

CASE STUDY: Introducing a food donation program at the Edmonton Convention Centre through collaboration and stakeholder engagement.

Since 2008, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada has acknowledged the power the events industry has to distribute excess food to:

1. Create more social good, and
2. Create food security in our city.

Between Edmonton's two convention centres (Edmonton Convention Centre and Edmonton EXPO Centre), we produce an excess of one million meals each year. Hospitality venues, large and small, all produce a significant amount of food waste. It's simply an unavoidable reality. In fact, the United Nations estimates that 30% of globally produced food is wasted without ever going to feed our world's population.

In 2008, the Edmonton Convention Centre began working with Alberta Health Services and the Edmonton Food Bank to contribute to the Second Helping Program—a program that since 2011, has received and redistributed 180,000 pounds of perishable food to Edmonton's homeless, impoverished and at-risk communities. In 2018 alone, the Edmonton Convention Centre donated more than 4,000 pounds of food which equates to an estimated 5,500 meals.

Many cities in the world, including in Canada and Alberta, are working alongside the events industry to overcome obstacles related to building a food donation program that are robust and impactful in addressing UN Sustainable Development Goal #2 – Zero Hunger.

Here's what made Edmonton successful in building our food donation program in collaboration with Alberta Health Services and the Edmonton Food Bank:

1. It was critical to include and align with provincial/district regulation. For us, this is the Alberta Charitable Food Act. This allowed us to achieve support and success because the act includes two important things: legal stipulations regarding liability and a definition of what counts as a charitable food organization.
2. We needed to engage all stakeholders around this initiative early in the process. This might seem obvious, but defining roles was crucial to gaining momentum. This meant working closely with the Alberta Health Services, Department of Environment and Public Health. They were, and continue to be, big allies in this work. Together, we formed donor and recipient regulations and duties of care that includes information from the Public Health Act. These are the guidelines we as the donating body and our recipients adhere to.
3. We needed to provide for infrastructure changes. This meant tapping into capital investment where needed. The Edmonton Food Bank needed fridge and storage space as well as a refrigerated vehicle to transport the food. This allows for safe and convenient pick-ups.

The Edmonton Convention Centre was the first donor organization in Edmonton that helped make the Second Helping Program a reality. Today there are 250 recipient organizations receiving healthy, food-service quality food that would otherwise go to waste.