



Improving the Food Access System through Recovery and Redistribution of Available Food

Engagement Project November 2018

Funding provided by:

**Food Systems and Community Leadership Program
Loblaw Companies Limited and
Community Foundations of Canada**

Report prepared by:
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Background

The Alberni Valley Transition Town Society (AVTTS) Food Group has been actively engaged in the field of food security and the development of a local Food Hub. The purpose of the Food Hub is to create partnerships and strengthen inter-agency collaboration to support initiatives and action towards addressing climate change and greater food security in the valley. Since 2012, AVTTS has undertaken several projects, including completion of a Community Food Assessment, development of a Food Security Action Plan Framework and conducting public engagement and education sessions. All the projects have repeatedly identified a desire and need to bring together community organizations involved in food redistribution efforts in order to increase the opportunities for collaboration and increase access to 'waste' food.

The Alberni Valley Community Foundation (AVCF), has for several years supported local organizations undertaking initiatives to create greater food security for those in need in the Alberni Valley. As reported in the 2015 Vital Signs document the local rates of child poverty and overall poverty are significantly higher than the provincial and national averages. As the number of groups involved in food distribution continues to expand, there have been indications that there are concerns regarding the ability to maximize available 'waste' food through effective collection and distribution mechanisms. Based on the work of AVTTS, the Foundation saw an opportunity to support and encourage greater collaboration and effectiveness amongst the organizations and groups involved in the shared challenge of food recovery and redistribution.

AVCF successfully applied for funding to the Loblaw's Foundation under the Food Systems and Community Leadership program to support a process for bringing together the organizations and groups involved in food redistribution. The grant was provided to explore opportunities for increased collaboration and the potential for joint partnerships in the area of 'waste' food recovery.

AVCF partnered with the AVTTS Food Group to organize and deliver the project. The Food Group undertook a process to bring together the organizations and individuals involved in food redistribution in the community. The intended outcome of the process was to facilitate collaboration amongst the organizations (government, non for profit, private) involved in food security initiatives in the Alberni Valley. The focus was on initiatives that provide access to food for people living in poverty. The purpose of the collaboration was to explore and determine a model/project for the Alberni Valley that would result in an efficient and effective system for collecting, sorting and distributing available food resources (e.g. food recovery program). An added benefit would be to collaborate for more integrated delivery of programs to ensure that services are maximized and elimination of any duplication of services.

Process

A process was developed to engage the identified stakeholders and explore possibilities for increased collaboration and a potential 'joint' project in food recovery. Due to the complexity and scale of the issues related to food security and poverty, a systems approach was adopted.

The process involved:

1. An initial session to start to build trust and an understanding of the scope of the project. It was important to ensure that all of the 'key' participants in the local food redistribution system were personally invited to attend the session. A copy of the invitation is included in Appendix A.

The session included:

- Food mapping (both at an individual and community level) in order to ensure understanding of the local food distribution system
- World Café focusing specifically on the opportunities through recovery of waste food
- Start, Stop, Continue exercise to identify potential changes that could be made to the food redistribution system as it currently exists.

Information from this session is included in Appendix B.

2. A follow-up day long session was held to explore possibilities for improvements to the food redistribution system and increase food recovery activities.

The session included:

- Storytelling from a number of the organizations in the system to create a better understanding of their services, clients and impact in the community.
- An overview of the collaboration continuum including identifying where stakeholders currently are on the continuum and where they would like to be.
- Problem Identification exercise.
- Identification of potential actions to increase collaboration amongst stakeholders and improvements for food recovery.
- Identification of the five (5) priorities for action.
- Discussion of the priorities and development of the initial steps for action.
- Individual and organization commitments for future action.

Information from this session is included in Appendix C.

Participation

There was active participation by all individuals who attended the sessions. In total 42 different people attended either both or one of the sessions and 26 groups were represented. Session attendance was:

	Organizations Represented	Number in Attendance
Session 1	25	36
Session 2	21	29

There were a number of key organizations that were not represented at the sessions. These include local government representatives and staff (City of Port Alberni, Alberni Clayoquot

Regional District, Tseshaht First Nation, Hupacasath First Nation) and the business community (sources for food recovery).

In addition, while some of the food distribution organizations had representation at the meeting, the key decision makers or board members were not in attendance.

The list of attendees can be found in Appendix D.

Observations from Session 1

Focus

Several participants at this session wanted to focus on the larger issue of poverty reduction, government(in)action, employment, food literacy, local food production, climate change and sustainability and more. These are all important issues related to food security and need to be addressed. However, this project was focusing on a very narrow portion of the food security system – the availability of recoverable food in our community and means of distribution.

As well, there are a number of different approaches to food recovery including those who are focused on food recovery and feeding people and those who are interested in prevention and reduction of food waste. While these are not mutually exclusive approaches, they do result in a different focus of efforts.

Awareness

While there have been a number of projects and meetings over the past few years regarding food security, there was an apparent lack of understanding by some of the participants of a number of the organizations and initiatives that are currently involved in food redistribution. The previous initiatives have focused on the broader issues of food security, while this project was focused on a very specific aspect in the food recovery and redistribution sector. The majority of participants in the previous initiatives are not involved on the front line in food redistribution initiatives and this may have led to assumptions that food is not being recovered or there are issues/problems in the sector.

Through discussion at the session, it was very apparent that several organizations are already involved in food recovery initiatives and are sharing recovered food amongst the different organizations/initiatives. It was made very clear that there is not a shortage of food in our community, there is food abundance.

It also became very clear that there is a need for more information and data about what is currently occurring in the Alberni Valley in regards to food redistribution and recovery.

Observations from Session 2

Awareness

Again, at this session it was very apparent that there is a need for information about the current situation specifically as it relates to the organizations currently recovering food. Without this information it is difficult to ascertain what actions will best serve to improve the current situation.

Communication and Collaboration

As indicated by the Collaboration Continuum exercise, all the organizations and participants desire an increased level of coordination and collaboration.

Continuum Stage	Organization – % currently	Organizations – % desired
Coexist		
Communicate	23.8	
Cooperate	52.4	4.7
Coordinate	23.8	66.7
Collaborate		28.6
Integrate		

Increased coordination and collaboration can only occur when there are good relationships and trust between the organizations.

Collaboration building is complex and requires commitment and involvement from the key stakeholders. Key to moving along the collaboration continuum will be open and frequent communication, building respect, understanding and trust and addressing turf issues and/or personality conflicts.

Key Stakeholders vs Interested Parties

It was apparent that there are different perspectives between the key stakeholders who are actively engaged in food recovery and redistribution and those who are interested in the broader issues of food security, climate change, etc. While, they are both connected and everyone has the best of intentions, there will need to be buy in and support from those who are directly involved in the day to day operations.

Outcomes

While the sessions did not result in consensus on a specific food recovery project, there were a number of successes and actions identified.

Creating Connections

For some of the participants this was the first time all the key stakeholders in the food recovery and redistribution sector had met together. This event also brought together a number of interested parties that can support the work of the sector. This is a very important step in providing opportunities for developing connections and building relationships.

Acknowledging and Building on Local Success

There are a number of food recovery and sharing initiatives that are working well. To build on these successes it will be important to clearly articulate the current local model. This will include identifying linkages with stakeholders and existing infrastructure and capabilities that can be utilized to continue to develop and strengthen the current system.

There were differing perspectives on the need for a centralized location for food recovery and distribution. It was important to many participants that they build on what is working rather than importing a model from elsewhere.

Improved Decision Making (Data)

There was a consensus that there is a need to collect data to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the sector and provide a basis for future decision making.

Increase Collaboration

There was consensus and commitment that the key stakeholders need to continue to meet and create the conditions for increased coordination and collaboration.

Increase Public Engagement

It was identified that there is a need to more fully engage the public in understanding the issues related to food recovery (waste). By engaging the public, there would be more buy in and support from different sectors of the community including business and local government.

Moving Forward – Next Steps

Meeting with Key Stakeholders

There was agreement that the key food redistribution stakeholders would meet early in the new year to focus on increased communication and collaboration. It is envisioned that this group would meet on an on-going basis and address a number of items that were brought forward through the sessions. The goal for the meetings is to build relationships and trust.

The agenda for the first meeting (and follow-up meetings) includes the following:

- Meeting Process/Logistics – develop a model (terms of reference) for the key stakeholder group including chair, location, frequency, etc.
- Data Collection – discuss what is currently collected, the need for further data collection and obtain agreement for a shared data collection project. This would include the purpose and type of data collected, lead agency/sponsor, creation of a data collection committee.
- Current Delivery Model – articulate what is currently being done in the Valley. Develop a communication tool for the community – who, what, when, where.
- Vision and Planning for the Future – develop a shared vision for food recovery and distribution for the Valley and commitment to a shared action plan.
- Session Report – review the report from this project. Focus on the commitments made from participants to determine how they can be followed up on and support the work of this group.

The AVTTS Food Group has offered to convene the first meeting. Theresa Kingston has offered to facilitate the meeting and AVCF has offered meeting space.

Data Collection Committee

Some of the session participants, with knowledge and experience in data collection, have volunteered to sit on a committee to oversee data collection. Once the Key Stakeholder group has agreed to a shared data collection project, this committee can be formed to oversee the project.

Community Engagement Committee

Several participants have indicated that they would be willing to sit on a Community Engagement Committee to support the work of the key stakeholder groups. This committee is interested in determining current community engagement initiatives in the community and researching effective engagement models that could be applied to food recovery initiatives. This committee could be activated at any time.

Closing

What we know for sure:

- Food insecurity and the need for food redistribution programs in the Alberni Valley is great.
- There is an abundance of food in our community that can be and is being recovered.
- There are many dedicated and passionate people working and volunteering to address issues of food insecurity.
- When we collaborate and work together, we do better.

The project brought together many people working in or interested in food recovery and redistribution (or as it was repositioned during the sessions to “food sharing”). The people in the room demonstrated their passion, frustration, commitment and dedication to finding a way to do better.

The project did result in a commitment to take action to increase the opportunities for improved communication and collaboration. This is not a small step – it is a big move towards finding ways to build upon relationships and create a better world for the people they serve.

Genuine community occurs, not because it is a nice thing (which it is), but because there is literally no other choice. When ego is transcended, because it was kicked out of the way by chaos, and life continues, as it seems to, you are left with what you had to begin, the reality that we are all in this together. Nobody is in charge, we all are. And each of us bears full responsibility for our brothers and sisters, to the extent of our ability.

Harrison Owen

October 24 1:00 – 4:00 AND November 14 9:00 – 5:00 at Black Sheep Rugby Clubhouse



Improving the Food Access System through Recovery and Redistribution of Available Food

We will bring together a diverse group of leaders and perspectives to discuss and develop an approach to food collection and distribution in keeping with a call for action voiced at the Food Security Workshop (May 2015) and identified in the Alberni Valley Food Security Action Plan Framework (August 2016). This is the beginning of the action to bring into reality what has been voiced in the past.

Over the course of 2 meetings we will explore what leadership is needed to develop and support an innovative and collaborative approach to expanding the reach of the food access system by focusing on the recovery and redistribution of available food.

There is no pre-formed conclusion as we desire and respect that innovation and collaboration is going to emerge from the wisdom of those who participate. We are seeking to combine all the skill, insight and passion in the room to create a momentum we could not otherwise generate

alone. Therefore, this event is not for spectators, please come ready to fully engage, learn, challenge your assumptions and take responsibility for what you care about.

Perhaps the greatest challenge we face in creating positive change at home is moving beyond a way of being in the world that affirms a sense of scarcity and alienation. ...to seeing abundant possibilities and boundless frontiers of relationships to explore and mobilize.

(from: Mapping Food Matters)

The participants will be leaders in transforming the food collection and distribution system in our community to better serve people and our organizations. Each person attending is expected to champion the emerging plan and commit the time necessary to enable the good work to happen.

We will set the direction and innovate together, recognizing that we will create something new to serve the entire community. We will all leave clear on our level of commitment and knowing what next steps need to be taken to create and sustain a collaborative endeavour.

**Sponsored by the Alberni Valley Community Foundation and AV Transition Towns Food Hub
To reserve your seat at the table RSVP by October 10 to avttsfoodhub@gmail.com**