



2023 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study University of Pittsburgh

Contact info:

Neha C. Devineni
Business Manager of Food Recovery Heroes
Student Office of Sustainability
University of Pittsburgh
ncd16@pitt.edu
203-293-3671

Focus of Case study:

This case study focuses on the diversion of food waste from University of Pittsburgh dining locations and off-campus restaurants to local hunger-fighting organizations.

Detailed description of campaign or effort:

In the city of Pittsburgh, 21% of residents are food insecure. Food Recovery Heroes is a club that started in 2014 with the mission of bringing unused food from the University of Pittsburgh to people in need and raising awareness about food waste. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic limited the club's ability to recover and donate food. In fall of 2022, the club re-established their connections with partners and gradually set up regular recoveries.

Food Recovery Heroes had recoveries on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays at 4PM. In fall of 2022, volunteers used to only wrap pastries sourced from Pitt on-campus coffee shops. One of our main achievements of spring 2023 was starting to recover food from Panera Bread in addition to recovering food from Pitt's kitchens.

Furthermore, we developed an initiative in partnership with Pitt Eats to package leftover food in the Eatery, the main dining hall of the University of Pittsburgh, and send it to the Pitt Pantry, an on-campus food pantry. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, we packaged meals and wrapped leftover pastries because those are the two days the Pitt Pantry is open. On Thursdays, we wrapped pastries, and the food was picked up by Wilksburg Community Ministry. Lastly, the pastries we wrapped on Fridays were driven to Family House in Shadyside. In the spring semester, we also began working with Pitt Athletics and started recovering food from the Peterson Events Center after the basketball games, which was sent to Jubilee Kitchen.

In terms of marketing, we regularly posted on Instagram about food recoveries and also collaborated with Pitt Eats marketing. Additionally, we tabled at the Spring Resource fair hosted by Pitt Eats and tabled at the Food Fair planned by ScholarCHEF. An incentive we used to increase engagement is that if a volunteer attends 3 food

recoveries, they receive a free Food Recovery Heroes hat. We also allowed volunteers to take some pastries that were in unsuitable condition for donation, such as broken cookies.

Planning steps & timeline to implement:

- November 2022: Emailed Panera Bread about the possibility of recovering food. Was able to contact the manager. Set up a food pick-up system for the spring semester.
- January 2023: Confirmed recovery location, times of recovery, and supplies with Pitt Eats. Collaborated with Pitt Pantry to plan food drop-off time. Reached out to Wilksburg Community Ministry and Family House to set food drop-off time. Reached out to student drivers that had previously filled out a form with their availability.
- February 2023: Met with Lynne, Food Safety Director at Pitt and she helped obtain labels, including allergy information and expiry dates, for packaged meals. VP of Volunteers cross checked that every volunteer signed up had completed the food safety quiz. I advocated for hat grant from Student Government Board.
- March 2023: Worked with Pitt Pantry to determine that most of the attendees of the food pantry are planted-based, so decision was made to package more vegetarian meals. Decided with Pitt Eats to get more vegetarian protein options. Met with Pitt Pantry to talk about the fact that on Wednesdays, since we dropped off the food at 4:30 and the pantry closed at 6, a lot of food was being thrown away. Decided to give the pantry fewer pastries on Wednesdays. VP of Community Engagement set up joint food recoveries with other on-campus clubs to raise awareness about food waste.

Resources and stakeholders involved:

Pitt Eats provided all of the necessary equipment for the recoveries including a scale, gloves, hairnets, and plastic wrap. We would also like to thank Steve Schurr, Director of Operations of Pitt Eats, and Jared, the head chef in the Eatery for giving us a place to wrap the food. We also appreciate Lynne for aiding with food safety training and labeling. The Student Government Board provided us with the funding to purchase hats to ensure food safety. The Green Fund also purchased a cart in order for us to transport food. The Student Office of Sustainability, Pitt Sustainability, Pitt Eats, Pitt EcoReps, Pitt Pantry, and Pitt News helped with the marketing efforts. We would also like to thank Judy Cameron, our club advisor, and Nick Goodfellow for guiding us throughout the semester. Lastly, we thank all of the food banks and partners that distributed the food to the community. We also couldn't have done any of this without our volunteers.

Describe the Results of this campaign component:

- **General results:**

The Pitt News, the campus paper, did a news story on the club's efforts. Gal Yovel, the president of Food Recovery Heroes, received the Pitt Sustainability award for his work with the club. Generally, the campus as a whole, including staff and students, has become more cognizant of food waste.
- **Specific measurable impact:**

From January 29th to March 25th, the club recovered 1564.58 pounds of food. During this time period, we had 105 people volunteer with us. In addition, from January 29th to March 25th, we had joint food recoveries with 5 different on-campus organizations, including Phi Beta Lambda (PBL), American Medical Student Association

(AMSA), Circle K International, Foundation for International Medical Relief of Children (FIRMC) and the Nordenberg Leadership Scholars.

What would you do differently in the future?

For future food recoveries, we would like to explore sustainable alternatives to plastic wrap. We would also like to collaborate with other groups, such as Street Medicine at Pitt, so we can reach even more people in need. In addition, with Panera, we will pick food up if we can, which is most of the time, but if we can't pick it up because we don't have enough volunteers, they throw it away as they normally do. Perhaps if we had pushed harder at recruiting volunteers, we would always have enough people to pick up food from Panera Bread so that nothing gets wasted.

What advice would you give to another college that wanted to do a similar effort?

If another college wanted to set up a food recovery, we would recommend establishing strong partnerships with both the organization donating the food and the pantry accepting the food. When we were recovering food from the Peterson Events Center, some employees accidentally threw away the food before we were able to recover it. Since we have a solid relationship with Pitt Eats we were able to respond to the problem quickly and ensure that it didn't happen again in the future. Sometimes there is miscommunication between groups, so the ability to respond to any obstacle that may arise is crucial.

Transport was a consistent problem because many students at our university do not have cars. This meant we only had two student drivers that could transport food. Sometimes we had too much food to give to the Pitt Pantry on Wednesday, so we would need to store it until Friday so that a student driver could take it. It would be best if food could be transported the day it is recovered. We would recommend a transportation grant for Uber or using a university owned vehicle (unfortunately those two options weren't feasible for us) rather than relying on personal cars.

Photos and Graphics:

Please see photos below. Photo with mascot was taken from Panther Central Instagram from tabling at Spring Resource Dining Fair. All other photos were taken at a Tuesday Recovery for Pitt News by Ethan Shulman.







