

# LAW FOR CHANGE STUDENT COMPETITION 2019

TEAM <b>2</b>	PROJECT TITLE <b>Eco-Responsibility – Save the Food, Banish Hunger</b>
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SCHOOL	City University of Hong Kong

## SUMMARY OF OUR PROJECT

This project aims to rescue edible surplus food that would otherwise be discarded as waste and redistribute it within Hong Kong. We propose to focus (at least initially) on Hong Kong's student population. University campuses in Hong Kong are home to thousands of students who inevitably discard a substantial amount of food every day. We see these campuses as a huge food donation "market" which NGOs have yet to tap into. We propose to work with NGOs such as Foodlink to launch a pilot project on City University campus in order to promote awareness of and facilitate surplus food redistribution.

In spite of the imminent saturation of several strategic landfill sites in Hong Kong, there has been a marked increase in the amount of municipal solid waste ("MSW") being discarded at landfill sites in recent years (for example, a 2017 study showed a 17% increase in the discarding of MSW within the last decade to 3.9 million tonnes).<sup>1</sup> Analyzed by type, food waste was the largest

contributor to MSW discarded at landfills in Hong Kong, comprising 34% of the total MSW for 2017. In fact, the daily amount of food waste being discarded in Hong Kong has surged by 41% within the last decade to 985 tonnes.<sup>2</sup>

While food may be discarded for various reasons, several of these reasons are in fact unrelated to the edibility of the food (e.g. unattractive appearance of food or food that is close to, but has not yet surpassed, its "best-before" date) which could otherwise have remained fit for human consumption. Our project seeks to introduce a system whereby this edible food can be donated and redistributed within Hong Kong instead of being discarded.

Our project can therefore simultaneously meet multiple policy objectives in Hong Kong such as welfare support to the needy, environmental protection, and efficiency in resource allocation.

## PROBLEM ANALYSIS

After a comprehensive assessment of the existing landscape in relation to food waste and food donation in Hong Kong, we found that both potential food donors and intermediaries (mainly food banks and charity organizations) face a number of constraints in the food donation process which may contribute to a reluctance to engage in food donation and redistribution. These barriers are summarized below:

**Logistical challenges:** The "lack of funds for the organization of logistics" is considered as "one of the most limiting factors in food redistribution".<sup>3</sup> Potential donors and intermediaries need to spare resources to store the food before onward delivery. Storage can be costly, especially for highly perishable foods in the cold chain.

Besides, the cost of transporting donated food from donors to intermediary food banks and then to final consumers can be high, especially when the donation is in large quantity. Furthermore, given that the donated

food is usually close to its expiry date, both donors and intermediaries need to deliver the food to the ultimate recipients under a very tight schedule.

**Food safety concerns and potential liability of donors:** Certain statutory requirements must be met whilst donating food (the applicable legal framework is set out below). The fear of running foul of these requirements often drives prospective donors to discard surplus food in order to avoid potential liabilities associated with donating food. For instance, the donors may fear that if the final consumers of the donated food get sick, the donors may face prosecution and compensation claims. The risks of criminal and civil liabilities cause prospective donors to discard the edible food instead.

According to the Research Office of the Legislative Council Secretariat, concerns about legal liability account for 67% of reasons why food are not donated<sup>4</sup>. Potential donors tend to discard unused edible food to avoid risks associated with liability for donated food.

## APPLICABLE LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING FOOD DONATION AND REDISTRIBUTION

There is presently no formal legal framework regulating food donation or redistribution in Hong Kong. The Government of Hong Kong is taking a rather voluntary approach in promoting food donation among its citizens.

In 2013, the Government launched the Food Wise Charter aiming to promote food donation and redistribution,<sup>5</sup> with 698 companies and institutions currently having signed up to it. However, the Charter is non-binding and lacks teeth.

The Government has emphasized that it has no intention to introduce specific legislation governing food donation or a “Good Samaritan Law”.<sup>6</sup> At end-2015, the Environment Bureau declared that “the Government has no plan to introduce a Good Samaritan Law”, partly because any contractual arrangement between food donors and charity organizations should already address the liability issues associated with food donation (which any Good Samaritan Law would, in large part, aim to address).

The Government has also declared that it is not prepared to provide tax incentives to food donors, as such incentives may not be effective in reducing food waste.

At the meeting of the Executive Council held on 16 October 2018, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong ordered that the Waste Disposal (Charging for Municipal Solid Waste) (Amendment) Bill 2018 be introduced into the Legislative Council for the implementation of MSW charging. The bill proposes to adopt two charging modes based on the polluter-pays principle and the existing waste collection system namely “charging by designated garbage bags” and “charging by weight”. Whilst not dealing with food donation specifically, the Bill aims to provide the necessary financial incentives to drive behavioral changes and encourage various sectors of the community to practice waste reduction and donate unwanted food. However, the Bill is not yet in force.

In summary, the lack of awareness and uncertainty about food donation caused by the lack of a Good Samaritan Law in Hong Kong as well as the perceived risks of attracting liability by donating food act as a substantial disincentive for potential food donors to actively engage in food donation. However, this project intends to educate people about food donation and redistribution and will also minimize the potential liability risks by allowing donors to enter into a release of liability agreement (see below).

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Our project aims to promote awareness in Hong Kong of surplus food redistribution and to facilitate this food redistribution in an innovative way:

### Scope of Project

We propose to launch a pilot project on City University campus, with prospective food donors being the staff and students residing within the University Campus.

- a) We carried out a survey of students of the City University campus; the result of the survey shows that more than half of respondents have excess food, and eighty percent of respondents expressed a willingness to donate surplus food if it is convenient to do so.
- b) On the strength of the survey results, we intend to collaborate with NGOs working on food donation to carry out the aspiration of the respondents by ensuring that their surplus food makes its way to those in need.
- c) Following the launch of the pilot project, we then hope to extend the project to other University campuses in Hong Kong.

### How the Project Works

We propose to design and build multi-functional food collection boxes that will reduce the burden of collecting donated food.

Food collection boxes have been widely used by local NGOs to rescue edible surplus food. For example, Food Angel, the largest food rescue organization in Hong Kong, has placed 15 food collection boxes at 15 shopping centres all over the city.

Whilst these boxes are helpful in encouraging the public to donate extra food, there are also problems associated with them. First, very few food collection boxes are placed on university campuses or residence halls despite college students producing a great deal of

food waste each year. Second, intermediaries (such as NGOs) do not have direct access to information on the quantity and type of the collected food, which makes it hard to arrange transportation logistics for the food. Third, the conventional food collection box is designed in a way that prioritizes the function of “collection,” while failing to promote the benefits of reducing waste. Dealing with each of these problems in turn:

- a) First, our food collection boxes will be placed at various publicly accessible locations on the City University campus where students can take their surplus food for recycling. An anti-theft tablet stand will be installed to protect the tablets from being stolen.
- b) Second, we propose to produce an “upgraded” collection box equipped with a tablet and a mini-printer. An embedded tablet is attached to each box, enabling donors to review and sign a waiver form on our website (which we will also develop) when dropping off food donations. They are also required to input information pertaining to the donated food, e.g. expiry date and food type. Once the above two steps are completed, the mini-printer will then print out a sticky memo pad containing a QR code that is machine-readable. A notification will pop up on the tablet screen at this moment asking the donor to put the memo pad on the donated food and finish the last step of dropping off. The tablet will notify us and the NGOs (with whom we propose to work – see below) of the information received once a donation is completed through the Wi-Fi network.
- c) To guarantee the best hygiene standard, only food that satisfies certain criteria will be accepted, e.g. 2 weeks or more before expiry date and dry food with intact package. Based on the information transmitted by the tablet, we will create an inventory database that is readily accessible for NGOs to track current donations and optimize the operations of their transportation resources. We will also conduct inspections of the collection boxes in person on a weekly basis in person to ensure they are working properly and not being mistreated.

- d) The donated food will then be transported to the NGOs' warehouses where volunteers can scan the QR codes on the sticky memos to get explicit information about the food in real time. The NGOs will then be responsible for distributing the food to the ultimate beneficiaries.
- e) Third, the tablets on the food collection boxes will have video capabilities which will showcase social media feeds and videos from food-related NGOs highlighting how massive the food wastage issue is in Hong Kong. By using the tablet in this way, we can raise the profile of our project campus-wide and, more importantly, we can raise awareness amongst students of Hong Kong's food wastage problem. To sum up, the new-designed collection box excels in not only "collection," but also "promotion."
- b) Then the donor will be asked to choose the type and amount of the donated food and indicate the expiration dates.
- c) We will build a website with a user-friendly interface for donors to complete the aforementioned activities.

### Collaboration with NGOs and Other Stakeholders

We propose to work with NGOs such as Foodlink.<sup>7</sup>

- a) We have spoken with various NGOs about our project. One of these NGOs, FoodLink, is keen to collaborate with us. Foodlink has indicated that it will work with us on our pilot project to transport the food that we have collected to the ultimate beneficiaries. Foodlink has skilled manpower and industry expertise and will be a valuable asset to our project.
- b) The City University authority will also be a vital stakeholder in supporting our project. We will work with them to progress our project campus-wide.
- c) We are also planning to work with various student organizations to promote our project through activities like educational lectures and events.

### Release of Liability Agreement

We propose to require each donor to sign a release of liability agreement upon donating food.

- a) In order to minimize the liability concern that many potential donors have, the donor will be required to sign a liability release agreement on the tablet upon donating the food and after reading a concise summary of existing laws and regulations.

## PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

On the sustainability of the project, we intend that our idea will be permanently incorporated into the activities of student groups and community service groups within the City University community. There are several student associations willing to collaborate with us in the management of the food donation sites and logistics.

In addition, NGOs are integral to the sustainability of the project. With the willingness of NGOs, such as Foodlink, to collaborate with us, we believe our project is sustainable going forward.

We also intend to replicate the project in other universities in order to solve the serious issue of food wastage.

## EVALUATION PLAN

An evaluation will be held after the pilot scheme is completed. There are two aspects to be evaluated in the pilot scheme. First, the data relating to the amount, type, and quality of the donated food which can then be used to form an idea of what food students tend to donate and in what quantities. This will in turn inform the second aspect which is how the data collected from the pilot scheme can be used to inform the logistical operation of the project in other student campuses. For example, the website, which will serve as an inventory database, will keep track of the peak 'food donation months' among the student body, such as the end of semesters when students are trying to get rid of surplus food. This data will be shared with the NGOs and will inform our continued operations (e.g. how often donated food should be transported to the NGOs for onward distribution).

We will also hold regular meetings internally, with the NGOs and the student bodies more widely (who will be our primary donors) to update our work processes and to further fine-tune our project. In particular, the NGOs will provide feedback on the quantity of food received and the general effectiveness of the project. The student bodies will also be surveyed and asked for feedback on their continued perception of and participation in the project in order to guarantee its sustainability.

We will also continue to monitor developments in the Legislative Council of Hong Kong with regard to the Good Samaritan Bill and the Waste Disposal (Charging for Municipal Solid Waste) (Amendment) Bill 2018.

## PROJECT TIMELINE

Task	Start Date	End Date
<b>PHASE 01: Initial engagement</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approaching NGOs and other stakeholders to secure their participation in the project</li> </ul>	Nov 2019	Feb 2020
<b>PHASE 02: Project preparation</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designing, developing, and producing the collection box</li> <li>Developing a website that is accessible to donors through the tablet, including a database of the donated food that is accessible to us and the NGOs</li> </ul>	Mar 2020	May 2020
<b>PHASE 03: Implementation of project</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Placing collection boxes around campus</li> <li>Launching campus-wide advertising campaigns</li> <li>Working with NGOs to redistribute all donated food</li> </ul>	Jun 2020	Oct 2020
<b>PHASE 04: Project evaluation</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation of pilot project in terms of levels of student engagement, amount of food donated and success of collaboration with NGOs in food redistribution</li> </ul>	Nov 2020	Dec 2020

# BUDGET BREAKDOWN

Item	Estimated Budget (HK\$)
<b>Website development cost</b> Including designing and hosting the website, and buying a domain with 10 GB online data storage	8,000
<b>Developing 5 collection boxes</b>	
• Stainless steel collection boxes including related logistics cost (\$500 x 5)	2,500
• Tablets with anti-theft stand for security (\$1500 x 5)	7,500
• Label printing machine including related logistics and installation cost (\$500 x 5)	2,500
<b>Operational costs</b>	
• Logistics cost for the pilot scheme	5,000
• Promotion cost	3,000
• Contingency	6,500
<b>Provision for expanding project to other universities</b>	15,000
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>50,000</b>

## CONCLUSION

Our project will enable us and our NGO partners to tap into the food donation “market” on student campuses where we can promote awareness of and facilitate surplus food redistribution.

Given Hong Kong’s severe food wastage problem and the fact that it lacks a Good Samaritan food donation law, it is hoped that our project will raise awareness of the problem (initially at a university student level but subsequently on a more national level) and change people’s habits as to how they treat surplus food. ■

### REFERENCE:

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