

# Building a Food System That Works for Everyone:

*A Look at the Intersection of Food Waste with Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion*



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# Acknowledgements

In December 2021, ReFED received our first grant exclusively dedicated to work focused on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) within the food waste space from The Betsy & Jesse Fink Family Foundation. A portion of this grant was used to engage a consultant to help us audit ReFED’s internal policies and practices and to educate and train staff on key topics within the JEDI space. The grant has also supported the development of this assessment, which we hope helps further the conversation about building justice into the food system. Without their support, this work would not have been possible.



There were many individual contributors that brought their insights to the table. We are incredibly grateful to the people who took the time to speak with us about how they see JEDI issues show up in their work across the food system. The knowledge and stories that these individuals shared shaped this report from the ground up. *(Please see the Methodology section of the report on page 12 for a full list of people interviewed.)*

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Thank you to the attendees of ReFED’s 2022 Food Waste Solutions Summit, whose feedback during the fishbowl discussion sessions helped to determine which Insight Areas to pursue deeper and whom to follow up with for more information.



## About ReFED

ReFED is a national nonprofit working to end food loss and waste across the food system by advancing data-driven solutions. We leverage data and insights to highlight supply chain inefficiencies and economic opportunities; mobilize and connect supporters to take targeted action; and catalyze capital to spur innovation and scale high-impact and high-potential initiatives. Our goal is a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive food system that optimizes environmental resources, minimizes climate impacts, and makes the best use of the food we grow.

*To learn more about the extent, causes, and impacts of food waste – as well as solutions to reduce it – please visit [www.refed.org](http://www.refed.org).*

# Executive Summary

As an organization dedicated to food waste reduction, ReFED hopes to play an important role in helping to transform the food system for the better. Yet while the connections between food waste and sustainability and resilience are clear, its link to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) issues can often be harder to discern – beyond the critical role that food recovery plays in redistributing food at risk of going to waste to those in need. As such, we have conducted this landscape assessment to explore the intersection of food waste and JEDI issues, in order to start to define ReFED's role in furthering the dialogue and to provide actionable recommendations and motivation for others in the space. We view this effort as a “work in progress,” as the general knowledge base – and our own learning – continues to evolve, and as we collectively work to make room for voices that have historically been marginalized throughout the food system.

We consolidated our findings into five “Insight Areas” which begin to explore the JEDI concerns and share recommendations for potential solutions; we have also included several short case studies to highlight examples of approaches that have tried to do things differently, and in a way that addresses some of the JEDI issues we learned about:



## JEDI Insight Area #1: Treatment of Workers in the Food System

Frontline workers – many of whom come from marginalized communities – are the fuel that keeps our food system operating, and they are critical to any efforts to reduce food waste. Whether they are harvesting crops on the farm, working the line at a meat processing plant, stocking shelves in a grocery store, or serving meals in a restaurant, frontline workers are the ones who are tasked with implementing waste reduction initiatives. Yet parts of the food system are plagued with long-standing inequities, including low wages and long hours, few benefits or growth opportunities, and poor or even dangerous working conditions, that make it difficult for workers to prioritize food waste reduction efforts and then lead to implementation challenges.



## JEDI Insight Area #2: Capital Flows

Data shows that start-ups and nonprofits led by non-white founders and executives and those from other marginalized communities receive a disproportionately smaller share of investment and grant funding compared to those with white leaders. Investments and grants flow most easily to individuals and organizations that already have strong assets, networks, and a “track record” of receiving funding from other sources – further perpetuating systemic, historic inequalities in the distribution of wealth. As such, potentially game-changing food waste reduction innovations may never get the funding they need. At the same time, we risk elevating solutions



to food waste that only resonate with a portion of the population, leaving aside enormous potential impact. With ReFED estimating that \$18 billion is needed each year to implement food waste reduction solutions, it is important that this money is invested with an eye to JEDI values to ensure that capital is helping drive the most impact.



### JEDI Insight Area #3: Food Assistance Infrastructure and Processes

Surplus food has become a key source of food for food assistance organizations, such as food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, food rescue, and other community service organizations. As such, they have become a key part of the food waste reduction strategy for many food companies. However, the food donation system has been designed with the needs of food donors in mind more than the needs of the recipients of the food. This results in distribution that does not always meet the needs of the end recipients in terms of access, dignity, and food preferences and requirements.



### JEDI Insight Area #4: Consumer Education Strategies

According to estimates from ReFED's Insights Engine, nearly 50% of surplus food occurs at the residential level from individuals and families, and surveys have shown that lower-income households waste a similar percentage of their food as higher-income households of the same size. Ensuring that low-income individuals have the right tools and education to fully use their food can help extend food budgets; this is especially important for consumers of donated and discounted food, which typically has a shorter remaining shelf-life. Food management skills can be learned, but only if the information is equitably accessible, as well as culturally relevant.



### JEDI Insight Area #5: Wasted Food Management

While the ultimate goal of food waste reduction efforts is to prevent food from going to waste in the first place, composting and anaerobic digestion are preferred destinations for uneaten food and scraps rather than landfill, incineration, or other disposal methods. Unfortunately, a range of factors – from service costs to facility locations to route availability – limit the accessibility of these options for marginalized groups. The siting of these facilities is also disproportionately located near marginalized communities.

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We understand that while we at ReFED are just starting to dig beneath the surface of a complex topic, others have been working in this area for decades, and we know that there is much more learning to do on our part. Our hope is that this report can be a conversation-starter, and we look forward to being a part of future efforts – including using our platform to amplify the voices of those that have gone unheard.

## QUICK LOOK:

# Examples of Intersections of Food Waste with JEDI and Potential Solutions



## JEDI Insight Area #1: Treatment of Workers in the Food System

### *Examples of Intersections*

- Undesirable frontline working conditions can make it difficult for workers to prioritize food waste reduction in their daily work.
- Different pay structures can incentivize actions that lead to waste.
- A lack of diverse representation in management-level food industry positions limits the range of voices available to discuss food waste solutions.

### *Potential Solutions*

- Improve working conditions in a way that builds a sense of shared purpose.
- Seek employee input to develop food waste reduction solutions.
- Compensate employees for actions and ideas that reduce waste.
- Incorporate hiring strategies to increase the amount of diversity in food business positions with management or decision-making power.



## JEDI Insight Area #2: Capital Flows

### *Examples of Intersections*

- Traditional funding processes can perpetuate injustices.
- A narrow definition of impact can limit the field of applicants unnecessarily.
- Decision-makers with limited diversity of perspectives and experiences may lack the insights necessary to create change.
- The structure of funding requirements can be a barrier for organizations led by or serving those from marginalized communities.
- Fear of doing something that is inadvertently offensive or insensitive can slow progress.

### *Potential Solutions*

- Conduct a review of your organization's funding processes to determine whether they need to evolve.
- Recognize the value of lived experience and community-led organizations.
- Create partnerships and opportunities to elevate unheard voices from marginalized communities.



### JEDI Insight Area #3: Food Assistance Infrastructure and Processes

#### *Examples of Intersections*

- Donated food does not always meet the needs of the organizations receiving it and can end up going unused.
- Dignity and choice are not always considered.
- Distribution locations are not always convenient for patrons.

#### *Potential Solutions*

- Develop a proactive plan for food donation that takes into account which foods are preferred by which recipient organizations.
- Provide choice and accommodating, dignified environments for food distribution.
- Increase funding for SNAP, WIC, and other food assistance programs.
- Create state or county level poverty guidelines.



### JEDI Insight Area #4: Consumer Education Strategies

#### *Examples of Intersections*

- There is a lack of tailored interventions to reach marginalized communities.

#### *Potential Solutions*

- Create explicit campaign strategies to reach specific diverse audiences.
- Serve campaign messaging to diverse audiences in an accessible way.



### JEDI Insight Area #5: Wasted Food Management

#### *Examples of Intersections*

- Lack of composting infrastructure – particularly localized infrastructure where the benefits are more readily accessible to the communities where services are located – leaves many marginalized neighborhoods with few composting options.
- Some composting facilities are located close to marginalized neighborhoods, as “NIMBY” concerns related to odors and pests keep them out of higher-income areas.
- Community composting and food scrap collection services are frequently fee-based, putting them out of reach for people on fixed incomes.

#### *Potential Solutions*

- Increase investments in composting infrastructure.
- Ensure that cost is not a barrier for people to access composting services.
- Explore innovative ways to collect food scraps from homes that are not served by existing composting businesses.



# Introduction

For several years, the ReFED team has been working to educate ourselves on how food waste reduction intersects with various inequities within the food system, as well as how our role in the food waste space and within the larger food ecosystem can be leveraged to advance progress. Creating a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive food system requires the input and efforts of all stakeholders, and we began this educational process with more questions than answers. We also feel strongly that inaction is not an option, and our intention is that this assessment serves as the beginning of a longer process of learning and growth.

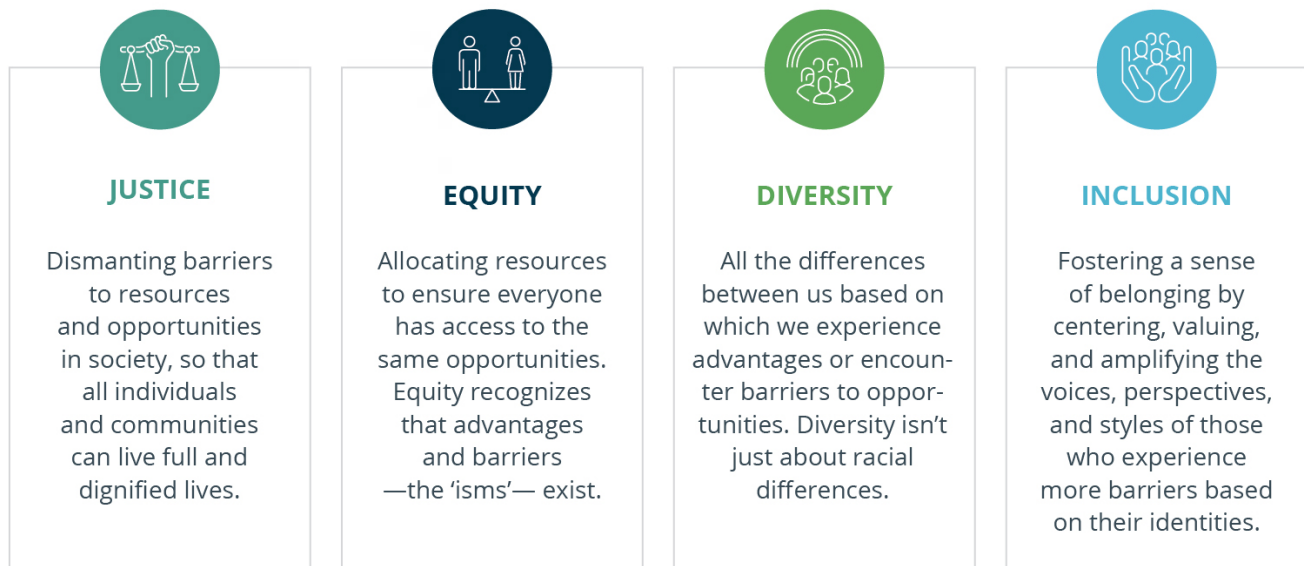
As an organization dedicated to food waste reduction, ReFED hopes to play an important role in helping to transform the food system for the better. Yet while the connections between food waste and sustainability and resilience are clear, its link to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) issues can often be harder to discern – beyond the critical role that food recovery plays in redistributing food at risk of going to waste to those in need. As such, we have conducted this landscape assessment to explore the intersection of food waste and JEDI issues, to start to define ReFED's role in furthering the dialogue, and to provide actionable recommendations and motivation for others in the space.

It is important to note that the reflections and recommendations in this report are intended to shine a light on ongoing discussions about this complex and multifaceted topic and to spark conversations among those interested in it, but we acknowledge the information presented here is far from comprehensive. We view it as a “work in progress,” as the general knowledge base – and our own learning – continues to evolve. We also understand that we are not the only ones exploring these intersections, as we have heard from our partners about parallel discussions and projects that aim to reduce wasted food using a JEDI lens. Due to our central role in the food waste discussion – along with available funding and staff resources and our collective appetite for learning – we saw an opportunity to collect and synthesize insights from the sector and share them widely to support those that are taking action, as well as to take action ourselves. We believe that having more voices involved will lead to more sustainable and successful actions, and we expect they will inspire us to continue to refine our learnings along the way.

We hope that this assessment serves as a piece of the puzzle, and that people feel inspired to continue this learning with us. Our goal is for this work to start to identify areas for improvement – both among the broader food waste community and within ReFED's ecosystem – and serve as a source of inspiration and ideas, as we collectively work to enhance justice and make room for voices that have historically been marginalized throughout the food system.

# What is JEDI?

We approached this project with the following working definitions:



Adapted from: <https://jedicolaborative.com/>

Note that we have made a conscious decision within our organization and this landscape assessment to use the acronym “JEDI” rather than the more frequently used “DEI” or “DEIJ” to highlight that justice is the ultimate goal of these efforts. As described by Yuka Nagashima, Executive Director of Food Shift, we believe that putting justice first is important because it is the end goal and can be achieved by creating equity, which is built on a foundation of diversity, which first and foremost requires inclusion.

The findings in this report focus primarily on the racial and socioeconomic aspects of diversity, as that is where we noted the biggest intersections within the food system and food waste specifically. We understand that there are many different aspects of diversity that have intersections with food waste, including gender, gender identity, sexuality, primary language, religion, citizenship status, age, and more. We chose race and socioeconomic status as a starting point, so that our report could have a narrower focus and scope to fit within our timeline and resources. But we have also touched on other aspects of JEDI as they arose in our research.

We also recognize that, due to a range of historical and ongoing inequities, there is a lot of overlap between race and socioeconomic status – more specifically that race can be a large indicator of socioeconomic status. We have tried to be specific when we are talking about one versus the other throughout this assessment; when we do not call one demographic facet out, please assume that we are talking about both together.

# Assessment Goals

Food waste and JEDI are both complex topics offering many avenues for exploration. As such, we defined two core goals to provide boundaries for this landscape assessment and to guide our work:

- 1** *Expand the understanding of JEDI connections within the food waste space:* We aimed to gain and share insights about how JEDI and food waste intersect and impact one another. By maintaining this narrow focus, we have not included discussion of intersections between JEDI and the broader food system where food waste is not an issue (although we know that these two things are highly interconnected).
- 2** *Provide insights that could lead to an evolution in programmatic strategies and execution for ReFED and for other stakeholders in the food waste space:* The insights collected from this review could inform how organizations like ReFED – as well as food businesses, solution providers, funders, government agencies, and other food system actors – can incorporate a JEDI lens into their existing and future work.

## Methodology

We undertook a qualitative review of the space via a series of stakeholder interviews. Our primary research questions were:

- 1** What existing inequities in the food system lead to more food going to waste?
- 2** What efforts to reduce food waste might perpetuate or mitigate these inequities?

To ensure that the research was being informed by a range of expertise and experience, we conducted more than 30 stakeholder interviews with subjects offering diverse representation from food system stakeholder types according to geography, gender, age, and race. We also spoke with individuals in sectors adjacent to the food system, including transportation, city and state government, academia, labor unions, and funders.



During the period of March 2022 through May 2023, we spoke with the following individuals:

**CHARISMA ACEY**

FOOD LABOR RESEARCH CENTER

**MICHELLE ARGUELLES**

AFRESH

**RICKY ASHENFELTER**

SPOILER ALERT

**ALI BERMAN**

THE KROGER CO.

**SHEENA BROWN**

DECOLONIZING WEALTH PROJECT

**CELESTE CHAVIS**

MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

**LISA CLAYBON**

COMPASS GROUP

**CATHERINE COMPITELLO**

PLENTIFUL

**LAUREN COMPITELLO**

LOAVES & FISHES FAMILY KITCHEN

**HAYDEN DANSKY**

BOULDER FOOD RESCUE

**HOLLY ELMORE**

ELEMENTAL IMPACT

**JEN FRANCO**

FOOD SHIFT

**VANESSA GARCIA POLANCO**

NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS COALITION

**MARVIN HAYES**

BALTIMORE COMPOST COLLECTIVE

**JOANNA JARAMILLO**

WHOLESUM

**SOPHIA LENARZ-COY**

THE FOOD GROUP

**CLARISSA LIBERTELLI**

INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL SELF-RELIANCE

**BRIDGETT LUTHER**

CRADLE TO CRADLE PRODUCTS INNOVATION INSTITUTE

**JAWANZA MALONE**

WIEBOLDT FOUNDATION

**MEGAN MATTHEWS**

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**AMI MCREYNOLDS**

FEEDING AMERICA

**MARCO MERRICK**

CITY OF BALTIMORE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

**YUKA NAGASHIMA**

FOOD SHIFT

**MICHEL NISCHAN**

WHOLESOME WAVE

**LINDA NORRIS-WALDT**

US COMPOSTING COUNCIL

**CURTIS OGDEN**

INTERACTION INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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CITY OF BALTIMORE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

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GANAZ

**MATT ROGERS**

AGSOCIO

**KAREN SPILLER**

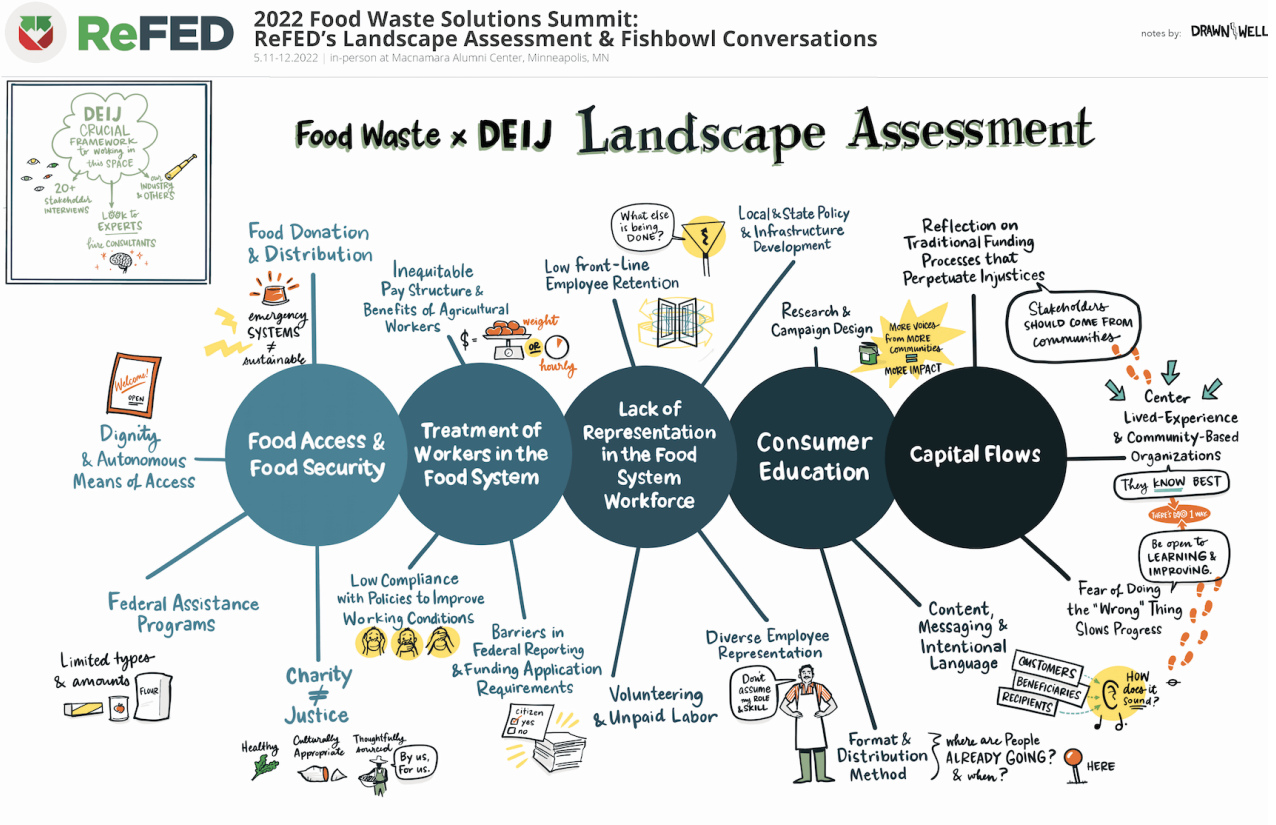
UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE

**DAVID TSWAMUNO**

FAIRBRIDGE PARK

All of these discussions were then analyzed by ReFED to determine common themes, glean specific examples, and identify individual insights that informed ReFED's perspective as we synthesized the findings into five "Insight Areas."

We took our initial Insight Areas to ReFED's [2022 Food Waste Solutions Summit](#) in Minneapolis, MN, where we hosted two fishbowl-style discussions to elicit reactions, feedback, and new ideas from attendees, which helped broaden our understanding of the issues and led to some important rethinking of how best to present our findings. The graphic below was captured during these discussions and features a first iteration of the Insight Areas.



Graphic by live notetaker Lisa Troutman of Drawnwell

# Food Waste x JEDI: Insight Areas

The five Insight Areas outlined below represent a synthesis of our findings. Each Insight Area provides a description that contextualizes its relation to food waste, explains examples of key JEDI issues, and shares recommendations for potential solutions. We have also included several short case studies to highlight some of the work currently being done within each Insight Area.



Treatment of Workers  
in the Food System



Capital Flows



Food Assistance Infrastructure  
and Processes



Consumer Education Strategies



Food Disposal Infrastructure







JEDI INSIGHT AREA #1

# Treatment of Workers in the Food System

## Food Waste Connection

Frontline workers – many of whom come from marginalized communities – are the fuel that keeps our food system operating, and they are critical to any efforts to reduce food waste. Whether they are harvesting crops on the farm, working the line at a meat processing plant, stocking shelves in a grocery store, or serving meals in a restaurant, frontline workers are the ones who are tasked with implementing waste reduction initiatives. Yet parts of the food system are plagued with long-standing inequities, including low wages and long hours, few benefits or growth opportunities, and poor or even dangerous working conditions, that make it difficult for workers to prioritize food waste reduction efforts – particularly when these efforts are not prioritized by management.

## Examples of JEDI and Food Waste Intersections

Undesirable frontline working conditions can make it difficult for workers to prioritize food waste reduction in their daily work.

While not the case in every business, many food workers feel undervalued and unappreciated in their positions due to low wages, long hours, and limited benefits. Across all sectors, these working conditions can make prioritizing food waste reduction a difficult proposition. Workers are not always consulted or asked to provide input on food waste reduction initiatives, even though they are the ones who have the most experience with the processes and procedures that need to be adjusted. And even when workers are en-

listed to participate in a food waste reduction initiative, a lack of incentives (e.g., extra pay or other bonuses) can make it difficult for them to prioritize its implementation. Here's a snapshot of each sector:

### *FARM*

Generally more physically demanding than other sectors, farm work can require the use of dangerous equipment, repetitive movements, a stooped position, exposure to extreme heat and other elements, and more. Additionally, farm workers are exempt from a range of worker protections that benefit other food system sectors and industries, including the right to unionize under the National Labor Relations Act. These undesirable working conditions and low pay lead to a lack of labor, which in turn leads to produce being left unharvested.

### *MANUFACTURING/PROCESSING*

Manufacturing, particularly meat processing, can involve the use of dangerous equipment, repetitive movements, exposure to extreme cold, frequent standing in close proximity to coworkers, long hours, and more. In such an environment, it can be unrealistic to expect employees to focus on food waste reduction, especially in situations where there is a greater risk for injury.

### *DISTRIBUTION*

Workers that distribute food can be required to lift heavy loads and be exposed to extreme cold and other elements. Those that transport goods via heavy trucks can face additional difficulties related to driving, including physical challenges from being in a sedentary position for prolonged periods of time, lack of sleep due to "pay by the mile" compensation structures, and mental stress from extreme road conditions. This can make it difficult for distribution workers to prioritize some of the operating procedures that lead to food waste reduction, especially if it is something that their managers do not necessarily prioritize by investing in the proper equipment, like enhanced cold storage, temperature monitoring, and other food waste solutions.

### *RETAIL*

There is a range of positions within a typical grocery store or other food retailer, but many can require workers to stand for extended periods at checkout registers or within various product departments. Shifts can be long, and employees in a customer-facing role can face the added stress of interacting with the public. All of this could lead to lower motivation to reduce food waste, for example, by not taking the time to scan items out properly (which would provide important data points for tracking a store's waste) or not carefully handling produce to ensure a longer shelf life. Additionally, high

employee turnover can lead to less of a base for specialized knowledge required in departments like seafood and meat.

### *RESTAURANTS/FOODSERVICE*

Like retail, there is a range of positions for frontline workers at restaurants and food-service businesses. Some require frequent time standing and/or walking between customers and kitchens, sometimes carrying heavy loads on trays. Back of house positions can involve the use of dangerous equipment. Shifts can be long, and employees in a customer-facing role can face the added stress of interacting with the public. This can make prioritizing food waste a challenge, as employees who are struggling to keep up with a fast pace during busy periods or who do not feel fairly compensated may not take the extra time to practice waste-saving techniques, including trimming products carefully to maximize their utilization, packaging leftover food for donation, etc.

It's no surprise then that many businesses have difficulty hiring for frontline positions, which can lead to a transient workforce with less job knowledge, as well as labor shortages during peak periods – both of which can result in perfectly edible food going to waste. As became apparent during the COVID-19 closures of 2020, crops still grow and need to be harvested, even when there are no workers to pick and pack.

### Different pay structures can incentivize actions that lead to waste.

“Piece-rate” pay systems – which compensate workers based on how much they are able to produce during working hours – are common on farms and some other food production environments. In some instances, these types of pay structures can create a rushed working environment, with workers focused on maximizing their output at the expense of meeting product standards – e.g., picking as many apples as possible during a shift with a “pay by the pound” compensation structure, even though the apples are under-ripe and won't meet strict appearance standards, which ultimately leads to waste.

### A lack of diverse representation in management-level food industry positions limits the range of voices available to discuss food waste solutions.

A lack of diverse voices results in a limitation of ideas. When workers don't “see themselves” in positions of authority, they can develop an us vs. them mentality that makes them less likely to feel engaged in their work – including food waste reduction initiatives. Conversely, when managers feel removed from the workers they oversee – for example, if they don't speak the primary language of their employees – they are less likely to seek ideas and insights from them.

## Potential Solutions

### *Improve working conditions to build a sense of shared purpose.*

Food businesses that ensure a safe and comfortable environment, provide an option for shorter shifts when needed, offer regular breaks, and generally make workers feel like more than a “cog in the wheel” may find lower turnover rates and a more motivated workforce – important attributes for implementing a successful food waste reduction initiative.

### *Seek employee input to develop food waste reduction solutions.*

The most obvious people to engage for ideas on how to cut waste are the workers closest to it. They are the best people to identify changes to operational processes and should be consulted when developing waste reduction programs.

### *Compensate employees for actions and ideas that reduce waste.*

Look for options besides “piece-rate” systems - for example, paying employees hourly, yet still requiring a reasonable level of output within that period. Provide a bonus for employees who submit a waste reduction idea that is successfully implemented, or gamify waste reduction and challenge employees to see who can reduce the most waste in a given period. Providing surplus food to employees after their shifts can be an incentive that also directly reduces the likelihood of it going to waste.

### *Incorporate hiring strategies to increase the amount of diversity in food business positions with management or decision-making power.*

Increasing the number of individuals from marginalized and/or underrepresented communities in higher-level roles has the capacity to strengthen solutions aimed at reducing wasted food through more innovative policies, higher frontline employee retention, the creation of organizational cultures that promote idea-sharing and a commitment to sustainability, and more. These can all lead to positive food waste outcomes.



## Case Studies



Wholesum is a leading grower and shipper of 100% organic, Fair Trade Certified™ fresh produce. The third-generation family farming operation has more than 90 years of experience and is dedicated to creating a more noble food production system that nourishes people and the planet through responsible growing, organic production, equitable labor practices, and environmental protection. Since obtaining its Fair Trade certification in 2012, Wholesum's farming communities have received more than \$9 million in community development funds generated by sales of Fair Trade Certified produce. These funds help address needs and challenges faced by community members in Wholesum's producing regions. Fair Trade USA™ has also helped Wholesum to amplify the farmworker voice, opening new avenues of equal representation and dialogue.

At Wholesum Farms Sonora, funds have been invested to build the infrastructure for an entire community of workers, including a community center equipped with computers, books, and access to the Internet, multiple recreational areas, a mini-market, and a tortilla factory. The projects are open to Wholesum employees, their families, and the community at large. In 2022, a new project was implemented to bring women's health to the forefront by hosting an annual health clinic offering onsite preventative health checkups for women at the farm.



In a survey conducted by the Fair Trade USA impact team, 73% of workers responded that their trust in company leadership had increased, and 76% perceived a positive change in the company since the changes were implemented after Fair Trade Certification was received.

Wholesum recognizes that the cornerstone of an efficient production system and food supply chain is the people behind the produce. When workers are treated fairly and with respect, there is greater satisfaction in the workplace and a higher level of trust in company leadership. This leads to greater efficiency in the workplace and can help reduce issues of product quality and food waste. Importantly, promoting inclusive and equitable policies and



practices not only fosters a sense of belonging, but it helps retain employees and makes the company stand out as an attractive and competitive employer compared to other similar operations.



Knowing that more than 50% of culinary school graduates are women, yet fewer than 30% of culinary roles throughout the industry are held by women, Compass Group’s leaders and Human Resources and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion teams established the “Women In Culinary” program. The program addresses inequities and opportunity gaps that exist within the hospitality industry by intentionally prioritizing women chefs for dedicated training, leadership development programs, and advancement opportunities. Launched in 2019, dozens of female culinarians from throughout Compass’ family of businesses have participated in this program.

Importantly, the program affords Compass Group the opportunity to listen and learn in a safe space. By listening, they learned that their female culinarians want “kind kitchens,” in which they will continue to receive recognition for their culinary skills and ensure their voices are heard. Career development and career progression are equally important in supporting women in culinary. Results from the program include higher engagement, retention, and promotion of participants vs. non-participants.

The apex of the program is a “Chef Showcase” that advances kind kitchens, strengthens female culinary networks, provides exposure to executive and industry leaders, partners with allies, and creates dedicated time and space for program participants to grow together. The chefs collaborate in teams to create culinary masterpieces and then share their creations with event attendees. While the program is an annual celebration, Compass’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion team collaborates with the Talent & Development team to provide ongoing development, training, and community-building initiatives.



“We can change how we work together and reshape how we take care of our guests and teams by leaning in and providing a community of support,” says Aleshia McMath, Vice President, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Compass Group North America.

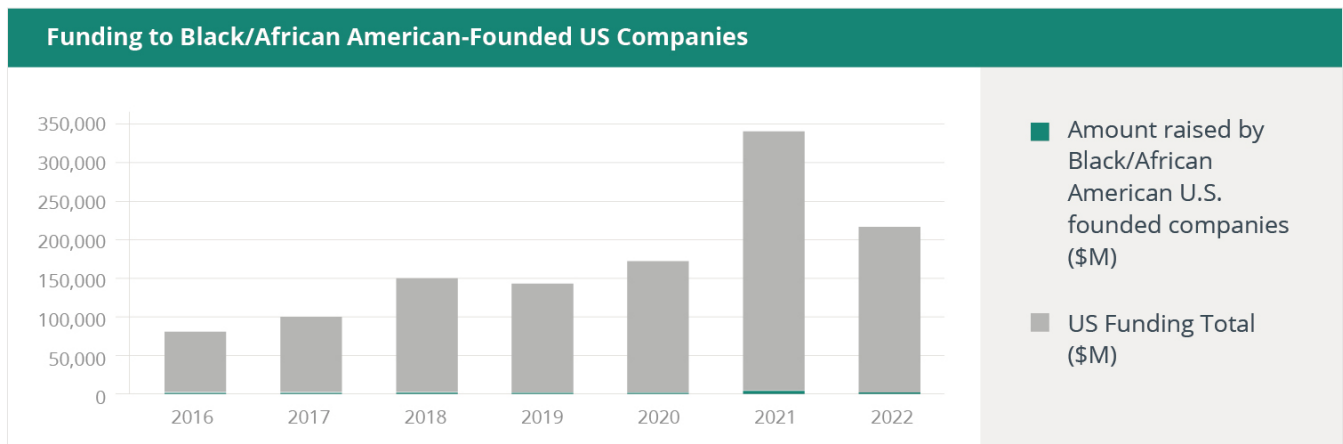


JEDI INSIGHT AREA #2

## Capital Flows

### Food Waste Connection

Studies have shown that start-ups and nonprofits led by non-white founders and executives and those from other marginalized communities receive a disproportionately smaller share of investment and grant funding compared to those with white leaders. For example, the share of funding going to U.S. companies with Black founders is a small fraction of the total amount of funding.



Adapted from [Funding Across the BIPOC Investment Community](#) by Bay Street Capital Holdings

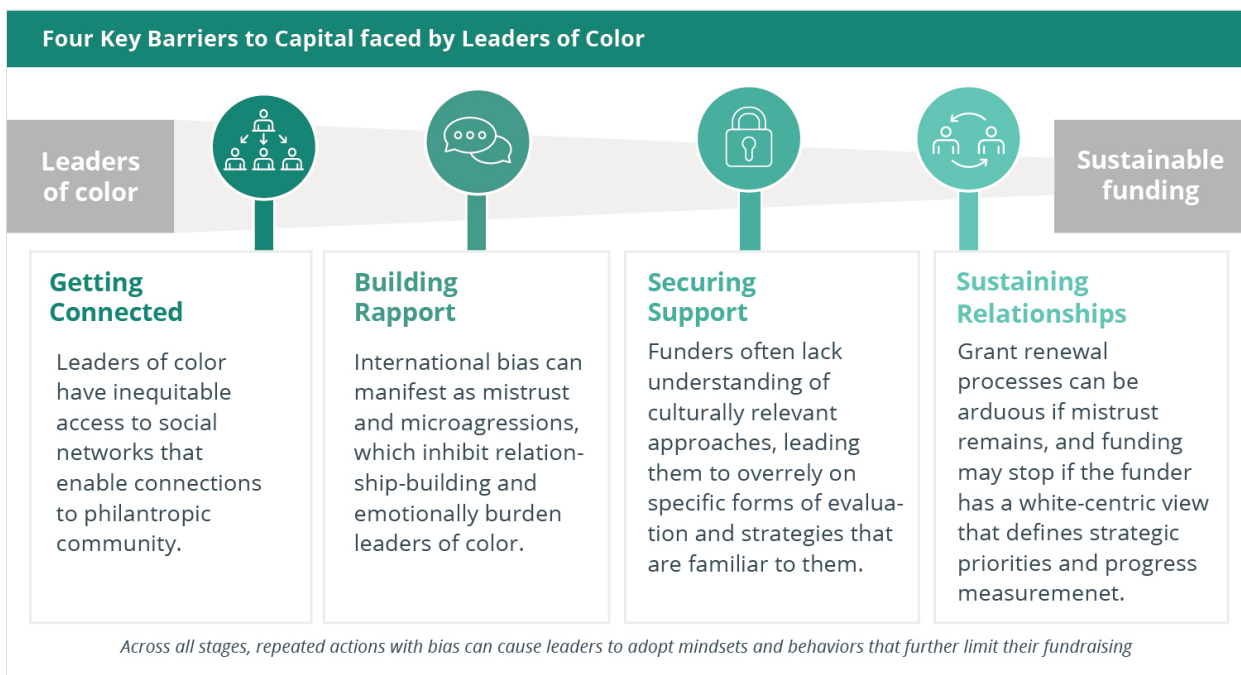
Although the data referenced in these studies are not specific to the food waste space, there is no reason to believe that this sector would be immune from the biases that perpetuate these funding patterns. Investments and grants flow most easily to individuals and organizations that already have strong assets, networks, and a “track record” of receiving funding from other sources – further perpetuating systemic, historic inequalities in the distribution of wealth. As such, potentially game-changing food waste reduction innovations may never get the funding they need. At the same time, we risk elevating solutions to food waste that only resonate with a portion of the

population, leaving aside enormous potential impact. With ReFED estimating that \$18 billion is needed each year to implement food waste reduction solutions, it is important that this money is invested with an eye to JEDI values to ensure that capital is helping drive the most impact.

## Examples of JEDI and Food Waste Intersections

Traditional funding processes can perpetuate injustices.

Extensive application and reporting requirements common in funding processes assume that applicant organizations have the personnel and organizational bandwidth to spend a lot of time developing their application materials, as well as responding to detailed requests for information during the due diligence and reporting processes. In doing so, these processes tend to favor organizations – often white-led – that already have enough funding to employ dedicated fundraising and reporting staff. It is worth bearing in mind that many pieces of information that funders request during the application, diligence, and reporting processes serve as proxies for something deeper and more difficult to quantify, especially when they are not physically present to observe impact play out directly. Funders compensate for this information asymmetry by making requests for documentation and metrics, and it is easy to lose sight of why the information is important. Even well-meaning requests for information during the application or diligence process – like asking to view human resources or JEDI policies and procedures – may backfire, as their existence may say more about how well-resourced an organization already is versus how committed they are to operating as the documents describe.



Adapted from [The Bridgespan Group](#)

## A narrow definition of impact can unnecessarily limit the field of applicants.

Impact-oriented funders typically have their own theories of change, which usually include a set of metrics that they expect would provide some information to them about whether companies in their portfolios are progressing toward the positive outcomes they want to see. However, when funders push their metrics on to companies in their portfolio, they might be creating reporting demands without actually learning much about the real impact of the company or program. For example, “scale” is often considered to be a program’s primary measure of success, and while many metrics are dedicated to counting various things – people served, tons of food waste diverted, meals saved, etc. – not all solutions are designed to scale, at least not in an accelerated time frame. That means that funders could be missing out on promising projects, just because they do not achieve a particular measure of impact. In many investment and grant funding applications, there is no space provided for organizations to offer additional information and context to demonstrate the impact of their services/resources using their own terms and metrics of success, which limits how the funders will understand the impact potential.

## Decision-makers with limited diversity of perspectives and experiences may lack the insight necessary to create change.

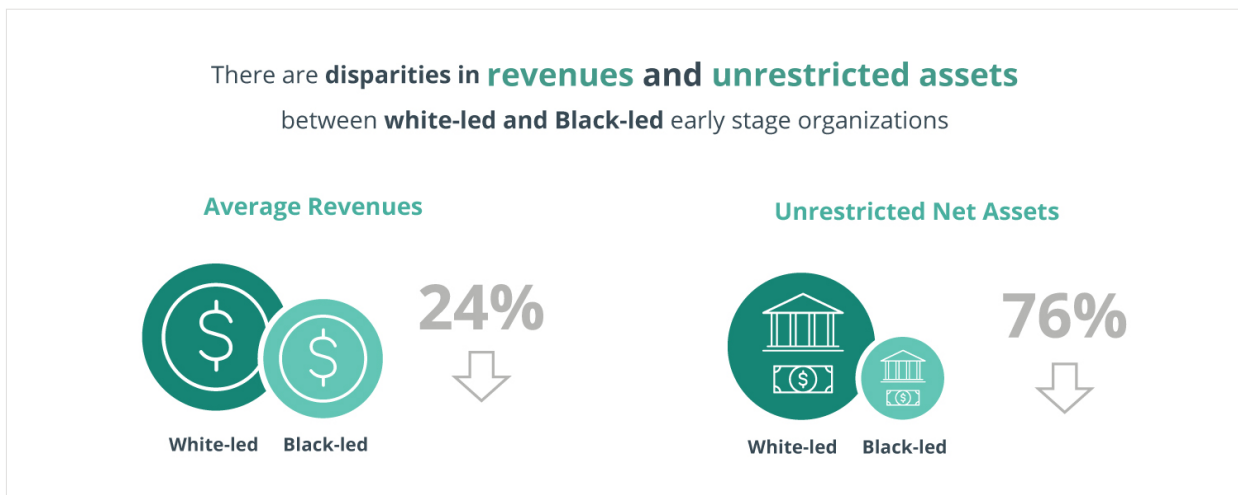
Across the funding landscape, disparities in funding going to non-white and female founders in the venture capital world is often explained by the number of white people in positions with decision-making power. This imbalance introduces the risk that the food waste solutions that do receive funding are those that will work well for one group of people with similar attributes but might not be the right solutions for everyone in an entire system. When trying to solve universal, persistent problems like food waste, it is critical to have everyone’s voice represented at the decision-making table.

## The structure of funding requirements can be a barrier for organizations led by or serving those from marginalized communities.

In some cases, the structure of a funding opportunity itself can preclude a diverse set of organizations from even applying. For instance, grants that stipulate a “one-size-fits-all” approach to how much funding can be spent on administration, fundraising, or community-facing programming, along with loans with “one-size-fits-all” payment schedules, can be a barrier. In these examples, as with funding with very prescribed milestones to access additional tranches of money or grants that require organizations to cover expenses upfront and



then seek reimbursement, there is no room for the flexibility to cope with the uncertainties of operating an early stage and/or small/medium-sized business or nonprofit organization. Organizations that can afford to comfortably seek inflexible funding are those that have access to other, more flexible funding that can see them through challenging times – which once again favors those that are already more well-funded.



Adapted from [Echoing Green Applicant Information, 990 Data from GuideStar, The Bridgespan Group](#)

Fear of doing something that is inadvertently offensive or insensitive can slow progress.

Getting funds to the most effective programs and initiatives is a learning process, and sometimes funders can feel ill-equipped to incorporate JEDI values into their funding process. This can create its own inertia for inactivity. The paralysis that comes from that lack of knowledge can keep funding organizations from learning and improving their processes and policies.

## Potential Solutions

*Conduct a review of your organization's funding processes to determine whether they need to evolve.*

Many funders don't recognize the barriers that are built into their funding processes – and when some applicants are able to provide the necessary information, it can be easy to assume that all applicants should be able to do the same. Enlist external input from a range



of organizations – including your peers – to examine your funding requirements and provide honest feedback. Are your requests too onerous for organizations in different stages of maturity or that are consistently underfunded? Take a hard look at what information is absolutely critical to making a funding decision, and whether or not additional information that is more readily accessible to different types of organizations would be just as illuminating. A helpful exercise is to go through your funding applications and requests and write out the rationale for each one as though you are explaining it to someone who is applying. You may discover redundant questions or requests for information that you don't use. An approach that values the applicant's time and provides them the space to describe their impact on their own terms will go a long way in building trust between the funder and the grantee or investee.

### *Recognize the value of lived experience and community-led organizations.*

Programs and the distribution of resources could be made more equitable, impactful, and inclusive if funders incorporated a mechanism to explicitly value lived experience. Similarly, building strong relationships with community-led organizations and movements can lead to greater impact, as they are typically the most familiar with the needs and challenges of the communities they are serving. Importantly, these organizations can help funders frame out problems and potential solutions in the initial stages of the funding process by helping educate funders on what a community's needs really are – but be sure to compensate them for their time commitment.

*Note: We are specifically referring to community-led organizations, as opposed to community-based organizations, the latter of which may not always have the extra “on the ground” experience that can potentially lead to sustained change once an intervention is completed.*

### *Create partnerships and opportunities to elevate unheard voices from marginalized communities.*

Organizations that are led by white, upper/middle-class individuals and/or have successful fundraising strategies have the opportunity to leverage their platform to help organizations with funding challenges to gain traction in the space. This could look like:

- Using social capital and introducing your own funders to organizations that are struggling to raise money;
- Advocating to be a co-grantor or a reference for an application; and
- Sharing examples that demonstrate the success (financial and/or impact) of organizations founded or led by non-white or female leaders – especially when they are not singled out as being “diverse” but rather simply because they are doing a great job.

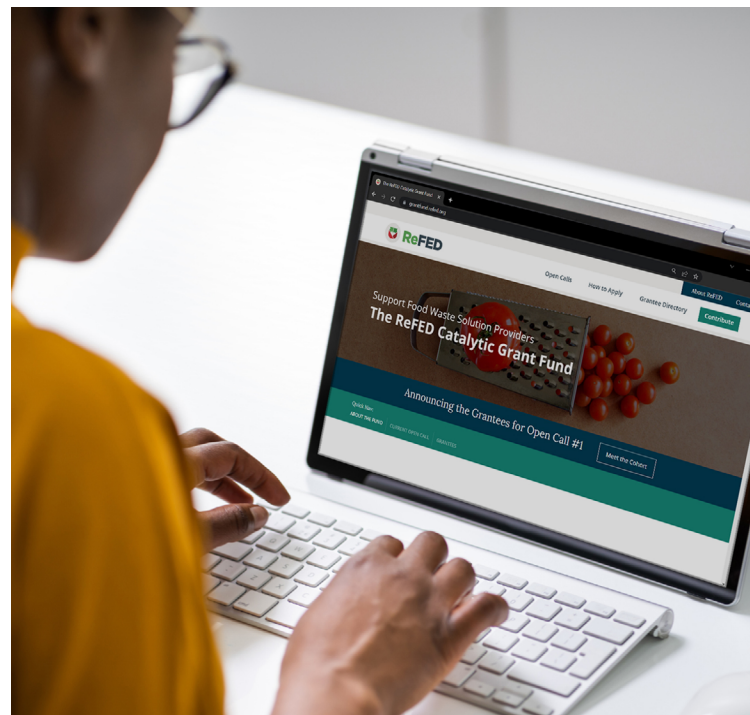
# Case Studies



In 2022, ReFED launched its Catalytic Grant Fund to accelerate the development and scaling of solutions to food waste across the value chain. Believing that in order to maximize the impact of the Grant Fund, it would be important to hear ideas from a diverse set of organizations, we sought to make its funding process as inclusive and accessible as possible. We started by hosting a [listening tour](#) to hear from the universe of food waste solution providers with direct experience seeking grant funding. We also engaged a consultant with expertise in JEDI training and deep experience in both designing funding processes and seeking funding for consultation and technical assistance.

Through the insights gleaned from these activities, we designed our process to focus on:

- Prioritizing transparency by sharing our criteria, processes, and timelines publicly and providing prospective applicants the opportunity to speak directly with members of the Grant Fund team to answer questions;
- Designing a two-step process that allowed applicants to submit a brief letter of intent as an initial step before a full application was requested, as a way to respect applicants' time;
- Stripping out as many extraneous asks in the application as possible and being clear about why we were asking the questions we asked;
- Creating selection criteria that recognized impact on the applicant's terms, that valued their lived experiences, and that remained open to different ways of demonstrating a track record of success;
- Establishing an Independent Review Committee with relevant experience and subject matter expertise related to the thematic focus of the open call to contribute fresh perspectives and challenge our assumptions and biases; and



- Offering to provide feedback on submissions with the intent of supporting applicants' work and their pursuit for other funding opportunities.

With a current grant portfolio of 10 organizations, we're so far encouraged by how this process has fostered a deeper and more collaborative relationship with our grantees, and with the many other impactful solution providers from all backgrounds that we were unable to support financially. That trust and understanding will allow us to be a better partner, and ultimately, we believe, to unlock more impact.



Fairbridge Park is a venture and private equity investment firm based in New York. Their mission is to be the partner of choice for entrepreneurs who are tackling meaningful societal problems. Their thoughtful investment philosophy and focus on prioritizing founders that have lived experience allows them to stand out as a funder in the food waste space.

Fairbridge Park's approach to investing is unique, as it aims to address common JEDI challenges and barriers in the funding space by focusing on the following aspects:

1. ***Empathy and lived experience:*** Prioritizing founders who have empathy and a personal connection to the problem they are solving. Entrepreneurs with lived experience can better understand the needs of the communities they serve and design products that meet those needs effectively.
2. ***Bridging the service quality gap:*** Supporting mission-driven entrepreneurs who are developing innovative solutions to address the needs of underserved low-income communities. By partnering with these entrepreneurs, Fairbridge Park aims to close the gap in service quality between high and low-income consumers. This involves providing accessible pricing, better outcomes, and broad access to high-quality products and services.
3. ***Resilience and human flourishing:*** Fairbridge Park's goal is to build resilience in local underserved communities and promote human flourishing. By supporting companies that provide solutions in foundational areas of financial/economic health, physical health, and the environment, they aim to empower low-income individuals and enhance their overall well-being.
4. ***Environmental health and food waste:*** Food waste is a critical issue that intersects with their investment mandate, particularly in terms of environmental health. Food waste significant-



ly contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. Fairbridge Park recognizes that environmental issues are intimately linked to physical and economic health, and the negative impacts of climate change disproportionately affect low-income populations. Therefore, they seek companies that address food waste and promote health, wellness, nutrition, and food security.

5. ***Technology and commercial innovation:*** Fairbridge Park believes in leveraging technology as a tool to amplify the quality, delivery, and accessibility of their companies' products. Additionally, they explore other forms of commercial innovation, such as creative approaches to capital stacking and strategic partnerships with governments and nonprofits. These collaborations enable them to maximize the impact of their investments, meet the hurdle rates of their fund, and drive positive change.

Overall, Fairbridge Park's work is guided by the belief that commercial innovation, alongside governments and nonprofits, plays a vital role in addressing socioeconomic and environmental challenges. By investing in mission-driven entrepreneurs and supporting scalable solutions, they aim to create a more just, equitable, and inclusive society for all.





JEDI INSIGHT AREA #3

# Food Assistance Infrastructure and Processes

## Food Waste Connection

Surplus food has become a key source of food for food assistance organizations, such as food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other community service organizations. As such, they have become a key part of the food waste reduction strategy for many food companies. However, the food donation system has been designed with the needs of food donors in mind more than the needs of the recipients of the food. This results in distribution that does not always meet the needs of the end recipients in terms of access, dignity, and food preferences and requirements.

## Examples of JEDI and Food Waste Intersections

Donated food does not always meet the needs of the organizations receiving it and can end up going unused.

Food donation is generally reactive, only addressing the immediate need of rescuing whatever food is at risk of going to waste in the near future – regardless of whether it is the most appropriate food for a specific community that’s served by the food assistance organization. Not all organizations want all types of food, and donating food that isn’t useful to a recipient organization can result in them having to dispose of it if it ends up going unwanted by its customers – and pay any associated costs for doing so.

Dignity and choice are not always considered.

Pre-packaged food boxes from food banks and food pantries do not always allow for personal choice, especially when it comes to dietary, cultural, or religious food preferences. Without



choice, people can receive food that is unfamiliar to them, and they may not have the capacity (e.g., necessary kitchen tools, knowledge of how to cook, etc.) or desire to consume or prepare it. This can lead to that food going to waste.

### Distribution locations are not always convenient for patrons.

Food banks and food pantries are not always located in areas that are the most accessible to their target demographic; they may not be located on or near a public transportation route (and when they are, the distance along that transit route could be too time-consuming), or they may not be open during hours that best align with the work schedule of people who work during the day. This can lead to an increase in on-site food waste at food banks and food pantries, especially as many donated food items are often close to their expiration date and therefore have less time to be consumed.

## Potential Solutions

*Develop a proactive plan for food donation that takes into account which foods are preferred by which recipient organizations.*

Businesses can explore the recipient organizations within their area to determine which food types each prefers. Relationships can be established with multiple organizations to ensure that none is left with food that could become a burden if it is unwanted by its customers.

*Provide choice and accommodating, dignified environments for food distribution.*

Food assistance agencies should take steps to ensure a welcoming, convenient, and inclusive environment for their clients. This may include:

- Increasing the number of locations and hours of operation;
- Intentionally fostering a dignified experience;
- Providing as much choice as possible in terms of number and type of products;
- Intentionally using accessible technology (e.g., self check-out, ride-share and delivery applications, and online order and pick-up systems); and
- Partnering with nontraditional locations that clients already frequent (grocery stores, community centers, etc.).

They may also want to survey their clientele to better understand preferences and reflect

those preferences in their donor communications. Furthermore, many people are more likely to seek assistance from others inside their cultural group or affiliation. Therefore, if food banks and food pantries are managed and operated by a diverse group of people, they are more likely to attract a diverse clientele.

### *Increase funding for SNAP, WIC, and other food assistance programs.*

Federal food assistance programs give people more autonomy over their food choices, making a wider variety of items – potentially those that are more culturally appropriate or dietary specific and would therefore be more readily eaten – more accessible. Increased funding to these programs, as well as potential subsidies to help with kitchen equipment and transportation to grocery stores and farmers markets, would both enable dignified nourishment for food insecure people, as well as reduce the amount of food that people may wind up wasting due to a lack of knowledge or comfort with limited food options they do not know how to prepare and eat.

### *Create state or county level poverty guidelines.*

There is inequity in current funding levels due to the federal Poverty Guideline not accounting for differences in cost of living across states (except in Alaska and Hawaii) or counties. Providing state- or county-level guidelines would provide a more realistic budget for those living in higher-cost areas, so that they can purchase healthy, nutritious, and culturally relevant food that would not end up going to waste.

## Case Studies



Plentiful is a free, easy-to-use reservation system for food pantries and the people they serve. It was created by the NYC Food Assistance Collaborative to improve dignity and efficiency at food pantries by providing agency and choice for food insecure people, who often aren't given those options. It is available in nine languages, increasing access for non-English speakers, and can also be operated via SMS for people with limited access to mobile applications.

Currently, Plentiful is one of the only applications that is actually in the hands of people experiencing food insecurity. This means that users are able to first choose when and how to use the service, which is crucial for the unpredictable nature of experiencing food insecurity. It can be difficult to find current information on food pantries, so by listing up-to-date opening hours, customer qualification requirements, food types, and wait times, users can be sure they are getting the information they need to inform their choices. This has led to average user wait time at food pantries being reduced from around 90 minutes to approximately six minutes, which is a critical time savings for those with difficulty taking time off from work, managing childcare, etc. In total, Plentiful has provided a reservation system for 576 pantries across New York City boroughs, connecting more than 1.2 million users to available food by facilitating over 7 million pantry visits.



While it is central to their technology and mission, CEO Catherine Compitello is forthright about their current state of operations pertaining to JEDI initiatives. Like many in the industry, she states that they are still learning but are also actively developing strategies to be more intentional about incorporating JEDI into their operations and mission.



Loaves & Fishes Family Kitchen, located in San Jose, California, provides hot and nutritious prepared meals, delivered and served to feed hungry families, children, seniors, veterans, students, and disabled individuals throughout California's Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. All the guests they serve are low-income, and providing this access to nutritious meals at no cost is core to their mission.

Their pioneering "A La Carte" program goes beyond a typical food recovery approach by using custom-built, temperature-controlled vehicles that are designed like traditional food trucks. This



allows the program to collect recovered meals from corporate cafes and institutional food services and then distribute them directly to people in food-insecure neighborhoods. This eliminates the inefficiencies of visiting a food bank or food pantry or returning to their kitchen before distributing the meals. That mobility, combined with the food truck approach, allows guests to receive the meals they need in a supportive, dignified, and no-cost manner.

In 2018, Stanford University signed on as the pilot institution behind the effort, packaging surplus food from its campus dining halls, and in 2019, Facebook (today Meta Platforms, Inc.) joined the A La Carte food recovery activities. In 2020, Loaves & Fishes Family Kitchen assumed operational control of the program.

Currently, the Loaves & Fishes A La Carte program partners with public school districts and low-income residential housing providers throughout Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, where they distribute meals to their low-income guests onsite.

The service has allowed Loaves & Fishes to triple their entire meal service capacity from 550,000 meals/year to nearly two million meals/year. Loaves & Fishes has become the largest provider of prepared meals in the entire Bay Area, distributing meals at 135 distribution sites. Since its inception, the A La Carte program has recovered more than 2.3 million pounds of food that otherwise would have gone to landfill or compost, resulting in the reduction of more than 2,391 metric tons of GHG emissions.

In addition to the A La Carte program, Loaves & Fishes was the first non-profit organization in the United States to acquire and put into service a Harp Renewables aerobic biodigester in early 2022, making Loaves & Fishes a zero-food waste organization.





JEDI INSIGHT AREA #4

# Consumer Education Strategies

## Food Waste Connection

According to estimates from ReFED's Insights Engine, nearly 50% of surplus food occurs at the residential level from individuals and families, and surveys have shown that lower-income households waste a similar percentage of their food as higher-income households of the same size. Ensuring that lower-income people have the right tools and education to fully use their food can help extend food budgets; this is especially important for consumers of donated and discounted food, which typically has a shorter remaining shelf-life. Food management skills can be learned, but only if the information is equitably accessible and culturally relevant.

## Examples of JEDI and Food Waste Intersections

There is a lack of tailored interventions to reach marginalized communities.

Consumer education is a key strategy for reducing household food waste, having been successfully implemented in countries such as the United Kingdom. However, U.S.-based campaigns have not yet been tailored in a way that is relevant to the culture, language, time constraints, information sources, and other aspects necessary to reach diverse audiences.



## Potential Solutions

### *Create explicit campaign strategies to reach specific diverse audiences.*

Creating campaigns to reach specific target audiences rather than simply translating existing materials originally designed for a general population can create a stronger connection with the messaging. Reaching a diverse audience begins during campaign design by including a diverse population in the research that informs the campaign. This will ensure the messaging and suggested interventions are relevant for those audiences. Messaging should be inclusive of a wide variety of food types that take into account the purchasing habits of different cultures, incomes, ages, physical and mental abilities, access to transportation, ability to store food, education levels, and more. Potential campaign topics could include proper food storage and management, the cost of wasted food, menu planning, repurposing leftovers, and appropriate portion sizes, as well as more general information about food waste and its impacts.

### *Serve campaign messaging to diverse audiences in an accessible way.*

Resources should be made available in many different formats, including audio, visual, written text, and different languages. Campaigns should use appropriate distribution channels to create equitable access to information. Beyond targeted media, this could include places already part of daily routines, such as churches, gyms, shopping centers, festivals, parks, daycare centers, and more. Language choices can also influence the accessibility of messages, as certain words and terms can be viewed negatively by different target audiences.

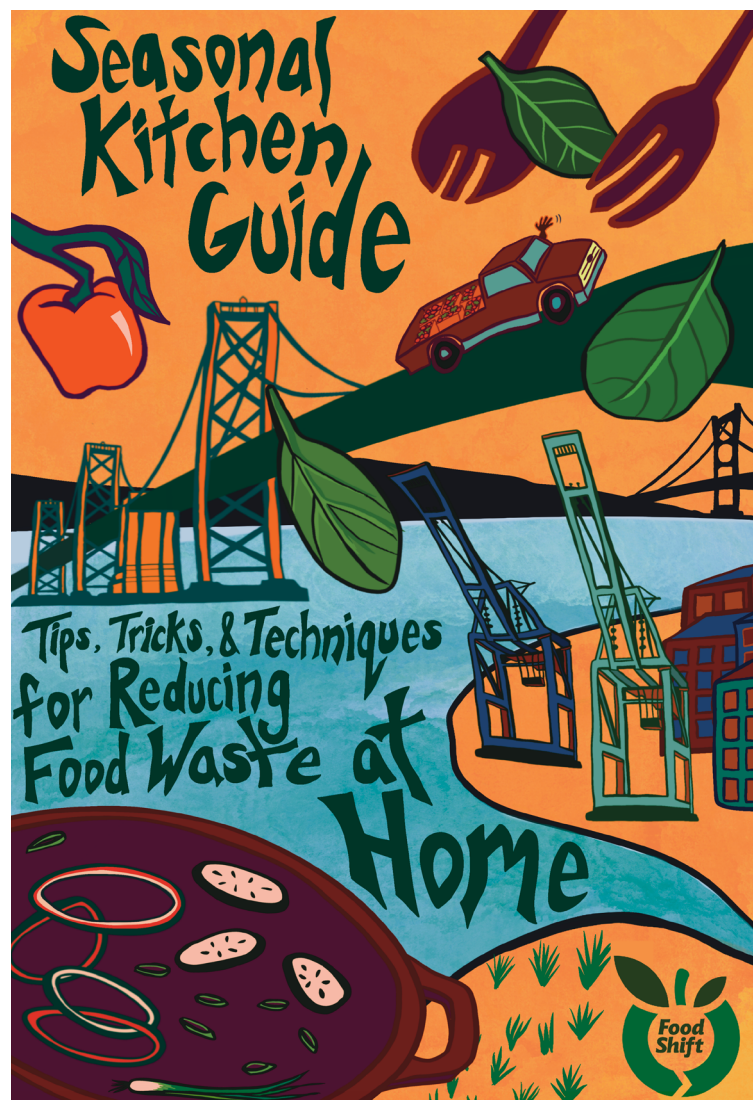
## Case Studies



Food Shift reduces wasted food and nourishes neighbors through its social enterprise kitchen by recovering and distributing food that would otherwise go to waste. Their culinary training apprentices, who are overcoming employment discrimination, upcycle or redistribute the surplus food, building community capacity. Insights from Food Shift's hyperlocal work in the Bay

Area are shared as community wisdom nationally, in resources like their “Seasonal Kitchen Guide,” with recipes and tips on maximizing food for wellness, budget, and the planet. The Guide prioritizes the experiences of consumers who are often overlooked – due to different customs or cooking abilities – so it offers practical hints on using affordable and culturally relevant ingredients available from food banks and food pantries in Northern California.

“Over 35% of food produced in the U.S. goes to waste, not just in farms, factories, and grocery stores, but mainly within our own homes,” says Yuka Nagashima, Executive Director of Food Shift. “The actual cost of overbuying, wasting edible parts of produce, and relying on ‘expiration dates’ can exceed \$1,500 per year for a household of four. Selecting, buying, storing, preparing, and eating food mindfully can be both activism and a show of honor and respect to the entire cycle intertwined with seeds, land, farmers, and food.”



Food Waste Prevention Week (FWPW) is a consumer awareness campaign that aims to increase understanding of food waste, share why it is a problem, and educate people on ways to decrease wasted food in their own homes and lives. In 2018, California hosted the first statewide Food Waste Prevention Week, centered around a social media campaign to raise awareness of the issue. Elaine Fiore of Broward County Schools in Florida heard about the effort and wanted to get the State of Florida to participate as well. Fiore met with the group behind the California



event at ReFED's Food Waste Solutions Summit and went on to lead Florida in hosting "Florida Food Waste Prevention Week" statewide in 2021.

In 2022, due to interest from other cities and states, Florida was dropped from the title, so that "Food Waste Prevention Week" could include all parties interested in participating. Most recently, in planning for the 2023 event, Fiore scaled the campaign nationally and brought on a team of leaders from across the country. They designed programming for K-12 educators, universities,

breweries, restaurants, government organizations, and nonprofits and brought on more than 600 partners from 48 states and 11 countries.

FWPW has been successful in scaling its reach and impact in large part due to a multi-pronged approach – FWPW uses social media, in-person events, webinars, radio ads, posters, school curriculum, placards in restaurants, and more to reach a range of diverse audiences in locations they are already frequenting. The messaging is straightforward, presented in a variety of formats, and includes specific versions for Spanish speakers, so that it can be more accessible to a wider range of audiences.



JEDI INSIGHT AREA #5

## Wasted Food Management

### Food Waste Connection

While the ultimate goal of food waste reduction efforts is to prevent food from going to waste in the first place, composting and anaerobic digestion are preferred destinations for uneaten food and scraps rather than landfill, incineration, or other disposal methods. Unfortunately, a range of factors – from service costs to facility locations to route availability – limit the accessibility of these options for marginalized communities. As such, they are not getting the benefits of these solutions – which go beyond just waste diversion.

### Examples of JEDI and Food Waste Intersections

Lack of composting infrastructure – particularly localized infrastructure where the benefits are more readily accessible to the communities where services are located – leaves many marginalized neighborhoods with few composting options.

Compost facility locations are governed by local zoning ordinances, which vary from community to community, and drop-off sites are not always available in locations that are accessible to marginalized groups – because they are not able or cannot afford to be off from work for the time that it takes to travel there, they are limited to public transportation that may not allow bags or containers of food scraps on board, or similar reasons. Many services that pick up compost do not have routes in marginalized communities (see later



section). Community composting and food scrap collection face similar infrastructure challenges. Smaller-sized facilities may not be able to justify the costs involved in going through the permitting process and choose to bypass local communities where they rightly or wrongly do not perceive a high level of demand to help recoup costs. Home composting in a backyard is an option for many, but lower-income people may live in apartments, smaller homes, and subsidized or public housing facilities that do not have adequate yard space to accommodate a composting set-up. Importantly, those that are interested in home composting may also not have access to a range of community infrastructure – including free or discounted bins, trainings, and more – that could make their efforts more successful.

Some composting facilities are located close to marginalized neighborhoods, as “NIMBY” concerns related to odors and pests keep them out of higher-income areas.

While these concerns can frequently be overblown – particularly when facilities are following best practices for compost production – it is true that increased traffic from trucks and other vehicles accessing the facilities can create congestion, noise, and hazardous situations.

Community composting and food scrap collection services are frequently fee-based, putting them out of reach for people on fixed incomes.

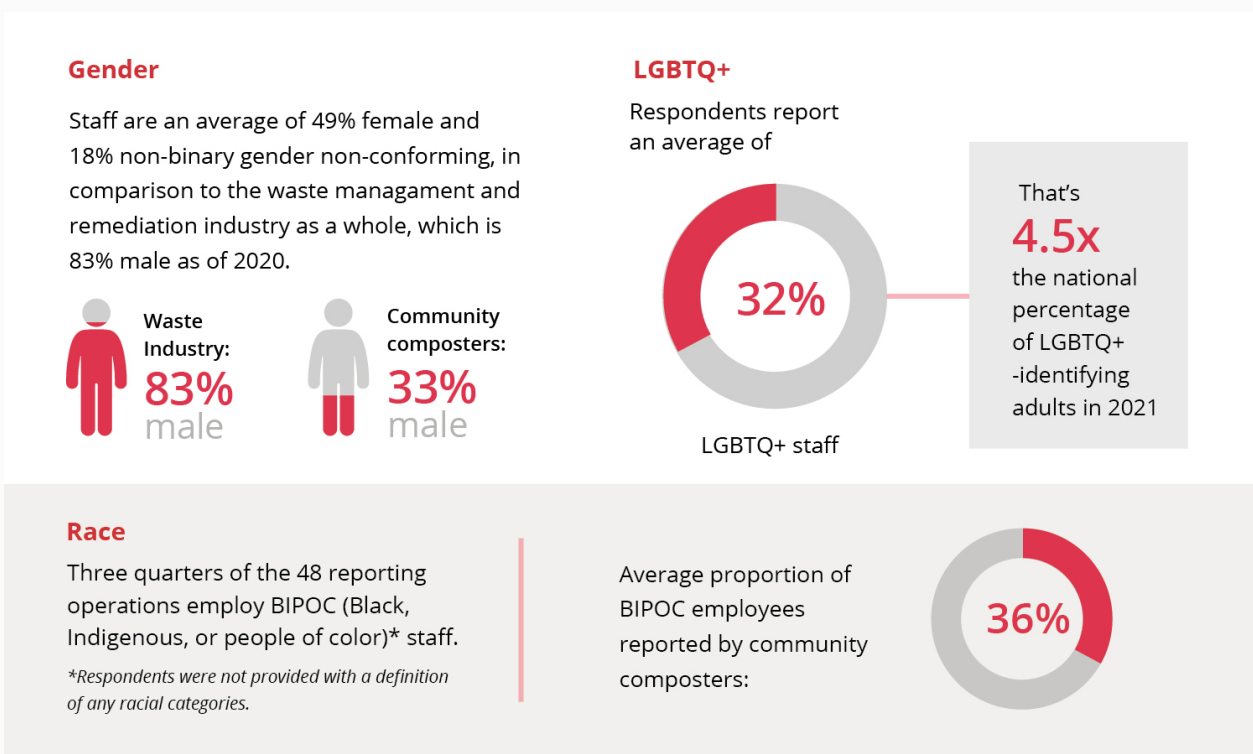
Community composting infrastructure has not proliferated enough that it is available in every neighborhood like regular garbage pick-up. When it is offered, it can operate on a fee-for-service model – with prices ranging from a nominal fee to \$25-30 per month that is not covered by taxes – and frequently must be opted into. For people on a fixed income, this fee can be a barrier, as food waste reduction is not a priority when someone is struggling to pay for food, housing, and other necessities. Because of this, there is often not enough demand for services offering home pick-up to create routes through marginalized communities – making the option inaccessible even for individuals who are willing to pay. When services are offered within a community, prices can be high as operators look to earn back the costs of permitting and facility creation. And while new tech-based systems that convert home food scraps to compost or its components have recently come onto the market, as yet their price tags can put them out of reach for those on a fixed income.



## Potential Solutions

### *Increase investments in composting infrastructure.*

While there are more than 5,000 composting facilities nationwide, less than 1% of them accept food scraps (as opposed to other organic materials like yard clippings). Expanding access to composting services requires investments primarily through public sources (government grants and project finance). Localized and home composting solutions would bring more of the benefits of composting to the communities being served, including greener neighborhoods, soil improvements, community and youth engagement, food sovereignty, fresh compost to support urban gardens, and more. Importantly, these facilities would also benefit the economy through increased employment opportunities. Research from the Institute for Local Self-Reliance shows that the employee demographics of composting facilities are much more diverse than other companies in the waste management space.



*Adapted from Institute for Local Self-Reliance's [2022 Community Composter Census](#)*

Additionally, compost that is generated from fresher food stock – which is more likely when it is produced locally – is generally higher quality with less likelihood of contamination.

When locating new composting facilities, jurisdictions must consider potential outcomes on specific communities through feasibility studies, impact assessments, and other methods.

Public information sessions can help local residents express their point of view and air any frustrations or concerns. If facilities are located in or near these areas, conciliations to the local community should be made. And facility operators can agree to employ a specific percentage of their workforce from the immediately affected areas. Further, all composting facilities should follow best practices for limiting smells, pests, noise, and excess vehicle traffic.

It is important to note that new infrastructure is not just physical. Participants in any composting program must be set up for success through robust education and outreach initiatives like in Austin, TX, which provides free training for all residents who compost (as well as rebates on composting bins).

*Ensure that cost is not a barrier for people to access composting services.*

Ideally, composting would be elevated to the status of a public utility servicing all residents, like garbage collection, with municipalities covering the costs through tax revenue. Where that is not happening, it is important to keep the costs as low as possible. In San Francisco, food scrap pick-up costs an additional \$7.30 per month, with the city offering a 25% low income discount (for all waste). Boston is currently piloting a program that is \$10.99/mo, and they expect that price to go down. Seattle charges less for compost than for garbage going to landfill, so this could wind up reducing a household's total refuse bill if people downsize their total garbage cart. Composting facilities and food scrap collection services can also offer sliding scale or "pay what you're able" payment models, or free customer drop-off at designated sites (saving businesses the costs of pick-up), ideally offering some drop-off sites in or convenient to marginalized neighborhoods. For home composters who view cost as the biggest hurdle to their participation in any composting efforts, free or reduced price equipment can help them overcome that barrier.

*Explore innovative ways to collect food scraps from homes that are not served by existing composting businesses.*

Rideshare companies, grocery delivery services, and others could add food scrap collection to their list of offerings. The costs (bins, vehicle clean-up, etc.) could be shouldered by the businesses as a community service through a corporate social responsibility budget, or they could investigate the availability of other public funding sources.

## Case Study



The Baltimore Compost Collective is a community-led initiative that operates as a localized service, dedicated to the collection of food scraps from residential areas in various neighborhoods across Baltimore. These collected food scraps are then meticulously composted at the Filbert Street Community Garden, situated in Curtis Bay, a community in South Baltimore. The resulting compost is utilized to cultivate and nurture a sustainable source of fresh produce, thereby bolstering urban food security within the region. In Baltimore, composting is a critical piece of food waste disposal, because it helps to reduce the air pollution associated with incinerators within city limits, and it combats food deserts by helping to grow fresh, local produce in urban gardens.

Additionally, the Baltimore Compost Collective serves as a dynamic youth entrepreneurship program, specifically designed to engage and employ local teenagers. Through their participation in this initiative, these young individuals are provided with invaluable opportunities to acquire essential workforce skills, actively contribute to food access programming, and gain comprehensive knowledge in the field of community-scale composting. Guided by experienced mentors, the youth workers are able to engage in hands-on experiential learning, actively managing the day-to-day operations of a small-scale composting facility, while also contributing to its expansion efforts.



# Conclusion

We started this report with the goal of learning more about the intersection of food waste and JEDI principles. This sentiment, combined with our organizational vision of “a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive food system,” led us to many incredible conversations with individuals and organizations throughout the food system.

Despite how informative these conversations were, we knew that they would only be scratching the surface of such a wide-ranging topic. For example, only a few of our discussions delved into the issues facing women in the food system (e.g., lower wages compared to men, sexual harassment and assault, discrimination based on maternal status, etc.) or members of the LGBTQIA+ community (fear of violence, discrimination, etc.), but we know that these identities and groups face barriers in the food system that similarly impact the amount of food going to waste. Our hope is to continue with this exploration around these and other topics in the near future.

*So the question for us at ReFED – as well as the food community as a whole – is what next? Now that more people are starting to understand the range and complexity of these intersectional issues and the opportunities for action that they represent, we will be determining how ReFED can best highlight the good work being done – both existing efforts and new initiatives – and help facilitate continued exploration.*





# Calls to Action

After going through this learning journey, we would like to offer several ways to continue to engage with this work:

1 We hope that you feel inspired and empowered to bring these issues up within your organization.

Create change in your own sphere of influence, whatever that may be. Listen closely to your employees and peers and be bold in bringing these ideas into your conversations.

2 Continue to conduct research in this area, so that we can all better understand the inequities and start to right them.

Please reach out to us if you have identified a research gap and are looking for partners to fill this need.

3 Commit yourself to being a life-long learner.

Have vulnerable conversations and put yourself in situations that might be uncomfortable at first, where you have the opportunity to interact with individuals and communities that you wouldn't normally have the chance to engage with. These conversations are what will continue to break down barriers and historic prejudices and create a space for trusting relationships to advocate for change in larger systems and processes.

4 If you learned something in this assessment, please share it widely.

Our intention behind this assessment is to have it shared, referenced, and used widely to co-create a sustainable, equitable, resilient food system that makes the best use of the food we grow.

5 Let us know your thoughts!

We view this assessment as a starting point that will get stronger with input and feedback from the food waste community. Please reach out to "info@refed.org" to share your thoughts, recommendations, and ideas on what we have presented here and what more can be added to future updates.

Finally, we will leave you with three maxims that stood out to us throughout the course of our exploration. We hope they give you the same inspiration they have given us:

- Recognize humanity. Value the humans of the food system and listen to their experiences.
- There is power in storytelling. Share your successes *and* your challenges, because there is something to learn in every situation.
- Don't let fear stop you from learning and making changes to the way that you've previously operated – both professionally and personally.



# Appendix

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