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## AT-A-GLANCE

- Building strong relationships with a partner organization is key to the success of both businesses' food donation programs.
- Food donation programs can have tax incentives and reduce disposal costs.
- Businesses that donate food are legally protected from liability under the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act.

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## Food Donation Programs Case Study

*Food donation is a critical part of reducing waste. Businesses across many sectors donate surplus food to reduce waste, feed hungry people, and increase the bottom line. This case study provides an overview of food donation programs at The Westin Boston Waterfront Hotel and Whole Foods Market in Medford, outlining the steps each business took to build a program that successfully diverts nutritious and delicious food from disposal and provides it to people in need.*

### Whole Foods Market, Medford

#### Program Overview

Whole Foods Market in Medford is a supermarket with grocery, produce, deli, prepared foods, bakery, and seafood departments. Whole Foods reduces waste by operating robust recycling, food donation, and composting programs.

Whole Foods Market in Medford has been donating food since opening in May of 2008. In 2014, Whole Foods expanded its donation program with assistance from [Food Donation Connection](#) (FDC), a company that connects food service businesses interested in donating surplus food to social service agencies that distribute the food to people in need. FDC introduced Whole Foods to [Food Link](#), a volunteer-powered food rescue non-profit that connects surplus food, and items nearing the expiration date, to food insecure individuals.

Each day, Whole Foods staff take inventory of surplus and unsaleable food items. Staff members place smaller items, such as bagels and pastries, into 13-gallon food-safe donation bags and place larger items into unused banana boxes or 30-gallon donation bins. Employees store perishable donations in a walk-in refrigerator, and place non-perishable foods on shelves near the store's loading dock. At Whole Foods, the Food Link volunteers divide and sort food items according to which hunger relief agencies will receive food that day. Food Link volunteers use four-wheeled



dollies to transfer donations from the store to the Food Link van or to their personal vehicles for transportation. Volunteers use coolers to maintain the temperature of refrigerated and frozen foods during transportation to the receiving agency. On a typical day, the food that Whole Foods donates is redistributed to five or more receiving agencies such as food banks, senior centers, after school programs, homeless shelters, and low income housing facilities.

### Program Challenges

In the early stages of the donation program, Whole Foods store managers encountered a few challenges that prevented the donation of wholesome edible food. For example, some receiving agencies could only accept select foods on certain days, meaning there were days when no agencies were available to pick up food from the store. Similarly, Whole Foods' existing partner agencies could not accept certain categories of food, such as prepared items leftover from the hot bar. Whole Foods staff also found it challenging to determine whether food rescue volunteers were thoroughly trained on food safety, and whether potential food rescue partners were classified as 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations that can legally accept food donations.



When Whole Foods started working with FDC in 2014, store managers found the extra support they needed to overcome many of these challenges which enabled them to expand the donation program. FDC helps Whole Foods build and maintain a network of different agencies that collectively pick up food from the store seven days a week, and are able

to accept all of the items that Whole Foods wants to donate. FDC also vets food recovery agencies to ensure they meet non-profit standards with the Internal Revenue Service. To further ensure food safety, FDC tracks recalled items and can trace these foods from the store to notify the recipient agency. FDC also keeps recipe ingredient lists on file for allergen purposes.

### Program Training

Whole Foods trained staff members in one day using the training materials FDC provided. Whole Foods store managers and the Whole Foods Green Mission Coordinator, Karen Franczyk, continue to deliver introductory training to new staff and refresher trainings to current employees. Store managers also periodically review food safety protocols with employees to ensure they are following best management practices.

Connecting with employees for regular conversation is important. For example, store managers found that a few employees mistakenly placed all surplus food in the donation area, instead of culling out unusable food for composting. Correcting this problem helped Food Link volunteers save time sorting through donations.

Whole Foods staff regularly communicate with Food Link founders and volunteers to discuss ways to improve the program. The two organizations partnered to establish a "First Friday" donation program, where Food Link staff and volunteers engage with Whole Foods shoppers to build awareness of their work in the community. During this time, customers can also purchase and donate receiving agency "wish list" items from Whole Foods.

See the [RecyclingWorks food donation guidance](#) to learn more about starting a food donation program at your organization.

## Westin Boston Waterfront Hotel

### Program Overview

The Westin Boston Waterfront Hotel operates two restaurants, two bars, an associate cafeteria, event space, and 793 guest rooms. The Westin has been successfully recycling since opening in 2006 and more recently, the hotel expanded its diversion program to include donating surplus prepared food.

The Westin began separating pre-consumer food waste from disposal for composting in 2013, with the intention of also adding a food donation program. At the RecyclingWorks Spring 2016 WasteWise Forum, the Westin's Engineering Coordinator connected with the Boston Area Coordinator for [Rescuing Leftover Cuisine](#) (RLC), a non-profit food rescue organization. Together, RecyclingWorks and RLC provided the Westin with resources and education necessary to implement a successful food donation program.

Hotel staff initiated the program by first donating unserved prepared or packaged catering food leftover from events. Within two months, they expanded the donation program to include buffet items and un-served plated meals. In the first six months of the Westin's food donation program, the hotel diverted 1,800 pounds of edible food from disposal which provided more than 1,400 healthy and high quality meals to food insecure people in Boston.

RLC rescues and redistributes many different varieties of food from the Westin and offers same-day pickup for prepared items, regardless of the quantity. The Westin's Executive Chef, Anthony DiCillo, takes pride in the high quality food the Westin provides to the community, noting that he would feed any of the items they donate to his own family. RLC volunteers pick up donations from the hotel and deliver the food directly to either the [Boston Food Bank](#) or [Rosie's Place](#), a local organization that provides meals and support services for poor and homeless women.



### Program Challenges

Westin staff were initially wary of donating food due to perceived barriers of food donation laws and liabilities. RecyclingWorks educated staff on the [Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act](#), which protects entities that donate wholesome food in good faith. RecyclingWorks also provided Westin staff with legal fact sheets on [tax incentives](#) and [date labeling](#) for food donation.

### Program Training

Rescuing Leftover Cuisine worked with Chef Tony to help implement the donation program. Chef Tony trained his own culinary staff on proper cooking, flash chilling, and storage practices. Kitchen staff are excited to participate in the program, knowing the food they prepare helps feed people in the community.