



Fresh Rescue Champions Project

FINAL REPORT

Developed Spring 2024 by researchers from Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) Center for Creative Impact in collaboration with Albertsons Companies' Safeway and ACME Department Managers and Associates



Fresh Rescue
Champions

The authors of this paper are researchers affiliated with Johns Hopkins University (JHU) Bloomberg School of Public Health and Krieger School of Arts and Sciences and the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) Center for Creative Impact. The use of “we” in this report refers to these university researchers. However, this project reflects a collaboration with employees from four Albertsons Companies stores, who informed and contributed to every stage of the research process and strategy development. Their expertise and insight into wasted food, food donations, and other aspects of retail supermarket processes, procedures, and dynamics laid the foundation for everything written here. We, the research team, are grateful for their knowledge, dedication, and passion.



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Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.



Albertsons Companies provided in-kind support by covering the costs of meals and sweatshirts for the research team and Champions. Champions completed project activities during their normal work hours and were paid by the company for their participation in the project.

To learn more about authorship contributions and how to cite this document, please see page 26.

To learn more about the RECIPES Network, please visit wastedfood.american.edu





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. retail sector generated approximately 4.99 million tons of surplus food in 2022, sending 34.5% to the landfill or for incineration, and donating only 19.5% (ReFED, 2023). Retailers recognize that the food they discard could be helping community members in need to live better, healthier lives. They recognize the considerable environmental benefits and cost savings they could achieve by improving donation and reducing waste. Yet, the solutions are not always simple, and regardless of the plans set at corporate headquarters, success often rests on the day-to-day actions of frontline workers.

Through [Albertsons Companies' Recipe for Change initiative](#), the company is working to accelerate food donations and reduce food waste to landfills (Albertsons Companies, n.d.). Within that initiative, the Fresh Rescue food donation program aims to divert high quality food that might otherwise be discarded to donation in local communities. This report describes a novel approach to improving food rescue, leading with the expertise of frontline workers. The Fresh Rescue Champions Project asks: how might unlocking the expertise, creativity, and motivation of supermarket employees transform food donation? How can worker-engaged approaches further benefit retailers and employees? To address these questions, we convened a cohort of 10 frontline employees from four Albertsons Companies' grocery retail stores in the Mid-Atlantic area (henceforth, Fresh Rescue Champions, or Champions) to co-design a set of strategies to improve the food donation program. These four stores were selected to participate in the study specifically because they were either not donating or donating very little on a regular basis. The project is rooted in the idea that when given the opportunity to think closely about needs, frontline workers can utilize their lived experience and expertise to develop strategies that both differ and complement those developed by others.

The Fresh Rescue Champions project was led by researchers at the [Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health](#), [Johns Hopkins Krieger School of Arts and Sciences](#), and [the Maryland Institute College of Art \(MICA\) Center for Creative Impact](#) (formerly the Center for Social Design), in partnership with Albertsons Companies, and with funding from the National Science Foundation as part of the [Multiscale RECIPES for Sustainable Food Systems research network](#). This report provides an overview of the project and the four resulting strategies to improve food donation in grocery retail stores.

Our project was guided by the human-centered design process, combined with approaches and expertise from anthropology and public health. Human-centered design is a collaborative, creative process dedicated to understanding the experiences, behaviors, and needs of people at the heart of a challenge, and designing interventions to better serve them. It involves those individuals at every step as co-creators and experts. In brief, our process involved the following:

Planning: Developing our approach, selecting Champions, and building relationships.

Research: Gathering data about food donation processes and challenges from the perspectives of Champions, other Associates within the four stores, Albertsons Companies leadership, and Donation Partners—the food banks and pantries that pick up food from stores.

Synthesis: Identifying common themes in the data and using them to develop a set of insights—connections or tensions.

Ideation: Guided brainstorming using “How might we...” questions based on research insights to generate ideas for potential food donation interventions.

Prototyping: Selecting ideas and developing models to test desirability, usability, and feasibility.

Implementation: Using feedback to evolve the prototypes into detailed strategies for piloting and implementation in stores.



After reviewing the research findings, the Champions identified multiple reasons for limited or inconsistent donation practices at the four participating stores including a need for more and clearer guidance and communication about what can or should be donated; a need for improved guidance about company priorities regarding donation (e.g., are donated items viewed negatively, since they were not sold?); a need to further promote a culture of donation across the company, including the opportunity to strengthen donation norms through gamification; a need to know more about what happens to donated food after it leaves the stores; and a need for improved communication overall, including ways for associates to feel secure and encouraged to provide input and feedback on the donation program without the fear of recourse.

Based on this brainstorming, **the Champions prioritized and guided development of four strategies to improve food donations at Albertsons Companies' stores:**

1. Conduct new trainings for the Fresh Rescue food donation program: These trainings, provided to all employees at all levels, would ensure alignment of communication, expectations and processes, and help strengthen the company's culture of donation.

2. Utilize updated donation guidelines with posters and detailed handouts: To standardize information about the Fresh Rescue food donation program within departments and across stores, we co-created posters to hang in each department with department-specific donation guidelines, and detailed donation guidelines available for reference.

3. Strengthen connections between Donation Partners, Associates, and stores: This strategy has four components, developed with input from Donation Partners:

- **Immersive training:** Department Managers and other key Associates in charge of food donation would receive a fixed number of paid training hours annually designated for on-site training at the Donation Partner location.
- **In-Store Teach-In:** Donation Partners would regularly give in-store presentations for Associates about their activities and community needs.
- **In-Store Customer-Facing Events:** Donation Partners would regularly set up tables in the front of stores to share with customers and Associates about their activities and community needs, and about the Fresh Rescue food donation program.
- **Donation Partner Onboarding Form:** Form to collect standardized information from all Donation Partners at the time of onboarding.

4. Run a donation incentives contest: To build engagement in and motivation for donating, and solidify donation behaviors, over the course of a year or so, stores would compete for prizes (such as pizza parties) when most departments donate a certain percentage of their shrink every quarter (or 12 weeks).

Additionally, **the Champions highlighted the need for open, clear, timely, and accessible communication and feedback** as essential to the success of all of four strategies and to the Fresh Rescue food donation program generally.

After pilot testing, using the knowledge gained, the strategies may be rolled out across all Albertsons Companies' stores.

We recommend continuing to collect data before, during, and after implementation to evaluate and improve the implementation process, and to document the strategies' impacts on donation and other outcomes. Further, evaluation research may help the company untangle the separate impacts of each strategy, and the employee-engaged processes used to develop them.



In 2022, Albertsons Companies donated 80 million pounds of food (Albertsons Companies, 2023, p. 18), **reflecting considerable commitment and effort by numerous associates and leaders throughout the company. Despite such efforts, food retailers still end up composting or throwing out edible food that could have been donated and eaten by community members** (ReFED, 2023). **The Fresh Rescue Champions project breaks new ground by collaborating directly with the workers involved in day-to-day food donations, mobilizing their expertise and creativity to design strategies to address the top store-level food donation barriers.**

The final strategies were informed by employees' extensive expertise, collected by academic researchers through numerous store visits, interviews with employees at store, division, and national levels, and Champion convenings. In addition to the future benefits for improving food waste, employee-engaged strategy development has another important benefit: the Champions described considerable satisfaction and professional growth as a result of participation.

We hope that the strategies presented in this report will be piloted and eventually rolled out across Albertsons Companies and other retailers. This would enable us to evaluate their impact in regards to improving food donation, reducing food waste, and impacting frontline workers.



Stores use banana and other cardboard boxes as containers for many storage needs, including donations.



INTRODUCTION

The U.S. retail sector generated approximately 4.99 million tons of surplus food in 2022, sending 34.5% to the landfill or for incineration, and donating only 19.5% (ReFED, 2023). Retailers recognize that the food they discard could be helping community members in need to live better, healthier lives. They recognize the considerable environmental benefits and cost savings they could achieve by improving donation and reducing waste. Yet, the solutions are not always simple, and regardless of the plans set at corporate headquarters, success often rests on the day-to-day actions of frontline workers.

Through Albertsons Companies' Recipe for Change program, the company is working to accelerate food donations and reduce food waste to landfills. Within that, the Fresh Rescue food donation program aims to divert high quality food that might otherwise be discarded to donation in the local community.

This report describes a novel approach to improving food rescue: leading with the expertise of frontline workers. The Fresh Rescue Champions Project asks, how might unlocking the expertise, creativity, and motivation of supermarket employees transform food donation? How can worker-engaged approaches further benefit retailers and employees? To address these questions, we convened 10 frontline employees from four Albertsons Companies' grocery retail stores in the Mid-Atlantic area (henceforth, Fresh Rescue Champions, or Champions) to improve the Fresh Rescue food donation program.



The Fresh Rescue Champions Project was sparked in May 2022 during an informal dinner conversation at the ReFED Food Waste Solution Summit between Suzanne Long of Albertsons Companies and Roni Neff of Johns Hopkins University. Long had spoken on the conference mainstage about the company's goals to reduce food waste and the importance of workers in food waste and donation outcomes (Long, et al. 2022). Neff, along with colleagues at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), had National Science Foundation (NSF) funds through the Multiscale RECIPES for Sustainable Food Systems national food waste research network to study worker-engaged food waste solutions. Between May 2022 and April 2023, we worked with Long and other corporate leadership to develop goals and the scope of work for this project. Working with a food retailer of the size and reach of Albertsons Companies—the second largest supermarket retailer in the country—presented an exciting opportunity for large-scale impact.



Albertsons Companies' Recipe for Change Initiative & Fresh Rescue Food Donation Program

Albertsons Companies supports food waste reduction through improved inventory management, planning, ordering, and receiving practices. Under the company's Recipe for Change program, the Fresh Rescue food donation program ensures edible food that might otherwise be discarded is donated (Gattuso, 2005). Initially introduced in 2005, the Fresh Rescue food donation program was designed to collect and distribute perishable foods to America's Second Harvest affiliates (Gattuso, 2005). The company recently began implementing an updated version

of the Fresh Rescue food donation program across its more than 2,200 stores, renewing its dedication to the program, emphasizing partnerships with local food banks, and updating guidelines for eligible food items, food safety protocols, and employee training. Additionally, Albertsons Companies actively engages in initiatives such as the Food Waste Reduction Alliance (FWRA) and Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment (PCFWC) and utilizes ReFED's "Retail Food Waste Action Guide" to support retailers in their sustainable practices.



Central to the JHU and MICA team's collaboration with Albertsons Companies is the idea that Albertsons Companies supermarket employees (henceforth, Associates) would be co-researchers and co-designers throughout the process. Frontline supermarket employees are the true experts: they have a depth of experience and expertise related to unsold food, and they determine what food is donated or discarded on a daily basis. Yet, their voices are not always included in efforts to enact change. This project is rooted in the idea that when given the opportunity to think closely about needs, frontline workers can utilize their lived experience and expertise to develop strategies that are unique and both differ and complement those developed by others. Unlocking the expertise, creativity, and motivation of supermarket Associates presents a significant opportunity toward achieving increased food donation, thereby decreasing food waste.



The Fresh Rescue Champions Project brought together a team of Department Managers from four Albertsons Companies' grocery retail stores, whom we call the "Champions," alongside public health and anthropology researchers from the JHU Bloomberg School of Public Health and Krieger School of Arts and Sciences and design researchers from the MICA

Center for Creative Impact. The Champions work across diverse departments (bakery, deli, meat, produce, and Starbucks) from four stores (two ACME and two Safeway) across the Mid-Atlantic region in Delaware and Maryland. The Champions worked as co-researchers and co-designers alongside the JHU and MICA team over our ten-month process.

Our team worked collaboratively to achieve three interrelated goals:

- **Improve** the existing Fresh Rescue food donation program at Albertsons Companies' grocery retail stores
- **Explore** how an employee-centered model might work within a limited number of Mid-Atlantic grocery retail stores, and potentially more broadly within divisions and stores across the country
- **Challenge** power imbalances that often occur in retail corporations that result from top-down decision making

Fresh Rescue Champions Project: Community Norms

Establishing trust and respect with and among the Champions was critical to open and generative thought, feeling, and idea sharing and thus to the project's success. At the start of the project, the Champions and the JHU and MICA research team collectively articulated "Community Norms:" ground rules and commitments that guided how we wanted to work together, show up for, and support each other. Our nine norms (summarized here) were referenced at the start of each meeting with the Champions:

1. Be **honest and respectful**.
2. Demonstrate commitment through **accountability and active participation**.
3. Give each other **grace**.
4. Create a **safe and judgment-free environment** through **support and community**.
5. Connect and work **as a team**.
6. Embrace **flexibility and fluidity**.
7. **Share** clearly.
8. **Listen** actively, be **responsive**, and show **gratitude**.
9. Have **fun!**



As outcomes of our research, the research team and Champions co-designed and co-tested the desirability, usability, and feasibility of four strategies to improve Albertsons Companies' Fresh Rescue food donation program:

- Conduct **new direct, hands-on trainings** for the Fresh Rescue food donation program
- Utilize **updated donation guidelines** with posters and detailed handouts
- Strengthen **connections between Donation Partners, Associates, and stores**
- Run an **incentive contest to encourage positive behaviors** and associations with the Fresh Rescue food donation program

In this report, we describe the process and findings that led to developing these strategies and provide detailed descriptions of each one. This report represents only a summary of our collective work; we also provided Albertsons Companies leadership with further rich data and findings, along with detailed recommendations for piloting and implementing each strategy in stores. Our shared hope and intention is that these strategies may be piloted and fully implemented, the results documented, and the impact evaluated over the coming months.

Although we undertook this process with Albertsons Companies and with the Champions in specific ACME and Safeway stores, we hope that our process, findings, and strategies can inform and inspire work in other retail supermarkets across the United States and in other countries with similar retail structures. From the start, the company committed to sharing these findings openly, in support of the wider collective effort to improve food donations and reduce wasted food.



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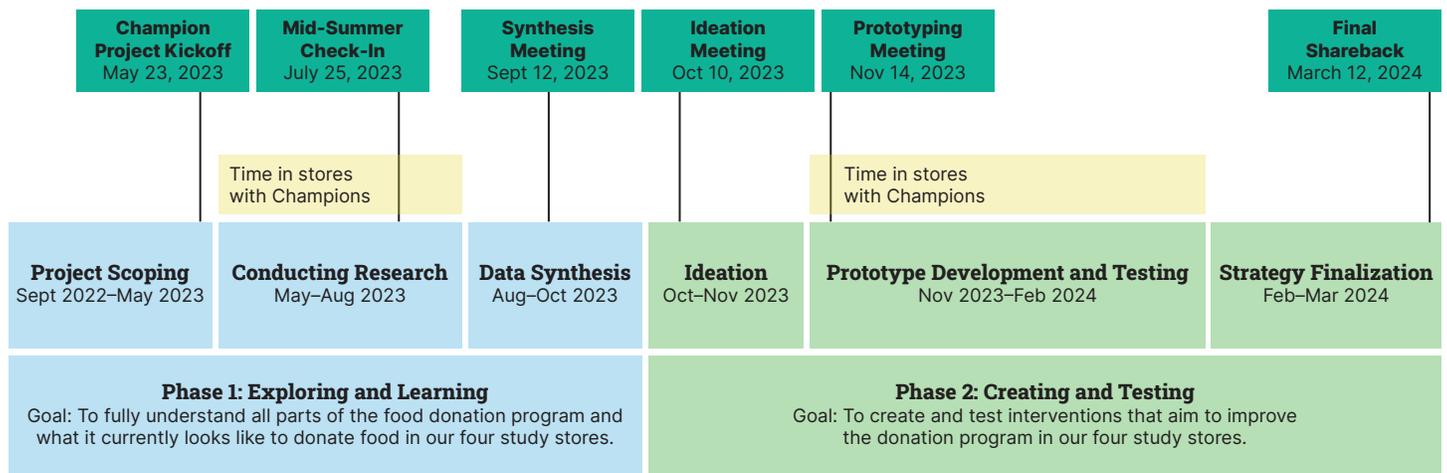
METHODS

The Fresh Rescue Champions Project was designed in two phases:

- **Exploring and Learning:** Fully understand all parts of the Fresh Rescue food donation program.
- **Creating and Testing:** Create and test strategies to improve the donation program in four stores.

Our team, including the Champions, undertook this work from May 2023-March 2024, meeting as a full team at six in-person gatherings at the MICA Center for Creative Impact studio in Baltimore, Maryland. We, the researchers, also made numerous trips to the stores in Delaware (Bear and Newark) and Maryland (Baltimore and Westminster) and to Donation Partner facilities. Donation Partners include the food banks and pantries that pick up food from stores on a regular basis.

Meetings with the Champion cohort



Project process & timeline



Our research was guided by the human-centered design process (see below), combined with qualitative research approaches and expertise from anthropology and public health.



Our process involved the following steps:

- **Planning:** Scoping the project process, meetings with leadership, selecting Champions, setting goal and expectations, and conducting initial store visits;
- **Research:** Conducting over 50 hours of immersive research in the four participating stores and at Donation Partner facilities through a combination of qualitative methods, including over 40 in-depth interviews; many hours of observations and work-alongs with Champions, other Department Managers and store Associates, Store Directors, Operations Specialists, Division and National-level Leadership; and interviews and volunteer experiences with Donation Partners;
- **Synthesis:** Assembling and sorting over 600 pages of transcribed interviews, over 100 pages of written notes, and over 300 photos and videos; identifying common themes around participant statements and observations; and drawing connections or tensions between these data and themes;
- **Ideation:** Articulating open-ended, solution-oriented “How Might We...?” questions based on our research insights to serve as prompts for guided brainstorming exercises in which Champions generated ideas for potential food donation-related interventions;
- **Prototype Development and Testing:** Collectively grouping and prioritizing the many ideas; selecting a few and developing models of each in order to test their desirability, usability, and feasibility in the four stores;
- **Strategy Finalization:** Integrating feedback gathered during prototype testing; evolving prototypes into more detailed strategies for implementing in stores.

Human-Centered Design

Human-centered design (HCD) is a collaborative, creative process dedicated to understanding the experiences, behaviors, and needs of people at the heart of an issue or problem (in this case supermarket employees and Donation Partners) and designing interventions that better serve their needs and/or alleviate challenges they are facing. HCD views problems through the perspective of the people directly impacted by a problem or issue, positions their lived experience as expertise, and involves the affected people—in this case the Champions—in every step of the design process as co-creators and experts. The HCD process is qualitative in nature and may also be referred to as “design research.”

Plan

Research

Synthesize

Ideate

Prototype

Implement



Planning

After our initial planning with leadership, four stores were selected to participate in the study. These stores were chosen specifically because they were either not donating or donating very little on a regular basis. We had our first meeting with the Champions in May 2023, where we focused on building relationships, described the research process, and elicited feedback from the Champions about when, where, and how to conduct interviews and observations with store personnel and what to ask during our research.

Research

Between June 2023 and August 2023, we completed in-store research, which involved conducting interviews and observing the day-to-day work of Champions and other store Associates, including Department Managers and Store Directors. We also interviewed non-store Albertsons Companies employees, such as members of District, Division, and National leadership. Additionally, based on Champion recommendation, we visited each store's Donation Partners and documented the process after items leave the store.

Throughout data collection, we sought to understand Associate roles, responsibilities, and chains of command; the end-to-end process of food coming into, being in, and leaving the store; the current state of the Fresh Rescue food donation program, including program roll-out, goals, processes, evaluation methods, and incentives; Albertsons Companies' grocery retail stores histories, cultures, and feelings about food donation; and Donation Partners and their relationships to their affiliated grocery retail stores and the food they receive from them.

Research by the Numbers

44 Total interviews & conversations

- 30 Interviews with Department Managers and Store Associates
- 04 Interviews with Store Directors
- 05 Interviews with Operations Specialists, Division, and National Leadership
- 05 Conversations and Volunteering Experiences with Donation Partners

50+ Hours of store and Donation Partner visits

600+ Pages of transcribed interviews

100+ Pages of written notes

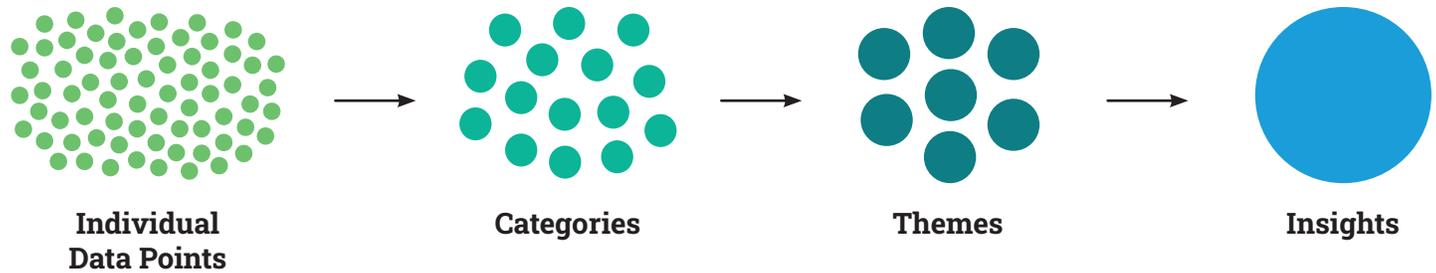
300+ Photos and videos from research



Synthesis

We synthesized the data in order to create what is known in HCD as “insights” (see right). To create the insights, we first sorted the data (i.e., quotes from interviews, photos, and notes) into categories, then sorted those categories into themes, and then connected and summarized multiple themes to create insights. In September 2023, we met with the Champions to co-create insights and to conduct a “gut check,” ensuring our findings aligned with what they knew to be true.

What are insights?
In human-centered design, an insight is a statement that describes a specific phenomenon in the data, tying multiple themes together. Insights are grounded in the data and identify real life tensions, conflicts, or problems. They are used during the ideation process to generate ideas for potential solutions.



Shareback About the Donation Partners

The Champions had many questions about what happens to the donations after they leave the stores. Some distrusted or were skeptical that the food goes to those in need. The report-back from our visits to Donation Partners’ facilities shifted the conversation. Champions frequently referred back to the presentation and photos from the visits as particularly impactful in affirming that their donation efforts matter.



“I also didn’t realize.... some people who need food, some are just down on their luck. They don’t need a handout, they need a hand up.”
- Champion

“I like knowing that we’re not throwing all that food away and it’s helping somebody.”
- Department Manager

“Everyone needs to see this [information]. All associates need to see that what we’re doing actually matters to people.”
- Champion

Summary of Insights

Albertsons Companies entered into this partnership because they wanted to continue to improve the Fresh Rescue food donation program. They recognized that in order to develop the most meaningful solutions, they had to identify and respond to real-world, on-the-ground challenges.

As a result of our research and synthesis, we generated a total of 15 insights, summarized below. All of the information below reflects data specifically collected from the four participating stores and their Donation Partners, though the challenges identified here may also be applicable to other low donation stores across other grocery retail chains. It is important to recognize that stores that already donate regularly may provide different insights. The process and strategies presented in this report provide an example of how Albertsons Companies and other grocery retailers may move forward in addressing such challenges.

- **Some Associates in the participating stores had positive perceptions of the Fresh Rescue food donation program. However, many Albertsons Companies' grocery retail stores have varying histories with food donation** and Associates have seen food donation efforts come and go over the years. As a result, many Associates we spoke with were unsure of leadership's dedication to the program.
- **Many Associates we spoke with felt that they received insufficient communication and guidance about the Fresh Rescue food donation program** when it was rolled out, as well as mixed messages and expectations from leadership about how much they should be donating. Therefore, these Associates felt anxious and confused, and donated inconsistently.
- **Associates we spoke with felt that several factors led to increased waste and decreased donations in the four participating stores.** These included unclear or unstandardized donation processes, inconsistent systems for tracking donations, low incentives for donating, and limited Department Manager input on the types and amounts of items they must order and produce, particularly items that did not sell well within their stores. These factors also left some Associates we spoke with feeling anxious, apathetic, or frustrated and contributed to collective perceptions, mindsets, and practices that reduced donations.
- **Many Associates we spoke with wanted more frequent donation pickups to minimize the amount of food that is composted or thrown away.** However, most Donation Partners have limited capacity themselves, and thus can only pick up donations once or twice a week. Additionally, Associates wanted more transparency about and communication with their stores' Donation Partners.
- **Some Associates in these stores noted that they must improvise and innovate to make space for donations** within store layouts (which vary across stores), leading to inconveniences, inefficiency, and confusion, and thus reduced donations.
- **Some Associates in the participating stores had a difficult time deciding which foods should be donated, particularly those without date labels, such as loose produce.** These items must meet certain quality standards to be sold to customers, and if they do not, they must be pulled from the shelves. While Associates want to sell high quality products to their customers, they also want to donate the safest, freshest, most appealing food possible. Many noted they would like more clarity on the line between when something should be composted or thrown away versus when it should be donated.



Focusing on the insights that we, the research team, and the Champions could have the most impact on, we selected four to transform into “How Might We...?” opportunity questions.

How Might We’s reframe insights and allow us to identify opportunities for potential interventions. Each question doesn’t necessarily align with any single insight, but rather draws from ideas we observed in multiple insights.

- How might we **ensure the communication Associates receive about food donation** goals and priorities **is both clear and consistent?**
- How might we **make the food donation process easier, more fun, and collaborative** so donations are more of a priority alongside other shrink management approaches?
- How might we **create food donation evaluation criteria** that **incorporates food safety and quality standards, Donation Partner priorities,** and **Associates’ professional experience?**
- How might we **create interactive, responsive, and safe spaces for Associates to learn about and provide ongoing feedback** and input on food donations?

Ideation

In October 2023, we met with the Champions to brainstorm interventions to address the How Might We questions (outlined above). During the session, we challenged them to brainstorm as many ideas as possible, prioritizing quantity over quality. For example, in one activity, we had Associates draw as many ideas as possible in a two-minute period. In another, we asked Champions to imagine how they would create solutions if they were addressing the How Might We through the perspective of well-known organizations (e.g., Nike, Ben and Jerry’s), celebrities and characters (e.g., Michael Jordan, Cinderella), and situational prompts (e.g., What if we had unlimited resources? What if we were in the year 3023?)

Through the ideation process, the Champions and research team created over 400 ideas. The Champions then voted to gradually narrow down to five ideas, using criteria they created for prioritization. These five ideas would then be built out in the next phase of work:

- Develop an **enhanced, hands-on training** for the Fresh Rescue food donation program
- Increase the clarity and specificity of **donation guidelines**
- Build **relationships between Associates and Donation Partners**
- Create a **program that incentivizes Associates to donate unsold food**
- Establish a **means for Associates to communicate and provide feedback** about the Fresh Rescue food donation program

On the surface, the first two ideas may seem similar to Fresh Rescue initiatives already underway, but the Champions made clear that more work was needed in these areas. While these strategies may not seem completely novel or ground-breaking, the innovation lies within how each idea was prototyped and tested, taking on forms reflective of the true needs of the Champions and other Associates.



Additional Ideas for Consideration

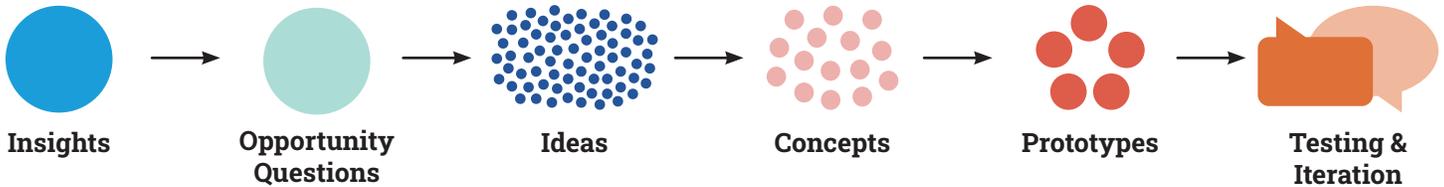
Although we only chose five ideas to move forward due to team capacity, the Champions were also enthusiastic about others that could be valuable for future strategy development. Some examples include:

- More specific communication-related ideas such as establishing regular one-on-one and/or group meetings between Associates and leadership to discuss the donation process or developing a website or suggestion box for Associate feedback and ideas
- Designing standardized bins and containers for donation
- Creating clear, consistent, designated areas for storing donations
- Holding an annual donation gala or showcase
- Designing a book of tips, tricks, and recipes to reduce waste and improve donations
- Planning a campaign with celebrity spokespeople to promote the Fresh Rescue food donation program
- Developing an AI system to assess the quality of potential donated foods

Prototype Development

In November 2023, at our next meeting with the Champions, we focused on further developing our prototypes. The Champions fleshed out the details (who, what, when, and where) and potential features of each of the five ideas, using activities such as storyboarding, card sorting, and sticky note brainstorming.

After the prototyping session, we summarized the Champions' input to begin creating first drafts of each prototype.



What are prototypes?

In Design Research, a prototype is a model or activity created to test the desirability, usability, and/or feasibility of a concept or idea. Prototypes vary based on the details or features being tested and may not look like the final product.

Prototype Testing by the Numbers

- 12** Store visits
3 rounds of testing in each of the 4 study stores
- 24** Conversations with Champions
- 25+** Conversations with Store Directors, Receivers, and other Associates
- 09** Conversations with Donation Partners

Prototype Testing

In January and February 2024, we tested each prototype's feasibility, usability, and desirability by conducting multiple rounds of interviews with Champions, other Associates, Store Directors, Donation Partners, and Albertsons Companies leadership. After each round of testing, we used the feedback to update each prototype and inform the next round of testing.

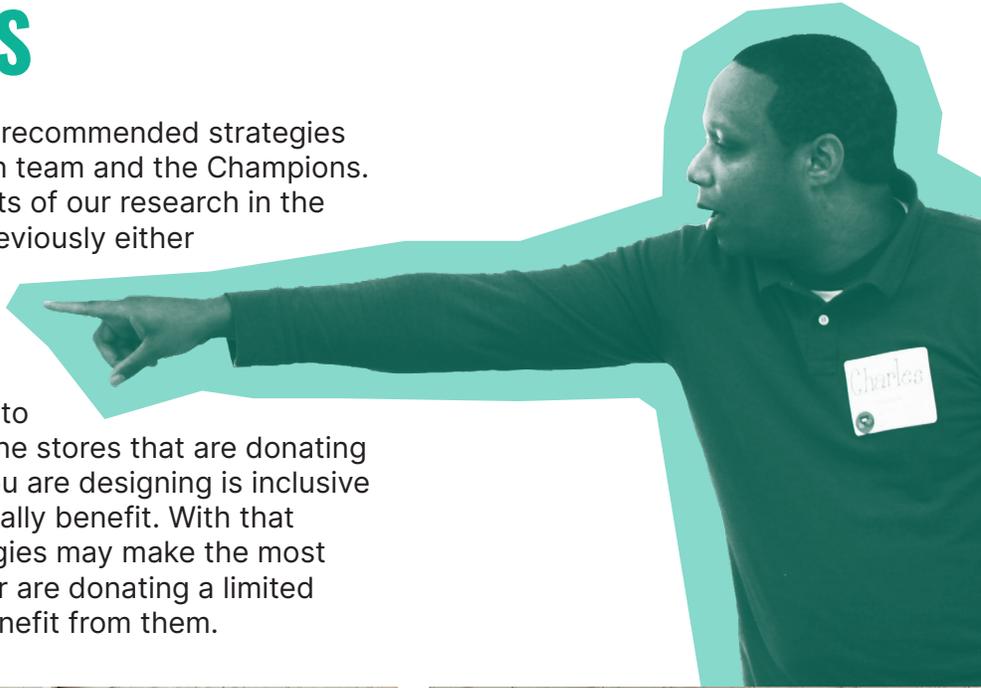
Based on the feedback we received during prototype testing, we developed four concrete strategies and one recommendation to help improve food donation (and reduce food waste) at grocery retail stores.



FINAL STRATEGIES

The following pages outline each of the recommended strategies co-designed and tested by the research team and the Champions. These strategies are based on the results of our research in the four participating stores, which were previously either not donating or donating very little on a regular basis.

In human-centered design and similar methodologies, it is often best practice to design for the extremes—in this case, the stores that are donating on a limited basis. This ensures what you are designing is inclusive and accessible, and that all users generally benefit. With that principle in mind, although these strategies may make the most impact in stores that are not donating or are donating a limited amount, all grocery retail stores may benefit from them.



Strategy 1: Conduct New Trainings for the Fresh Rescue Food Donation Program

The Champions recommended that the company conduct new trainings about the Fresh Rescue food donation program for all employees at all levels to ensure alignment of communication, expectations, and processes. The Champions felt strongly that hands-on trainings would be most effective in building knowledge and engagement among Department Managers and Operations Specialists. For National, Division, and District-level staff, virtual training would be sufficient.

We created preliminary curricula for eight training programs adapted to the needs of District, Division, and corporate leadership, Operation Specialists, Store Directors, Department Managers, Receivers, and Cashiers/Courtesy Clerks. The trainings cover:

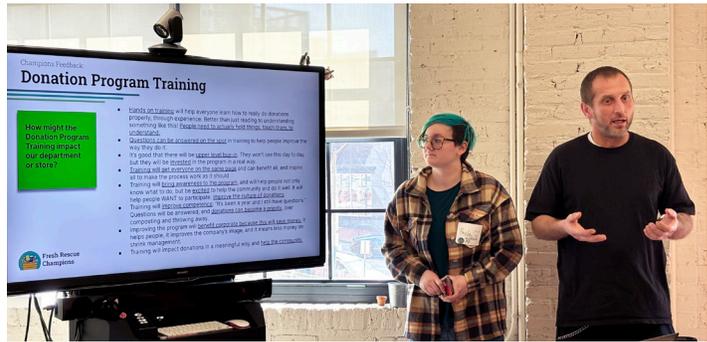
- The importance of the Fresh Rescue food donation program
- Donation food safety and quality
- Food donation processes (and challenges)
- Participation in donation contests and incentives
- Strengthening connections with Donation Partners
- Overview of roles and responsibilities, and chain of command
- Including time and space for those being trained to ask questions and provide feedback

Further, the training program would prioritize strengthening the culture of donation by demonstrating leadership's commitment to food donation and building Associate motivation and engagement.

To roll out the program, the company would further develop the curricula and train those responsible for delivery, ideally using multiple modalities and engaging techniques.

“We definitely need training... It’s good that we all know. If you don’t inform everybody and everybody’s working toward it, it doesn’t happen. It [will] always be an uphill battle.”

– Department Manager



Next steps for strategy: These outlines should be further developed into detailed training curricula. It will be valuable to have associates provide input on these curricula prior to plotting and implementation.

Key Principles of The Fresh Rescue Food Donation Trainings
These training guides have been created by emphasizing the following key principles. The training program should prioritize:

- Strengthening the culture of donation at Albertsons, including by demonstrating leadership commitment to food donation, and by building associate motivation and engagement
- Keeping the training program rooted in insights from store-level associates based on the ground experience and expertise
- Providing the information and skills associates need to play their roles in the Fresh Rescue Program
- Including time and space for those being trained to ask questions and provide feedback
- Containing multiple modalities and provide backup resources, to make trainings relevant, engaging and effective
- Reaching associates at all levels

Training Delivery
Associates were adamant that for Department Managers and Operations Specialists, in-person, hands-on training would be most effective in building knowledge and engagement. At other levels, virtual training via Microsoft Teams may be sufficient. Recorded trainings could be used for refreshers. We recommend a training hierarchy (Figure 1) in which the Director of Waste Reduction and Circularity (John Bernero) and the Chief Sustainability and Transformation Officer (Suzanne Lang) would train other members of National Corporate, Division Food Safety Directors, Division ESG Champions, and Division Presidents. The Division ESG Champions would select district-level Fresh Rescue Champions in new roles, outlined below, and would train both those Champions as well as District Presidents. The new Fresh Rescue Champions would train both Store Directors and Operations Specialists from each department. The Store Directors would train Receivers and Courtesy Clerks, while the Operations Specialists would train Department Managers.

Associates emphasized the importance of ensuring participants remain engaged, via interactive, hands-on, and relevant information and activities, and/or by keeping each training session relatively short. Further training facilitators and planners need to ensure that attendees prioritize this training and minimize distractions (e.g., requiring participants to turn off their video, closing out of email browsers and other messaging apps, silencing phones, etc.).

Based on the importance of these trainings, we recommend they be mandatory at all levels, to be completed as the first step of the roll-out. Makeup sessions may be necessary to accommodate all associates.

Training Hierarchy for the Fresh Rescue Donation Program Re-Rollout

Figure 1: Training Hierarchy

Contents	Page
Division-Level Leadership Training	5
Additional Training for Division ESG Champions to Select and Train District-Level Fresh Rescue Champions	9
National-Level Corporate Management Training	10
District Leadership Training	11
Additional Training for District Fresh Rescue Champions	11
District-Level: Operations Specialists Training	13
Store-Level: Store Director Training	15
Store-Level: Department Manager Training	16
Store-Level: Department-Level Associates Training	18
Store-Level: Receiver Training	18
Store-Level: Department-Level Associates, Cashiers and Courtesy Clerk Training	21
Summary of Roles and Responsibilities, Chain of Command, Training Hierarchy	22

Store-Level: Department Manager Training

STRUCTURE
Audience: All Department Managers for a particular department within a district location. One two-hour training including 15-minute break with snacks, for full group. An additional session can be added for space reasons or absences.
Format: IN-PERSON and highly interactive training at one of the stores in the district. The training will take place partly in a conference room and partly in the department staff.
For space reasons, each Department will train on a separate day.
LdL: Operation Specialist for the particular department

Operation Specialists should follow up with each department manager at their next in-person store visit to answer any questions that may have come up since the training. They should also follow up with departments that do not meet their donation goals in the subsequent months.

CONTENT
The content is the same as Division Manager training (see above), with the following differences:

- 1. Overview of food waste, stock, donations, and impact**
 - Add local data, where possible, regarding food waste and donations.
 - Within the department, which stores are currently donating?
 - Time for brainstorming about why some stores may or may not be donating (INTERACTIVE)
- 2. Donation food safety and quality**
 - Emphasize data table information, to help inform their decision-making.
 - USDA guidelines for storing items (only those specific to their department)
- 3. Introduction to the Scanning Process and Department-Specific Guidelines**
 - Provide more time to review the detailed guidelines for the specific department
 - Emphasize the expectation that they make this a part of their every day routine.
 - Time to review, ask questions about detailed guidelines and posters. (INTERACTIVE)
- 4. Strengthening Connections Between Donation Partners, Associates and Stores**
 - Tell department managers to make sure they check with their receiver to find out if there are specific items that Donation Partners will not take.
 - Explain and motivate participation in Immersive Training opportunity. Describe logistics.
- 5. Overview of Chain of Command - Roles and Responsibilities for Guidance and Training**
 - Emphasize the importance of their expertise, experience and wisdom for the program's success. Encourage them to share insights with Operation Specialists.
 - Emphasize Operation Specialist, Store Director, Corporate leadership commitment
 - Let them know that similar trainings have been provided at every level of Albertsons, including National Leadership.
- 6. Q&A**

Figure 1. A sampling of the training outline document

Strategy 2: Utilize Updated Donation Guidelines with Posters and Detailed Handouts

To standardize information about the Fresh Rescue food donation program within departments and across stores, the Champions recommend that stores hang posters in each department with department-specific donation guidelines. Each department would also keep detailed donation guidelines available for reference.

Building on the company's earlier materials, we created new Donation Guidelines Posters and Detailed Handouts that respond to the Associates' nuanced questions and concerns about department-specific donation rules (e.g., Which cakes can be donated, and how long can they be refrigerated or frozen before pick up?) and the process for donating (e.g., should items be scanned before or after being placed on the reduced-price rack?).

The Donation Guidelines Posters provide simplified overviews of donation guidelines and processes in a format that is relevant to each department and are intended for use on a daily basis.

The Detailed Handouts are more comprehensive and are intended for use as a reference tool for complex or unusual questions about how to determine if a product should be donated and donation procedures. Additionally, we created a donation pick up schedule template for each department to more easily track who is picking up donations during different days of the week.

"If I could, I would just educate everybody and say, look, this is what Fresh Rescue is all about. If we put that kind of effort into it, it will make this program really, really run. People like being a part of stuff."
— Champion



Fresh Rescue Food Donation Program
Donation Partner Pick Up Schedule

Donation Partner details: Name: _____, Phone Number: _____
 Donation Partner details: Name: _____, Phone Number: _____
 Donation Partner details: Name: _____, Phone Number: _____

Pickup Schedule: Fill in the table with your Donation Partners' names, pickup days, and times

Donation Partner	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun

Figure 2. Donation Partner Pick-Up Schedule Template

Please DO donate:

Item type	Storage requirements
Items prepared in-store with fresh ingredients, dairy-based ingredients, or vinegar This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Salad Sandwiches Mayo-based salads and dressings 	Must be picked up within 24 hours past the date label. Store at 41° F or less while awaiting pick up. These items cannot be frozen due to diminished quality.
Items prepared in-store without fresh ingredients, dairy-based ingredients, or vinegar This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Olives packaged in-store Flatbreads and stores 	Must be picked up or frozen within 24 hours past the date label.
Pre-packaged refrigerated items This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hummus, dips, and spreads Pasta and pasta sauce Pre-packaged deli salads Vacuum-packaged deli meat, cheese, Specialty meat and cheese Vendy-packaged olives, catering trays, cold prepared sides and meals, refrigerated soup Containers of shredded cheese, lunch meat, or other processed meat 	If donation pickup is within 24 hours, store at 41° F or less while awaiting pick up. Otherwise, if donation pickup is in more than 24 hours, freeze at 32° or less for up to one month.
Deli cheese and meat from behind the counter This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unopened chubs of meat and cheese Meat and cheese sliced in-store 	Must be picked up or frozen within 24 hours past the date label.
Hot bar items packaged in-store and cold, store-made proteins This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole roasted chickens, wings, tenders, leg 	Must be picked up or frozen within 24 hours past the date label.

Figure 3. Example of the Detailed Handouts (Deli Department)

Fresh Rescue Food Donation Program
DONATING DELI ITEMS

ITEM TYPE	TIMING	STORAGE
1 Items prepared in-store with vinegar, dairy, or fresh ingredients	Picked up within 24 hours past the date label.	Store at 41° F or less while awaiting pick up. Do not freeze.
2 Pre-packaged shelf-stable items	Picked up within 7 days past the date label.	Store at room temperature while awaiting pick up.
3 Deli meat and cheese, hot and cold proteins made and packaged in-store	Picked up or frozen within 24 hours past the date label.	Store at 41° F or less if pickup is within 24 hours. Otherwise freeze them.

Items prepared in-store without vinegar, dairy, or fresh ingredients
Pre-packaged refrigerated items

Recovery Programs: Follow protocol for recovery programs (such as rotisserie chicken into shredded chicken) before donating. If a recovered item (like shredded chicken) did not sell, it can be donated.
Vendor/Warehouse Credit: Always check if an item can receive credit before donating it. Do not rescan items as "Donation" after they have been scanned for credit.
Mistake: Donate mistpick items that meet these guidelines.

DO NOT DONATE ITEMS IF THEY ARE:

- Discolored, moldy, or contains bugs
- Leaking fluid
- Damaged or soiled*
- Irregular or bad odor
- Not in original or store-made packaging†
- Refrigerated items not stored properly at 41°F
- Missing product code or date label*
- Involved in a recall

*Individually wrapped items from a damaged package can be donated and do not need their own date labels. †For more detailed donation guidelines, please see the detailed Fresh Rescue Donation Guidelines Handout.

Figure 4. Example of the Donation Guidelines Posters (Deli Department)

**Strategy 3:
Strengthen Connections between
Donation Partners, Associates, and Stores**

Throughout this project, the Champions and other Associates we spoke with noted their lack of knowledge about their stores' Donation Partners, and the Champions reiterated the impact of learning about where donated food went after it left the stores. With this in mind, this strategy cultivates an engaging relationship between Donation Partners and Associates, enhances the donation culture in stores, improves transparency in the donation process, and encourages store Associates at all levels to actively participate in the Fresh Rescue food donation program. This strategy consists of (a) three opportunities for Associates to learn about Donation Partners and (b) an onboarding form for new Donation Partners. In addition to Associates, at least one of each study store's Donation Partners reviewed and provided input during the testing and development of this strategy.

“This kind of event would have a positive impact and demonstrate what the company does for the community and can improve value in the job. I would make sure as many associates as possible can interact with the Donation Partners at their table.”

– Store Director

(A) Donation Partner Learning Opportunities

1. Paid Immersive Training with Donation Partners:

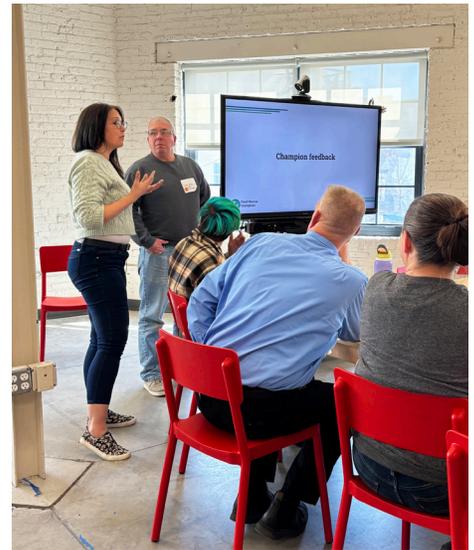
Department Managers and/or other key Associates in charge of food donation would receive a fixed number of paid training hours per year designated for on-site training at one of their store's Donation Partner's locations (e.g., food bank, food pantry, or other distribution site). The immersive training could include activities such as assisting with pantry set-up, unloading food from donors, food distribution, and/or clean up.

2. In-Store Teach-In:

To build Associate understanding of Donation Partners' missions, operations, and impact, Donation Partners would visit stores and deliver brief 15 to 20 minute presentations to Department Managers and other Associates twice per year. This presentation would increase the reach of the strategy to Associates who are not eligible to complete the Paid Immersive Training opportunity, and would allow all Associates the time to ask questions and gain thorough understanding of where their store is donating food.

3. In-Store Customer-Facing Event:

Donation Partners would host customer-facing tables or booths in the front of stores at least twice per year. The tables would provide information about the organization and how they collaborate with the store, helping to build understanding of community needs and strengthen buy-in for donations among both Associates and customers.



(B) Donation Partner Onboarding Form

This form would fill gaps by collecting standardized information from all Donation Partners at the time of onboarding. The form serves as an acknowledgment of food safety protocols and gathers information including food preferences, pick-up schedules, and interest and willingness to participate in in-store events and host Immersive Trainings.

**Fresh Rescue Food Donation Program
Donation Partner Onboarding Form**

Background Information

Your organization's name: _____

Organization's mailing address: _____

Qualified 501(c)(3)? Yes No

Primary point of contact: Name: _____ Email: _____ Phone number: _____

Preferred mode(s) of communication: Email Text Phone Call

Delivery driver: Name: _____ Phone number: _____

Available days and times for pickup:

Day	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Time							

Donation Preferences

Please indicate which of the following items you accept (check all that apply):

Product	Reason for not accepting (if applicable)
Floral arrangements, plants, gardening items	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Vitamins	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over the counter medicine (Ibuprofen, cough medicine, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pet products (refrigerated/un-refrigerated pet food, pet toys, pet shampoo, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home, health, and beauty products	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baby products (formulas, diapers, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food items without a label (e.g. Date label is hard to read, was removed or is not present)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yogurt parfaits	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seafood items	<input type="checkbox"/>

Donation Learning Opportunities

Join us to strengthen our food donation program! We value our Donation Partners' contributions to the community. Let's collaborate to enhance our efforts. Please review the opportunities below and consider sharing your organization's impact with our team to ensure greater support for food donations.

Would you be willing to host a table at our store to showcase your organization and inform customers about how they can be involved?

Yes, I'm interested Maybe, I'd like to learn more No, thank you

If yes, please indicate the best time(s) of year to join us at our store:

Would you be willing to hold a brief information session with employees at our stores to showcase your organization's positive impact on the community and discuss opportunities to improve donations?

Yes, I'm interested Maybe, I'd like to learn more No, thank you

If yes, please indicate your preferred day(s) and time(s) for the session:

Figure 5. Sample of the Donation Partner Onboarding Form

Strategy 4: Run a Donation Incentive Contest

To build engagement in and motivation for donating, the Champions prioritized a Donation Incentive Contest. The contest uses structured and clearly communicated incentives to solidify behavior changes for Department Managers and other Associates involved in the food donation process. The Champions recommended running the Incentive Contest for at least a year after it is implemented, coinciding with the re-rollout of the Fresh Rescue food donation program. After one year, it may be possible to taper down the contest or gradually remove it altogether.

During the contest, Department Managers would identify weekly donation goals in communication with their Operations Specialists, based on their department and store. These donation goals would be a percentage of their pre-existing shrink and would consider their specific store and department characteristics (e.g., a lower volume store vs. a higher volume store). If all but two departments in a store meet their weekly donation goal, the store would earn a point. Based on Associate feedback, we recommend testing two incentive contest models: one based on receiving points each week in a quarter (highest number of points wins); and another based on receiving points for 12 consecutive weeks, regardless of the quarter cycle. Winning stores would receive recognition, as well as pizza parties or other non-monetary incentives (e.g., in-store coupons, other free food from outside vendors).

“You gotta have fun with it! Need to make people feel appreciated and that everyone plays a part.”
— Department Manager



	Preparing for the contest		During the contest				End of the contest	
	A MONTH BEFORE THE CONTEST STARTS		WEEK 0	WEEKS 1-12		WEEK 13		
	BEFORE IT STARTS	DURING THE WEEK	BEFORE IT STARTS	DURING THE WEEK	AT THE END OF EACH WEEK	AT THE END OF EACH QUARTER		
What happens?	Department Managers are informed about the contest.		Department Managers and Operation Specialist set a weekly donation goal per department.		Department Managers and associates complete the donation process for their respective departments.		Donation partner(s) pick up donated items.	
How does it happen and who does it?	<p>District Managers notify Store Directors and Department Managers about the upcoming Incentive Contest on regularly scheduled calls and via email.</p> <p>In each store, the Store Director calls a quick Department Manager meeting (and/or goes around to each department to notify Department Managers and other associates about the upcoming contest, including all important details).</p> <p>The Store Director may also print out a brief summary of the contest with all important details to put in the break room and other common areas.</p> <p>The week before the contest starts, the Store Director reviews about the contest.</p>	<p>Each department's weekly donation goal is a ratio based on shrink vs donation volume that is determined by the Operation Specialist and the Department Manager at the beginning of the contest.</p> <p>Pull out the shelves, determine which products are no longer suitable for sale, and use donation guidelines to determine what can and cannot be donated.</p> <p>Scan donations and address. Data is automatically entered into Power BI or other data tracking platform(s).</p> <p>Package and place donations in the designated location in the cooler, freezer, or back room for storage prior to pick up by Donation Partners.</p> <p>Donation Partner pickup driver arrives at the store and signs off that they have received the donations.</p> <p>The Donation Partner packs the donations into their vehicle and signs off that they have received the donations.</p> <p>The Donation Partner may receive a copy of the donation paperwork from the receiver and the receiver may print a copy to keep on hand.</p>	<p>All eligible departments are expected to meet their goal. If accomplished, the store receives a point for that week.</p> <p>If more than 2 departments don't meet their weekly goal, the store will not be awarded with a point.</p>	<p>Each department is reviewed to see if they met their weekly donation goal and awarded with points if complying.</p>	<p>All stores who earned all points for at least 10/12 weeks win the prize. Stores that missed more than 2 weeks, will not be eligible to win the prize.</p>			
What resources are needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to email and web communication Terms and conditions of the contest that include requirements, prizes, and (other resources). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to CheckTrack and Power BI Bins or carts to sort donations and address Barcode labels to store donations Donation guidelines Cooler, freezer and backroom storage space for donations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to CheckTrack and Power BI Carts or tables to transport donation boxes Printer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracking system for each department's points Tracking system for each store's status Visual progress of the donation point tracker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Storable prizes Email or other communication platform Resources for storewide prize deployment (e.g., plates and cups for lunch party) 			
Additional Considerations	<p>Eligible departments that should be considered to participate in the contest include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meat Dairy Produce Sauces (if applicable) Casserole <p>Each time information is distributed about the contest (especially the first few times it happens), it should include all of the relevant details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An explanation of what the contest is and the goal behind it The period of time the contest will run Rules of the contest How prizes will be tracked and shared What the prizes are and how it will be distributed <p>When the contest is announced, this is also a good time to remind store leads and associates with information about the Fresh Rescue program to remind Store Directors and Associates about the program, its mission, impact goals, etc.</p>	<p>Donation goals can be reviewed throughout the year based on seasonal variance, department's ability to meet the goal, etc.</p> <p>Progress updates with information regarding all the departments that met their donation goals are emailed to Store Directors and Department Managers at the beginning of each week.</p>	<p>Associates can stay up to date on how many donation points the store has and how many are left to complete the contest with a progress tracker displayed in the break room (e.g., on a TV monitor, on the bulletin board).</p> <p>Progress updates with information regarding all the departments that met their donation goals are emailed to Store Directors and Department Managers at the beginning of each week.</p>	<p>Food for the prize should not come from Albertsons banner stores, but from outside purveyors.</p> <p>In addition to a pizza party, associates shared they would also appreciate \$5 gift cards or coupons or other small tokens of appreciation.</p>				

Figure 6. Donation Incentive Contest: Quarterly Model

	Preparing for the contest		During the contest				End of the contest	
	A MONTH BEFORE THE CONTEST STARTS		WEEK 0	WEEKS 1-12		WEEK 13		
	BEFORE IT STARTS	DURING THE WEEK	BEFORE IT STARTS	DURING THE WEEK	AT THE END OF EACH WEEK	AT THE END OF EACH QUARTER		
What happens?	Department Managers are informed about the contest.		Department Managers and Operation Specialist set a weekly donation goal per department.		Department Managers and associates complete the donation process for their respective departments.		Donation partner(s) pick up donated items.	
How does it happen and who does it?	<p>District Managers notify Store Directors and Department Managers about the upcoming Incentive Contest on regularly scheduled calls and via email.</p> <p>In each store, the Store Director calls a quick Department Manager meeting (and/or goes around to each department to notify Department Managers and other associates about the upcoming contest, including all important details).</p> <p>The Store Director may also print out a brief summary of the contest with all important details to put in the break room and other common areas.</p> <p>The week before the contest starts, the Store Director reviews about the contest.</p>	<p>Each department's weekly donation goal is a ratio based on shrink vs donation volume that is determined by the Operation Specialist and the Department Manager at the beginning of the contest.</p> <p>Pull out the shelves, determine which products are no longer suitable for sale, and use donation guidelines to determine what can and cannot be donated.</p> <p>Scan donations and address. Data is automatically entered into Power BI or other data tracking platform(s).</p> <p>Package and place donations in the designated location in the cooler, freezer, or back room for storage prior to pick up by Donation Partners.</p> <p>Donation Partner pickup driver arrives at the store and signs off that they have received the donations.</p> <p>The Donation Partner packs the donations into their vehicle and signs off that they have received the donations.</p> <p>The Donation Partner may receive a copy of the donation paperwork from the receiver and the receiver may print a copy to keep on hand.</p>	<p>All eligible departments are expected to meet their goal. If accomplished, the store receives a point for that week.</p> <p>If more than 2 departments don't meet their weekly donation goal, the store will not be awarded with a point and the 12 consecutive week period will need to be restarted.</p>	<p>Each department is reviewed to see if they met their weekly donation goal and awarded with points if complying.</p>	<p>Once the store receives 12 consecutive donation points, the store wins the prize.</p>			
What resources are needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to email and web communication Terms and conditions of the contest that include requirements, prizes, and (other resources). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to CheckTrack and Power BI Bins or carts to sort donations and address Barcode labels to store donations Donation guidelines Cooler, freezer and backroom storage space for donations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to CheckTrack and Power BI Carts or tables to transport donation boxes Printer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracking system for each department's points Tracking system for each store's status Visual progress of the donation point tracker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Storable prizes Email or other communication platform Resources for storewide prize deployment (e.g., plates and cups for lunch party) 			
Additional Considerations	<p>Eligible departments that should be considered to participate in the contest include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meat Dairy Produce Sauces (if applicable) Casserole <p>Each time information is distributed about the contest (especially the first few times it happens), it should include all of the relevant details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An explanation of what the contest is and the goal behind it The period of time the contest will run Rules of the contest How prizes will be tracked and shared What the prizes are and how it will be distributed <p>When the contest is announced, this is also a good time to remind store leads and associates with information about the Fresh Rescue program to remind Store Directors and Associates about the program, its mission, impact goals, etc.</p>	<p>Donation goals can be reviewed throughout the year based on seasonal variance, department's ability to meet the goal, etc.</p> <p>Progress updates with information regarding all the departments that met their donation goals are emailed to Store Directors and Department Managers at the beginning of each week.</p>	<p>Associates can stay up to date on how many consecutive points the store has, and how many are left to complete the contest with a progress tracker displayed in the break room (e.g., on a TV monitor, on the bulletin board).</p> <p>Progress updates with information regarding all the departments that met their donation goals are emailed to Store Directors and Department Managers at the beginning of each week.</p>	<p>Food for the prize should not come from Albertsons banner stores, but from outside purveyors.</p> <p>In addition to a pizza party, associates shared they would also appreciate \$5 gift cards or coupons or other small tokens of appreciation.</p>				

Figure 7. Donation Incentive Contest: 12 Week Model

**Recommendation:
Enhance Communications
and Feedback Mechanisms**

Open, clear, timely, and accessible communication and information are important to the success of all aspects of the Fresh Rescue food donation program. Improving communication and feedback may also benefit other aspects of Associates' work that impact a store's performance.

"[We need] constant communication with the Department Managers, telling them all they donate is greatly needed and just making sure they stay on the ball, keeping up their part."

– Donation Partner

The Champions and other Associates we spoke with described challenges related to communication and feedback, such as difficulty getting clear information about donations, delayed responses to their questions or requests regarding food donation policies and processes, and limited opportunity for input and feedback. Some Associates also expressed a desire for greater receptivity to the input they provide.

Associates also recognized that improving communication in a large company is difficult, in part because of the need to standardize operations and information dissemination protocols. That said, Associates noted that enhanced communication systems in the Fresh Rescue food donation program could also be useful for other company programs and operations.

Perhaps the most important lesson from this project overall is that frontline Associates bring a wealth of expertise and insight to their work, which is not being fully utilized. Improving communication and feedback loops in the food donation process would enable the company to learn from and leverage frontline Associate expertise. Our team decided that rather than creating a separate strategy focused on communication, as originally intended, there was greater benefit to wrapping in good communication as a necessary component of all strategies.

Beyond the communication improvements specific to each strategy, we also recommend prioritizing the following principles related to communication and feedback:

- **Prioritizing interactive communication and feedback. Associates felt that ongoing support from leadership helps them feel secure and welcome in sharing input without concern of recourse.** Dissemination of the Champion-developed strategies may also demonstrate that Associates' ideas and expertise are valued.
- **Developing clear processes, spaces, opportunities, and points of contact** for Associates to raise questions, share ideas and input, provide feedback, and ensure accountability, responsiveness, and follow-through.
- **Further increasing Associate access to tools and technologies** (e.g., phones, tablets, computers) to enable ongoing and timely communication and feedback (including options for anonymity).



NEXT STEPS

Finalizing Materials and Pilot Testing

While the content of each strategy is finalized, some additional materials and details (training materials, additional graphics for posters, and some logistical details) need to be developed prior to piloting. Once those are completed, we recommend rigorous pilot testing to assess the effectiveness and implementation of each strategy to determine the effects on the amount and quality of donations, and to gain insight into adaptations that may be needed in different contexts. The strategies were developed to be implemented together as a package (see below). We recommend piloting the strategies in a variety of stores (e.g., each of Albertsons Companies top 10 banners; a mix of high and low volume stores; urban, suburban, and rural stores; stores that are currently donating at various levels). Any grocery retailers planning to implement these strategies would benefit from pilot testing.

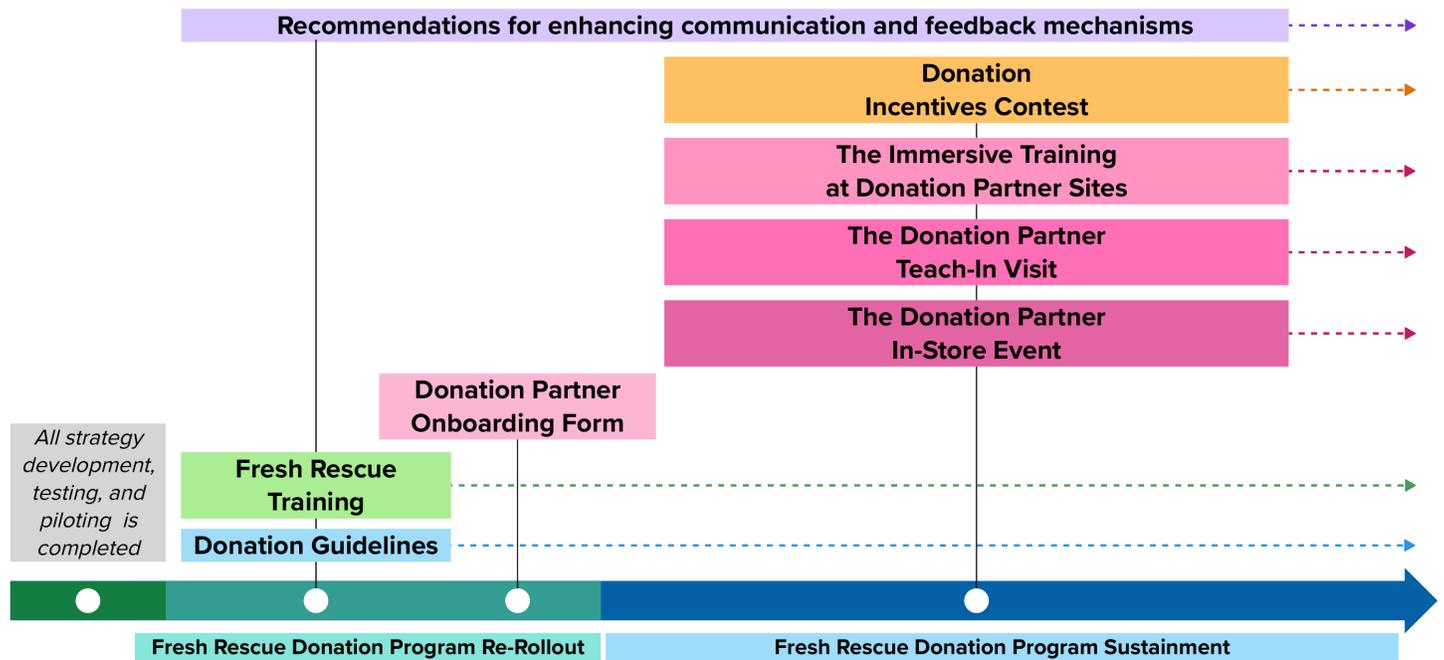


Figure 5. General timeline for strategy implementation

The Impact of the Project on the Fresh Rescue Champions

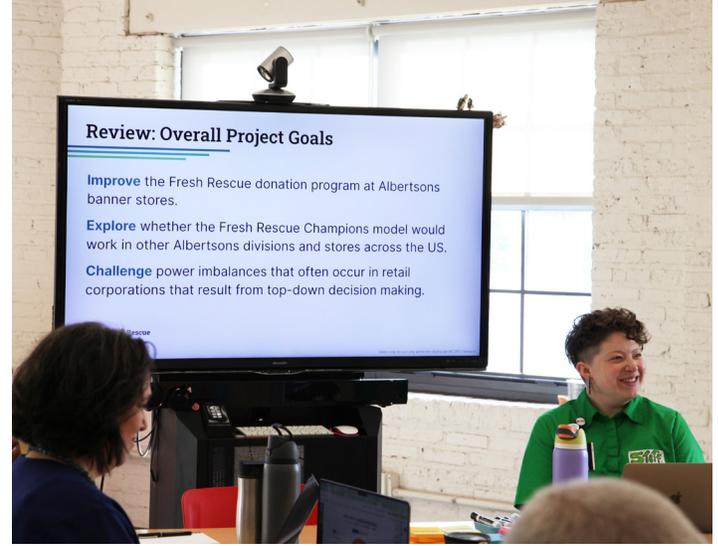
This project had a profound impact on the participating Champions, both in terms of how they understand wasted and donated food and how they view their role as changemakers in the company. Throughout the process, the Champions shared sentiments about how they appreciated the chance to share their unfiltered opinions without worrying that their words may be misconstrued by leadership. Many Champions described the project as fun and exciting, and said they enjoyed the chance to take part in the sessions outside their stores at MICA's campus. At the end of the project, Champions shared sentiments about how fulfilling this project was and how they feel hopeful for the future of food donation at Albertsons Companies.

"I think everybody feels the energy . . . I think everybody is excited to be a part of something. In 25 years, this is probably one of the biggest, most exciting things that I've been involved in . . . We gotta leave our kids with something. And we can wait for somebody else to fix it or we can take the initiative and do it. I think we are in a position for change and I think we can do that."

— Champion

Wide Scale Implementation

Using knowledge gained from pilot testing, strategies may be rolled out across all the company's grocery retail stores. It will be important to collect data before, during, and after implementation to evaluate and improve the implementation process, and to document the Fresh Rescue food donation program's impacts on donations and other outcomes. Further, evaluation research may help the company untangle the separate impacts of the strategies themselves and the employee-engaged processes used to develop them.



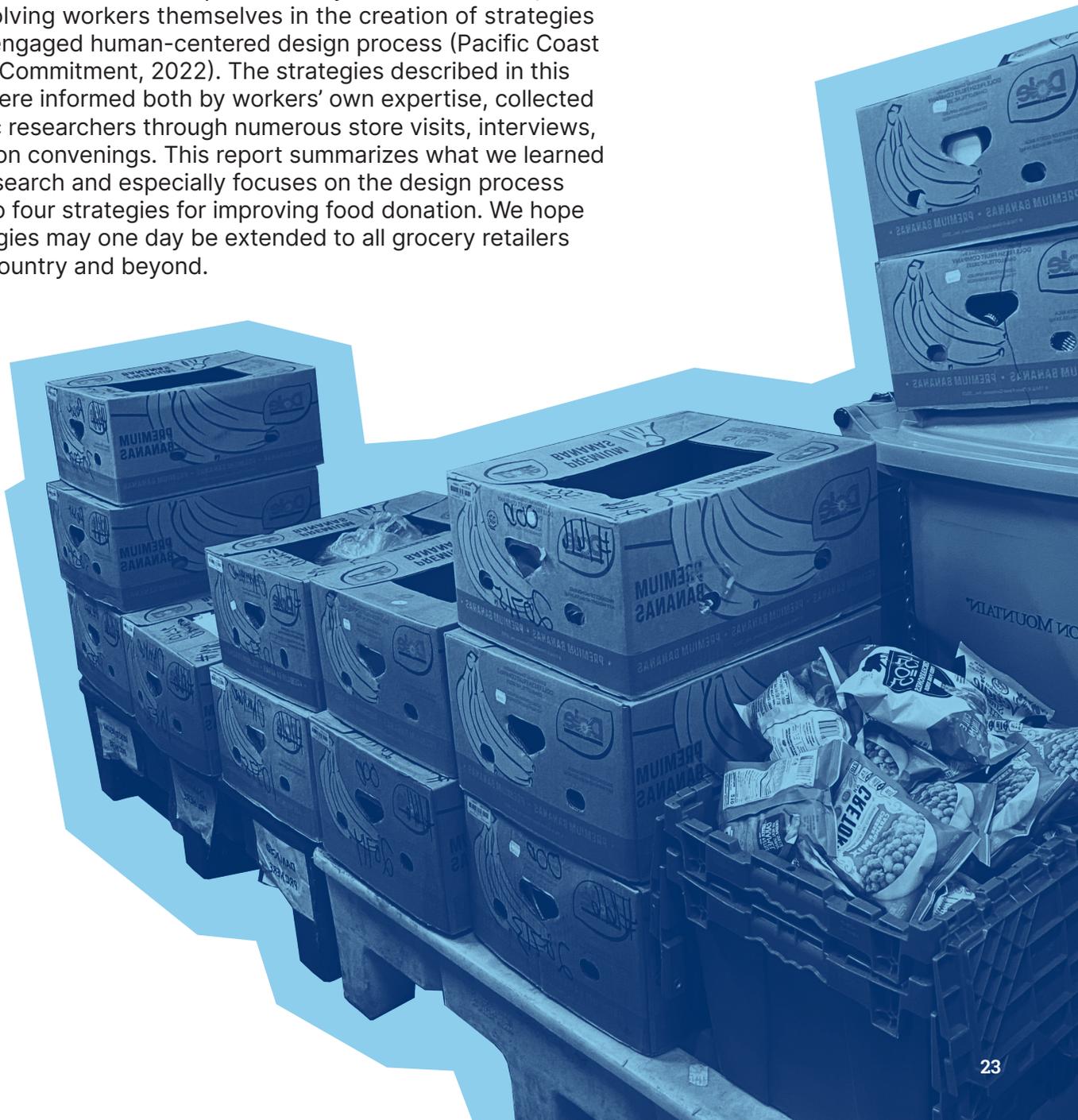
Maintaining a Worker-Centered Approach in Future Work

We strongly recommend that any grocery retailers interested in implementing the strategies presented here should center store-level workers' input, perspectives, opinions, and repeated feedback. The research process and resulting strategies presented here would not have been possible without the expertise of the Champions at every stage. This worker-centered approach is both innovative and effective, resulting in uniquely tailored results and interventions that would not be possible without their input. We further encourage other retailers to adopt worker-centric research processes and strategy development. It is important to note that worker-centric projects require creating an environment of collaboration, trust, and cheer to maximize employees' willingness to contribute with honesty. Leadership might consider hiring external facilitators to lead research sessions with store-level employees.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of a year, 10 frontline Associates from Albertsons Companies' grocery retail stores across the Mid-Atlantic joined with researchers from Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) to design food donation strategies informed by the needs and concerns of retail workers.

Across Albertsons Companies' stores, approximately 80 million pounds of food were donated in 2022 (Albertsons Companies, 2023, p. 18), yet there remains the potential to waste less and donate more. Success in mobilizing this massive shift will depend on the workers tasked with the everyday decisions about what food should be donated and manually separating the food for donation pickup. This project breaks new ground by not only working to address the barriers faced and prioritized by frontline workers, but also involving workers themselves in the creation of strategies through an engaged human-centered design process (Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment, 2022). The strategies described in this document were informed both by workers' own expertise, collected by academic researchers through numerous store visits, interviews, and Champion convenings. This report summarizes what we learned from that research and especially focuses on the design process leading up to four strategies for improving food donation. We hope these strategies may one day be extended to all grocery retailers across the country and beyond.



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The Fresh Rescue Champions Project has been a collective and collaborative effort.

First and foremost, we want to recognize the Fresh Rescue Champions. At the core of this project is our commitment to centering and uplifting the lived experience and expertise of Albertsons Companies frontline Associates in the four stores. They have been the heart of this collective endeavor. Bobby, Charles, Dave, Don, Erin, Hayden, Kelly, Kenitta, Kevin, and Kim have put their hearts into this project. They have been the experts, co-researchers, and co-designers on this project. Among them collectively is over two centuries of professional expertise in retail supermarket business. They know every detail, every item, every process and policy in their departments and stores and have shared generously and with tremendous professionalism, all on top of their very demanding jobs. Even more, their heartfelt commitment to food donations—and to the impact they have on their communities and on the environment—is reflected in the passion and thoughtfulness they have put into evolving the strategies they have proposed for improving the program. There are too many other Associates across ACME and Safeway to list here who also contributed their input, advice, ideas, and time to this project. The insights and ideas shared herein are richer because of their contributions.

The research team from JHU and MICA has been a true dream team across anthropology, design, and public health. We could not have asked for more fearless and phenomenal team leaders in Kaitlyn Harper and Steffanie Espat who have kept this complex project moving and organized, have kept us all focused and motivated, and have remained unwavering in their commitment and attention to detail, all while maintaining such thoughtfulness, goodness, and humor. Thank you to our tireless JHU and MICA student research fellows—Alice, Ana, Dipthi, Eli, Jordan, and Yaseer—for reminding us that the future will be brighter (and less wasteful) in your hands.

We are also grateful to our trusted partners at Albertsons Companies—especially Suzanne, John, James, and Joe—for their openness and willingness to embark on this collective journey with us. It is not common to have a large retailer so willing to open their doors to us, provide direct access to their employees, share data, share policies and processes, share challenges and aspirations, and share broadly in the spirit of a greater good. We are grateful for your receptivity to the Champions ideas and for your commitment to advancing them. Thank you also to Bill, Fred, Joan, and Kurt, the Store Directors from the four participating Safeway and ACME stores who provided us access and time for our many store visits throughout the project.

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