

Madd Love Community Refrigerator Program: Playbook & How-To Manual

What Is a Community Fridge?

Community fridges are grassroots solutions to food insecurity and food waste. The concept is simple: take what you need, leave what you can. Individuals, restaurants, farmers markets, and grocery stores can drop off surplus food, while anyone is welcome to pick it up. These fridges are usually hosted by local businesses, community centers, or generous individuals with a vision for addressing food insecurity.

Community fridges create a space for nourishment, dignity, and care—one meal at a time. To locate existing fridges, start with freedge.org, a global map of community fridges. Also check Google, Instagram (e.g., #communityfridge), or local Facebook groups. Many fridges may not be officially listed. The Yuba-Sutter region launched its first community fridge under the MADD Love Refrigerator Program, located at Habitat for Humanity's ReStore at 202 D Street, Marysville, CA 95901.

Purpose

Community Refrigerator Programs aim to combat food insecurity through mutual aid by providing access to free, fresh, and healthy food. This playbook is designed to guide individuals, organizations, and communities in launching and sustaining their own community fridge initiative.

SECTION 1: LAYING THE FOUNDATION

1.1 Understand the Need

- Conduct a local needs assessment to identify communities with high food insecurity or low access to fresh food.
- Engage community members and grassroots groups to understand challenges and potential partners.

1.2 Define Your Vision & Values

- Embrace principles of dignity, equity, and mutual aid.
- Center the project around community empowerment, not charity.

1.3 Build Your Team

- Recruit a core planning team: volunteers, local organizers, residents, and nonprofit partners.
- Identify roles such as project coordinator, food recovery lead, volunteer manager, communications, and maintenance support.

SECTION 2: PLANNING YOUR FRIDGE

2.1 Find a Host Location

- Choose an accessible, visible, and welcoming place with electricity access.
- Secure long-term approval from the host organization.

2.2 Source a Fridge

- Request donations of a used or new refrigerator.
- Ensure it is energy efficient and in good working condition.

2.3 Set Ground Rules

- Determine allowable food types (e.g., no raw meat or opened containers).
- Post fridge etiquette and community guidelines clearly.
- Avoid locations with excessive surveillance or police presence.

2.4 Communication & Check-Ins

- Use tools like whiteboards, WhatsApp, or Instagram for updates and issue reporting.
- Gather feedback from unhoused individuals and regular users.

2.5 Liability, Insurance & Legal Protection

- Consult the host site regarding liability coverage.
- Consider waivers or umbrella insurance if necessary.
- Understand Good Samaritan food donation laws in your state. More information at <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/blog/good-samaritan-act-provides-liability-protection-food-donations>

SECTION 3: COMMUNITY OUTREACH & PARTNERSHIPS

3.1 Build Partnerships

- Collaborate with farms, food pantries, restaurants, bakeries, grocery stores, businesses and individuals..
- Distribute flyers or info sheets on how to contribute.

3.2 Educate & Mobilize

- Host community meetings and info sessions.
- Create flyers, social media pages, and multilingual outreach materials.

3.3 Fundraising

- Launch crowdfunding campaigns or seek microgrants.
- Engage local sponsors and host fundraising events.

SECTION 4: OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE

4.1 Set a Launch Date

- Organize an installation and launch event with community involvement and media presence.

4.2 Volunteer System

- Recruit volunteers to check the fridge and clean regularly.
- Use digital sign-up tools for scheduling.

4.3 Keep It Clean

- Create a cleaning schedule and provide supplies.
- Use social media to encourage community involvement in cleanliness.

4.4 Food Safety

- Train volunteers in basic food safety.
- Monitor fridge temperature and discard expired items.

4.5 Troubleshooting & Conflict Management

- Set clear communication channels for reporting issues.
- Address concerns transparently and collaboratively.

SECTION 5: SUSTAINABILITY & GROWTH

5.1 Evaluate and Adapt

- Survey users and partners regularly.
- Track donations, usage, and waste data.

5.2 Celebrate and Share Stories

- Highlight impact stories and community champions.
- Use storytelling to maintain engagement.

Good Samaritan Act: Legal Protection for Food Donors

- In many states, donors and volunteers who provide food in good faith are protected from liability under Good Samaritan food donation laws.
- These laws encourage food sharing and limit legal risks when food is donated without gross negligence or intentional harm.
- Refer to the USDA's FAQ on the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-good-samaritan-faqs.pdf>