

CAG How-to Guide:

Running a Food Surplus Café



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Running a Food Surplus Café

1. About Food Surplus Cafés

A Food Surplus Café is an event which uses food that would otherwise be wasted. Instead, it is cooked up to create a wholesome meal and served in a café style setting. Food Surplus cafés are taking place around the country and although they all have similar objectives, each has its own style and frequency. In some places, people have set up daily food surplus cafes, in others they are monthly, or they may be occasional, pop-up events.

Before running this type of event, be clear your objectives. For example, do you want to host a community meal to connect people? Is it to reach communities in food poverty by providing an affordable meal? Or is it to educate people about how to reduce food waste in their own homes?

Chances are that not everyone who comes to the event will be familiar with how to tackle food waste and so it could be a good opportunity to influence some behaviour change.

This guide will take you through everything you need to consider when organising a food surplus event as well as the practical steps to take.

2. Planning for your event

A well-chosen and well set-up venue will help make sure the event runs smoothly. The space to be used should be big enough and adequately equipped to run the café. The team of volunteers needs to be large enough and well managed both before and during the event.

Food

If you don't already have a source for the surplus food, you need to locate it. When you know if it will come from just one source or involve multiple sources, find out how often will it become available. For example, is there enough available for a daily, weekly or monthly food surplus café event?

Volunteers

Organising an event can take a lot of time and resource, so you need to ensure that there are enough volunteers to take care of the planning, organising, publicity as well as helpers during the event. If you could use a few extra hands then aim to recruit a few new volunteers through your website, social media, or word of mouth. If you have plenty of volunteers consider utilising one to run an activity for children, such as a craft table or a play corner.

TOP TIPS

WHAT ARE THE KEY VOLUNTEER ROLES?

- Sourcing surplus food
- Venue booking
- Collecting surplus food
- Planning the meal(s)
- Venue set up on the day
- Cooks /Servers
- Clearers / washer-upers
- Meeters/greeters

Having one or two people front of house as meeters/greeters is useful and an area that is easily overlooked. These volunteers can be responsible for making sure the Café space looks inviting (e.g. tablecloths, flowers) as well as writing menu boards, welcoming people, answering questions and counting the number of attendees.

An extension of this role is to have someone available to keep an eye out for those who look a bit unsure of the concept, or who are alone and who might need some support in getting their food and finding someone to sit with.

See the CAG 'Key Role' document for more details of the volunteer's roles likely to be needed when running an event.



Transport

It can often be easier to arrange for the food to be delivered by your supplier. However, if that is not possible arrange who will pick up the surplus food up. Make sure they know the full address(es) and the time it needs to be collected by. If you are reimbursing their fuel cost, ask the driver to keep a note of the mileage.

Food storage

If food is being delivered before the event, then you will need somewhere to store it overnight that meets food hygiene safety standards. Check when booking the venue if it can be stored in their kitchen/fridge overnight and, if so, how you would get access to the venue to do so. If not, check which of the volunteers have storage/fridge capacity that could be utilised.

Venue

This will largely depend on what you have available in your area. Potential venues include community centres, village halls and church halls.

When looking for a suitable space, things to consider are:

- How many people can the venue hold?
- Is there a charge for renting the space?
- Is the venue accessible?
- How will the venue hire be paid?
- When can you get access to the venue on the day?
- How early do you need to get in to set up?
- Is setting up/clearing up time included in the rental?
- Are there adequate tables, chairs, plates and cutlery?
- What cooking equipment (e.g. urn, large pans, utensils) does it have?
- Is the kitchen big enough for several volunteers to work?

Cooking

Making sure that you have cooking team in place to make the meals is, of course, a crucial part of the day. Do you have people experienced in cooking large amounts of food ready to volunteer? Are there people who are comfortable creating menus from what may be quite random ingredients?

Serving food

Decide whether you want to serve food at a designated time or make it available over a couple of hours to fit the maximum number of people in. Estimate how many people you can expect to serve based on the venue size and location, e.g. is it on a busy street or a bit more out of the way? Although the first one you run will be trial and error! Things to consider are:

- For how long will food be served?
- Are you also serving drinks? Desserts?
- Will you serve from a hatch or counter or will people help themselves? This can make a difference to how many volunteers you'll need.

Food hygiene

Not everyone who volunteers in the kitchen needs a food hygiene certificate but those who are **coordinating** the kitchen do. It is then the coordinator's responsibility to inform the volunteer team about basic food hygiene rules and behaviour. You can read more about food hygiene here www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/food-hygiene-for-your-business

As a group, you may be able to get a discount off food hygiene training courses.

Payments and Donations

Running a Food Surplus Café event with donated food and organised by volunteers, means you shouldn't have many overheads to cover. Exceptions would be if you need to pay for the venue and perhaps any transport/travel costs. However, you need to decide if you are charging people for the meal. If so, consider whether they going be asked to pay what they can afford for the food, or whether you'll suggest a donation amount. The mechanism for people paying could be by putting donations into jars at the table or when they pick up their meal, or as they leave the hall.



TOP TIPS

WHAT TO COOK

Meat, vegetarian or vegan?

Is surplus meat and/or dairy produce available to you as well as vegetables? Serving a vegetarian menu does reduce the risk of cross-contamination and is lower risk than meat in terms of food hygiene, storage and prep.

If you do decide to serve meat or dairy at the event, then you'll need to carefully consider how you will store these items. This website will help you plan food hygiene in the kitchen

www.food.gov.uk/food-safety

3. Promotion and publicity

All the detailed and careful set up will have gone to waste if you don't get people through the doors to enjoy the food that has been prepared. Strong social media engagement is essential these days so it's really helpful if some of the volunteers have skills in this area.

Consider which of the following publicity and advertising methods are most appropriate to your event:

- Check the CAG guide and handy checklist on how to promote your event on the CAG How to Guides found on the website.
- Make use of free software like Canva to easily create eye-catching publicity images for all social media.
- Make a poster – CAG have poster templates that they can share with you.
- Create a Facebook page, and a Facebook event for each Food Surplus Café event. CAG will also share your events on their website and Facebook page.
- Make some short video clips on a smart phone to recruit volunteers and post it on as many social channels as you can.
- Promote your events by sharing some of the success stories from your previous Food Surplus Cafés (or other local ones if it is your first event).
- Send a press release to local media.
- Make a banner to hang outside the venue in the week before the event to attract passers-by. Make sure it is reusable, so use wording like 'Food Surplus Café here this Saturday' rather than using specific dates.

4. Running the event

As well as taking delivery of the food, the planning and cooking of the meals, thought must be given to monitoring numbers of attendees and weighing the surplus food when it arrives, through to recording potential allergens, and following correct food hygiene procedures. Once that is all in place, the event will be a fun, productive and rewarding one.

Volunteers

Check the tasks/shifts are all allocated to your volunteers. Email all of them to ensure they know where they need to be and at what time. Provide a number they can contact the main organiser on if they find they are having issues in getting to their shift.

It will help the day run smoothly if you have a plan of how the kitchen will run and everyone knows in advance what they will be preparing /cooking. The following can be a useful

TOP TIPS

GETTING THE PRESS INTERESTED

Local press coverage

Once your first event is out of the way (and any potential teething problems are ironed out) invite the press along to the next one.

The press like interesting stories about what's happening in the community. Food waste is an issue often in the news so will grab people's attention.

If you are a CAG group and need help writing a press release, get in touch with CAG

guideline, but numbers required will depend on how much food or how many courses you are cooking:

- **1 or 2 Coordinators** whose role is to organise cooking teams to make sure all tasks are done, keeping an eye on the clock, offering advice and support, and keeping momentum going.
- **2 or 3 cooking teams** covering the different items on the menu.



Counting

Put a system in place for counting the number of people you serve. This is important in understanding how far the food went and how much money people donated on average. Make sure you are also gathering and recording the data for your activity, ready to input into CAG **Resource CIT** to demonstrate the impact you are having.

Weighing

When the food arrives it is important to weigh it! This is valuable for understanding how much food you've saved from waste – an inspiring and motivating story for volunteers and customers – and for the press and social media. It is also valuable information if you are applying for funding for your group.

Allergens

It's important that all cooks keep a record of what goes in each dish. This is needed for the menu board so you can list any potential allergens. All your volunteers need to be ready to point people to this information if asked for. You can read more about allergen information here www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses

Menu planning

Once the food has been weighed then it's time to come up with a menu. This can be done as a skill sharing workshop between volunteers and will help to teach new volunteers how to plan a meal from surplus food and how to cook for large numbers of people. Lots of creativity can be used here – for example, in a situation where you realise you've massively underestimated how many potatoes there were! Thinking on your feet as a team will help you come up with an idea of what to do with them.

At the menu planning session, create a rough timetable for the day so the kitchen coordinators can keep to a schedule.

TOP TIPS

TAKING A BREAK!

Running a Food Surplus Café can be a full-on so it's important that all volunteers take breaks and do not get burnt out. Ask someone to make all the volunteers a mid-morning cuppa!

For example, a simple timetable might look like this, but every event will be unique depending on number of volunteers, types of food available, how long the venue is booked for, and so on:

Example: Kitchen timetable

8.30	Get the kitchen set up – welcome volunteers – run through
9.00	Team 1 - Chop veg for chilli
9.15	Team 2 - Chop veg for curry
10.00	Team 1 - Get the Chilli on
10.30	Team 2 - Get the curry on
10.45	Make the volunteers a cuppa!
11.00	Team 1 - Make the first pudding
11.30	Team 2 – Make the second pudding
12.00	Get the rice on
12.30	Start serving the main course
1.15	Start serving the puddings
2.00	Start clearing and washing up
3.00	Pack away

Risk assessments

On the day of the event, be sure to revisit your pre-completed risk assessment (see section 6), updating as appropriate. Make sure all volunteers have read a copy. It is a good idea to get volunteers to sign to say they have read and understood it. If you need help with the template or filling one in, get in touch with CAG.

Promoting the event on the day

On the final day before the event, post on social media and remind your supporters of what you're doing and when. During the event, be sure to post on social media again about how it's going and how people can find you and - at this stage – about the menu itself, your opening hours and how people can find you. Take plenty of pictures for future use and if possible, shoot some short videos (with permissions as appropriate).

Another useful way of drumming up interest is to have a few volunteers outside to talk to people and encourage them in.

Disposing of peelings and other food scraps

Before the event, check if the venue has food waste recycling bin. If not, why not ask the volunteers to bring their kitchen caddies from home so any veg peelings and other food scraps can be taken home for food waste recycling.

CASE STUDY

ReROOTed (Tiverton) Food Surplus Cafés

The day before each event the Sourcing Team collect unwanted, but perfectly edible, food from the Food Bank then hand it over to the Cooking Team who work out how to use it all up.

They create a menu the night before and a schedule for the kitchen. During the café, the Front of House Team create an accessible and welcoming space, with information on other local groups and services. The Volunteer Team ensures that all those who have come to help out are fully supported throughout the day.

Visitors are invited to make a donation for their meal, giving those who can't pay a judgement-free experience and those who can, an opportunity to consider what they think the food is worth. All money goes into event expenses (such as hire of the venue) and towards providing free accredited training for volunteers.



5.

Health and safety

This section will tell you what you need to know about - and the things you must do - to keep volunteers and members of the public safe.

Insurance

Public and product liability insurance is currently provided for free by CAG to those community groups in CAG membership, if signing up before March 2024. After that, CAG groups can apply for a small grant to help cover the costs of insurance. If your CAG group wishes to use the CAG insurance or find out about grants, you must inform the CAG project staff. You must also submit a copy of your up-to-date risk assessment to the CAG team for approval at least a week before the event. If you decide not to use the CAG insurance, your own group will be responsible for seeking and maintaining alternative insurance to cover your activities.

Risk assessments

It is essential to have an up-to-date risk assessment for your event, prepared in advance. For a risk assessment template, contact the CAG team.

Health & Safety Guidelines

As well as the risk assessment, you may want to have a set of clear guidelines for volunteers to be aware of how to keep themselves and others safe. Ideally you should print out the guidelines and have volunteers sign them to show they've read and understood them. An example set of guidelines can be seen in Appendix 1.

Event management policy

When hosting a public event, it is possible you may run into some issues that you need to address. For example, what to do if someone comes to the event intoxicated or causing trouble? It is important to have a policy in place and make sure coordinators know what to do if something like this occurs, to keep your volunteers and members of the public safe.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

Measuring your impact is a really important part of making sure your Surplus Food Café is effective at reducing waste. As well as counting attendees and weighing the food (see section 4) there are other ways you can evaluate the success of each Café you run.

Reflect and evaluate

Take 20 minutes at the end of the event to reflect with the volunteers about what went well and why, and what could be improved for next time. If time allows, flick through the comments on the feedback forms and share those too. Note these ideas down and build them into your next event.

Share feedback

Share any anecdotal feedback with each other so it doesn't get lost. For example, someone in the kitchen will appreciate hearing good things about the food they prepared and might not otherwise get to hear those comments.

Share success stories

Use photos and video to capture a flavour of the event. Ask peoples permission, particularly if you are doing close-up photos rather than whole room shots. These photos can help you to publicise future food Surplus Café events: Share them, along with your success stories, online and in local papers.

TOP TIPS

FEEDBACK FORMS

Put out feedback forms so you can collect data on what attendees thought and how you can improve in the future.

Appendix 1: Example - Health and safety briefing for volunteers

Guidance for volunteers - minimising risks

The Food Surplus Cafe is insured by its membership of the Community Action Groups (CAG) network. If it is necessary to make an insurance claim it would need to be demonstrated that all foreseeable measures to reduce any risks at the event had been taken.

A risk assessment was written before this event and it will be updated and amended if necessary, for future events. Every volunteer should read and sign a copy to show that they have read and understood the Risk Assessment. . (There is no need for all volunteers to have a full paper copy of this, but it is available on request.)

The key points are summarised below

- First aid kit will be carried to attend to any injuries. Medical advice will be sought if necessary.
- Check for obstructions of open floor space and walkways and clear any trip hazards.
- Take care to minimise the distance between sockets and electrical equipment.
- Ensure that any cables and are properly enclosed and secured (e.g. taped to the floor).
- Spillages or wet floors should be blocked off and cleaned up immediately.
- Try and reduce the need for manual handling of large/heavy/awkward items. If necessary, use a trolley, ask someone stronger or move as a team. Some guidance on safe manual handling can be found here: www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/manual.htm
- Avoid sandals/open-toed shoes if moving equipment.
- Children are very welcome at the event - they need to be accompanied by an adult.
- Volunteers should ensure that they or other members of the public are never left alone with an unaccompanied child or vulnerable adult.
- People tasked with food preparation must be aware of basic food safety and food hygiene principles (such as washing their hands, checking products for freshness, washing products, tying back hair, etc.).
- Food being served and ingredients being handled should be clearly marked so everyone is aware of potential allergens.
- Care must be taken when making or serving hot drinks and hot food.

I have read and understood these guidelines:

Name _____ Date _____

Signed _____