant conflicted with city staff workload. There was a delay in implementing the grant – and this delay meant staff were unable to work on this project as planned (during the period of time planned for major initial efforts). The funding for staff reimbursement was extremely helpful since those budget savings offset the cost of a consultant to provide multifamily recycling outreach which allowed City staff to focus on this grant. The City was also ramping up a procurement process for a new solid waste contract, which also diverted staff time. However, the City plans to continue to work on commercial food rescue with support from the King County WRR grant as it is such an important and impactful project.

Please provide feedback on your experience with this Commercial Food Waste grant program. Do you have suggestions for how to improve the program?

The reporting structure was difficult to capture the details relevant to the program as the structure was more focused on metrics and deliverables, rather than main findings which are experience based. It was also difficult to write combined quarterly reports and a cumulative report at the same time.