

Zero Waste Yukon  
**Food Rescue Feasibility Study**  
Proposed Project

March 2021



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**United Way**  
**Yukon**

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# Food Rescue and Food Insecurity in Whitehorse

## *Whitehorse Context*

In 2018, approximately 17% of Yukon households (~6,880 Whitehorse residents) experienced food insecurity<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, Whitehorse lacks a robust system of food rescue to help alleviate hunger with safe and nutritious food.

As an initial step in evaluating food rescue in Whitehorse, Zero Waste Yukon conducted 30 community interviews between July and November 2020. Interviewees represented a wide range of key stakeholders including non-profit NGOs, the public sector, restaurants, and grocery store owners.

The interviews represent an initial step towards an intersectional description of the needs, strengths, challenges, and opportunities for a food rescue system in Whitehorse. A community-specific approach to designing a food rescue system could increase resilience and decreasing levels of hunger and food insecurity in Whitehorse.

The goal of the feasibility study was to present several potential projects that are directly based on the community interviews in Whitehorse. Each proposed project was designed to meet the identified needs and overcome some of the barriers associated with current food insecurity and food rescue efforts in Whitehorse. However, these represents potential avenues of action and do not represent fully realized proposals. As such, we hope this feasibility study can kick-start action by giving an interested group potential avenues for action. Zero Waste Yukon remains engaged with stakeholders in food security and we encourage any interested parties to contact us.

## **PROJECT AIMS**

- Identify community-specific barriers and opportunities in food rescue and food security
- Present current programs and efforts in addressing food insecurity and food rescue
- Propose three plans that could help to decrease food waste and address hunger in a dignified and compassionate way

# Background Information

## Root Causes

It is important to note that rescuable food waste and food insecurity are very different issues however, they are inextricably linked in the equitable distribution of food.

A study found on unnecessary food disposal in Canada identified three key root causes. (1) The waste disposal system is much more developed than systems for distributing rescued food. (2) Generating waste is culturally accepted. (3) There are very few municipalities that effectively measure the amount of edible food being wasted and therefore, a lack of leadership that responds strategically<sup>1</sup>.

Root causes for *food insecurity* are tied closely to the ability to earn a 'living wage'. In 2019, the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition calculated that the living wage for a two-income household with two children is \$19.07/hour<sup>4</sup>. In contrast, the regulated minimum wage in the Yukon was \$12.71/hour in that same year.

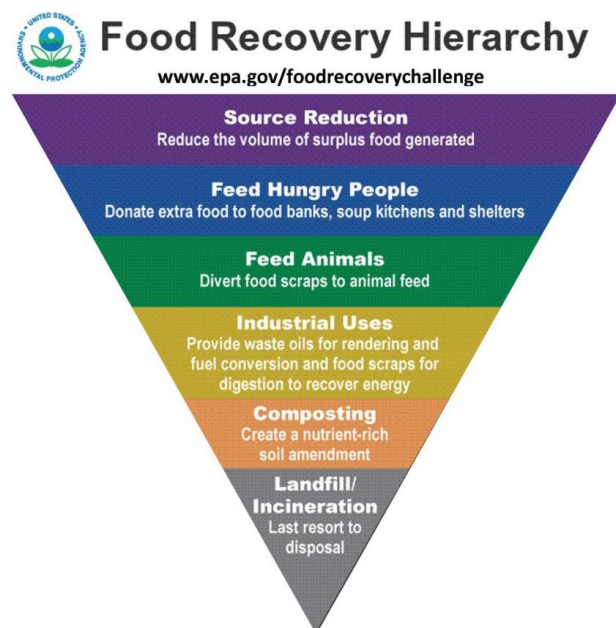
As such, it is unlikely that a food rescue system will address the root causes of food insecurity. However, a program designed by community-based research can help alleviate hunger by providing safe, nutritious, rescued food. To do so, the program should have identified the needs of community members, empower them, and respond to specific barriers and opportunities.

## Rescued Food Hierarchy

Zero Waste is a framework that encourages a view of material and energy as a resource at all times of its lifecycle.

A Zero Waste approach to food rescue is finding the highest resource recovery for food that is at risk of being disposed. The many benefits of approaching the Whitehorse food system this way include:

1. reducing the environmental impact associated with shipping food to Whitehorse;
2. reducing methane emissions and groundwater contamination associated with large amounts of organic waste in a landfill; and
3. helping to respect the nourishing and cultural significance of food when fit for human consumption.



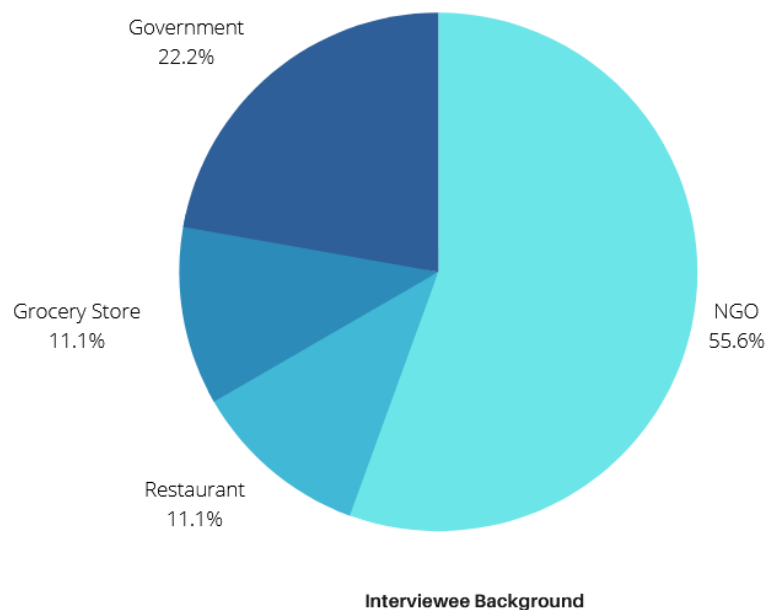
# Methods

## Interviews

Zero Waste Yukon created an initial list of stakeholders and potential interviewees in the summer of 2020. The list of stakeholders grew using the “snowball effect” – which means that during interviews, we asked interviewees if they could list additional stakeholders that may have been missed. In doing so the final list of interviewees is based on the input of the community.

To ensure stakeholder privacy, the results of the interviews are presented in general terms. A detailed breakdown of the methods and results may be made available depending on intended use and organization by contacting Zero Waste Yukon.

Stakeholders varied but the largest portion of interviewees represented individuals from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The interviewed NGOs administer programs that address food security and/or food rescue.



Phase 1 of the interviews consisted of four prepared questions:

1. Can you tell me a bit about the food programming related to food rescue or food insecurity within your organization?
2. Can you describe the top barriers and challenges to running this programming?
3. What metrics do you use to measure the impact of your food programming?
4. Can you describe where you see opportunity in the future for ensuring a more food secure community?

Based on the answers received, the needs of Whitehorse residents and stakeholders were further discussed. Interviews were one hour in length on average.

# Findings

## General Themes

Many of the stakeholders involved worked in one of two types of food programming in Whitehorse: (1) Food programming that aims to decrease hunger related to food insecurity or (2) Programs that rescued food for a variety of alternate uses including composting, animal feed, or human consumption.

Some interviewees were involved in both areas but their comments are separated for clarity.

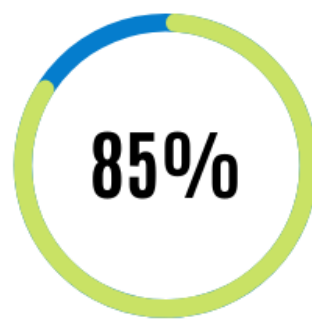
### Addressing Food Insecurity



Of interviewees provided food at no cost

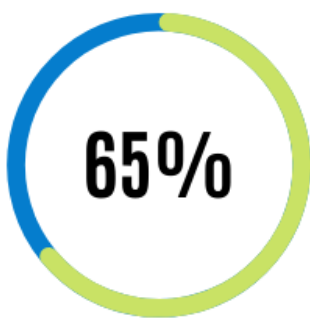


Of food programming involved food preparation rather than raw ingredients

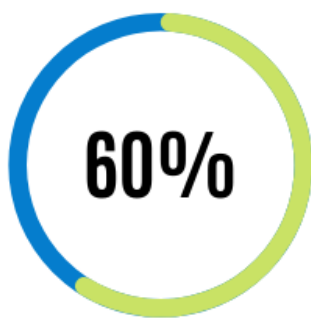


Of interviewees reported that a major challenge to food programming is coordinating volunteers and having enough space

### Food Rescue



Of food rescued had visual degradation (bruised produce, smudged labeling, etc.)



Of food rescued is produce, with approximately 10% from other departments



Of interviewees expressed concerns centered around liability despite the Food Donation Act

# Key Concepts

Based on the interview results, consistent themes emerged regarding strengths, challenges, barriers, and opportunities specific to Whitehorse. A summary of the key themes are presented here:

**Strengths**

- Concerted Efforts around Food Programming**  
Food sharing, emergency food programs, food co-ops, food skills programs, food networks, and community gardens are abundant in Whitehorse.
- Growing Interest**  
Governments have published local food strategies and many groups are involved with food rescue (mostly for animal feed).

**Challenges**

- Access**  
Safe and nutritious food is often mixed with food unfit for human consumption. It appears that the Food Donation Act has not significantly reduced liability concerns around donating food for human consumption.
- Lack of Coordination**  
Coordination between programs relies on well-developed communication lines that are not yet present.

**Barriers**

- Cost of Space**  
Having the facilities and space to store rescued food comes at a relatively high cost in the Whitehorse downtown area.
- Ability to Use Rescued Food**  
A number of barriers may exist for those experiencing food insecurity. Perhaps most notably, access to a kitchen, ability and knowledge to prepare food, ability to travel to places where food can be acquired, and the ability to consume that food (for example, having good dental health)

**Opportunities**

- Increase Coordination**  
Set up a communication network that consistently connects rescued food with present food programming. It might also help decrease the resources dedicated to coordination within organizations involved.
- Community Food Centre**  
Providing a space to store rescued food and gain food preparation skills would help increase access to rescued food and lower barriers present in the ability to use rescued food.
- Consistent Food Distribution**  
Overcoming barriers felt by those facing food insecurity include providing food outside of the downtown core. Having a mobile facility to store and distribute rescued food is an opportunity to address those barriers.

## Proposed Projects

The single-most common concern communicated was the need for better coordination for identifying food to be rescued and getting it to an appropriately equipped end-user. Furthermore, limitations on space and volunteers were highlighted as a challenge to delivering a program that incorporates both food rescue and alleviating hunger associated with food insecurity. For this reason, Zero Waste Yukon proposed projects that could act as a community-informed support for existing efforts—rather than implying existing programs should stretch their limited resources even further.

We propose that additional efforts should be oriented within the following three umbrella projects.



1. The first project is centered on creating and delivering a program that connects food-for-rescue with interested organizations and individuals.
2. The second project proposes using a mobile unit for picking up and delivering rescued food.
3. The third proposal is for a permanent “food hub” that stores and distributes rescued food, as well as providing a community kitchen to build skills around food preparation.

Each umbrella project is intended to guide certain community-specific needs more than others and address stakeholder challenges. Each umbrella project has value as a standalone initiative or in conjunction with each other, depending on available resources and goals.



## Next Steps

The intention of this feasibility study was to propose projects that are informed by community-specific needs. In doing so, Zero Waste Yukon hopes to provide an interested group with an initial starting point for increasing food rescue and/or decreasing hunger associated with food insecurity in Whitehorse. We hope that this information can help a dedicated group secure resources to pursue these efforts.

We recognize the logistical efforts that taking on these projects entails and have endeavored to provide proposals for a variety of funding and resource scenarios. The table below is intended to illustrate this.

	1	2	3
Proposed Pilot Projects and SMART Objectives	Coordination Program	All Season Bicycle Delivery	Healthy, Accessible Food Preparation Skills Resources
<b>S</b> Specific Action	Create a platform solely to coordinate pick-ups and delivery for rescued food	Outfit a small mobile unit that can pick-up and distribute rescued food	Write and distribute resources for low-barrier food preparation and guides to food rescue.
<b>M</b> Measurable Indicators for Success	Include: client satisfaction, proportion of rescued food actually consumed, costs to execute program, survey of barriers faced to using the program, amount of food rescued		
<b>A</b> Targets those Experiencing Food Insecurity?	It's important to recognize that trust needs to be built with clients. Ensuring that new programs are accessible will rely on these types of considerations		
<b>R</b> Resources Needed	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●
<b>T</b> Time-frame	Dependent on funding. Ideally 6 - 12 months to incorporate changes in food loss and food security between summer and winter months		

The 3 proposed umbrella projects represent an initial step for governments and NGOs to address components of food security and food rescue as expressed by the interviewees. Food security and food waste are a worldwide problem, and improvements require the coordinated effort of various organizations. For any organizations seeking to adopt the proposed programs or would like additional information, please contact Zero Waste Yukon.

## References

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