

Hints & Tips: Setting up a Community Fridge

1 Introduction: Join the Movement

Starting a **Community Fridge** is a powerful way to tackle food waste while building a supportive local network. Unlike a food bank, a Community Fridge is a **shared space for everybody** where surplus food, which would otherwise go to waste, is collected from supermarkets, restaurants, local producers and shared with the community.

2 The Power of the Network

Connecting with established organisations can provide the framework and support you need:

- **Visit Existing Projects:** A clear overview of the training, including what it will cover and who will benefit.
- By becoming a **NIRN member** we can connect you with other Community Fridge Projects which can provide you with vital start up advice.

3 Leveraging Local Skills & Partnerships

Building a successful fridge relies on strong relationships within your area:

- **Retail Partnerships:** Start conversations with managers at local supermarkets like Tesco, Sainsbury's, and M&S. Their staff are often invested in the project and benefited to them as able to demonstrate diversion of food from waste (which is an environmental as well as financial benefit) as well as promoting social value by supporting local community activity. It is important to note the timings of when this food might be available for collection as sometimes it can be near closing time. Need to ensure volunteers are available to make these regular collections.
- **Community Donations:** Encourage locals to donate excess garden produce (like cooking apples) or items from their cupboards they know they won't use.
- **Local Food Producers:** Partner with local farmers or nature hubs to ensure nothing goes to landfill. For example, vegetables that are not taken can be composted, and excess bread can be used by farmers for livestock.



4 Step-by-Step Guide

Step 1: Why Are You Doing It?

It is important to advertise the project not as a food poverty project, but as an **environmental initiative**. This helps reduce stigma and focuses the community on the goal of preventing food waste.

Step 2: Find Your Location

- **Accessibility:** Choose a central location, (community centre) so people can walk to it easily. The space should be accessible for all abilities.
- **The Space:** Check out your local community spaces for available spaces.
- **Equipment:** Invest in “drinks-style” fridges with glass doors. This allows users to see what is inside without opening the door constantly, which saves electricity.

Step 3: Safety, Training & Regulations

Running a Community Fridge is like running a restaurant without the cooking:

- **Food Hygiene & Training:** Organisers must pass Food Hygiene Certificate exams before starting. Ensure at least one team member on-site is trained to Level 2 Food Safety to advise others.
- **Daily Maintenance:** You must perform health and safety checks, clean the facility, and record fridge temperatures at the beginning and end of every day.
- **The 4-Hour Rule:** If chilled food is kept out of the fridge (e.g., during an event), it must be used or returned to the fridge within 4 hours. If it has been out for longer, it must be thrown away.
- **Natasha’s Law & Allergens:** Only accept packaged food with clear labels listing all ingredients and the 14 major allergens in bold. Do not accept items that are opened, damaged, or missing labels.
- **Recall Alerts:** The coordinator should sign up for Food Standards Agency (FSA) alerts to stay informed of any product recalls and ensure unsafe food is removed immediately.
- **Volunteers/Staff:** Dedicated personnel are needed to collect, sort, and display food, as well as engage with the public in a positive manner.
- **Data Collection & Impact:** Establish a system to record the amount of food rescued and the number of visitors.
- **Insurance:** You must have Public Liability Insurance and Product Insurance in place before opening.





4 Step-by-Step Guide

Step 4: Beyond the Fridge (Building Community)

A fridge is more than just food; it's a social hub:

- **Social Space:** Provide a spot where people can have tea or coffee, read a book, or let children play.
- **Additional Activities:** Use the space for seed-saving workshops, cooking lessons themed around reusing food, book or toy swaps, or budgeting advice from experts.

Step 5: Managing Expectations

- **Opening Times:** State your hours clearly to manage the flow of visitors.
- **Fair Share:** While there is often no strict limit on what people can take, use signage to encourage people to take only what they need so there is enough for everyone.

Step 6: Promotion & Demonstrating Impact

Capturing data is essential for the long-term sustainability of the fridge:

- **Recording Data:** Use Excel or Google Sheets to maintain a monthly record of food weights and visitor counts.
- **Environmental Benefit:** Collate the total weight of food diverted from waste. Sharing this data with the supermarkets and restaurants you collect from helps them demonstrate their own environmental and financial benefits.
- **Social Value:** Record the number of people using the service. Highlighting these social benefits is crucial when

providing information to potential funders to show the project's reach within the local community.

- **Visual Storytelling:** Use signs to let people know you are taking photos to promote the project, and share your "waste saved" statistics on social media to build community pride.
- **Social Media Promotion:** Connect with local schools, community groups, GP practices, youth clubs and churches. Share information about how and when they can access your community fridge.

5 Funding Available

Initial startup costs can be around **£10,000**. This covers the "big" items like a shipping container or building works, insurance, and volunteer training.

Potential Funding Sources in NI:

- **Department for Communities**
- **The National Lottery Community Fund**
- **Halifax Foundation**
- **IKEA & Co-op (Hubbub)**
- **Donation Jar:** Many fridges use a donation jar to cover ongoing costs like electricity and tea/coffee.

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