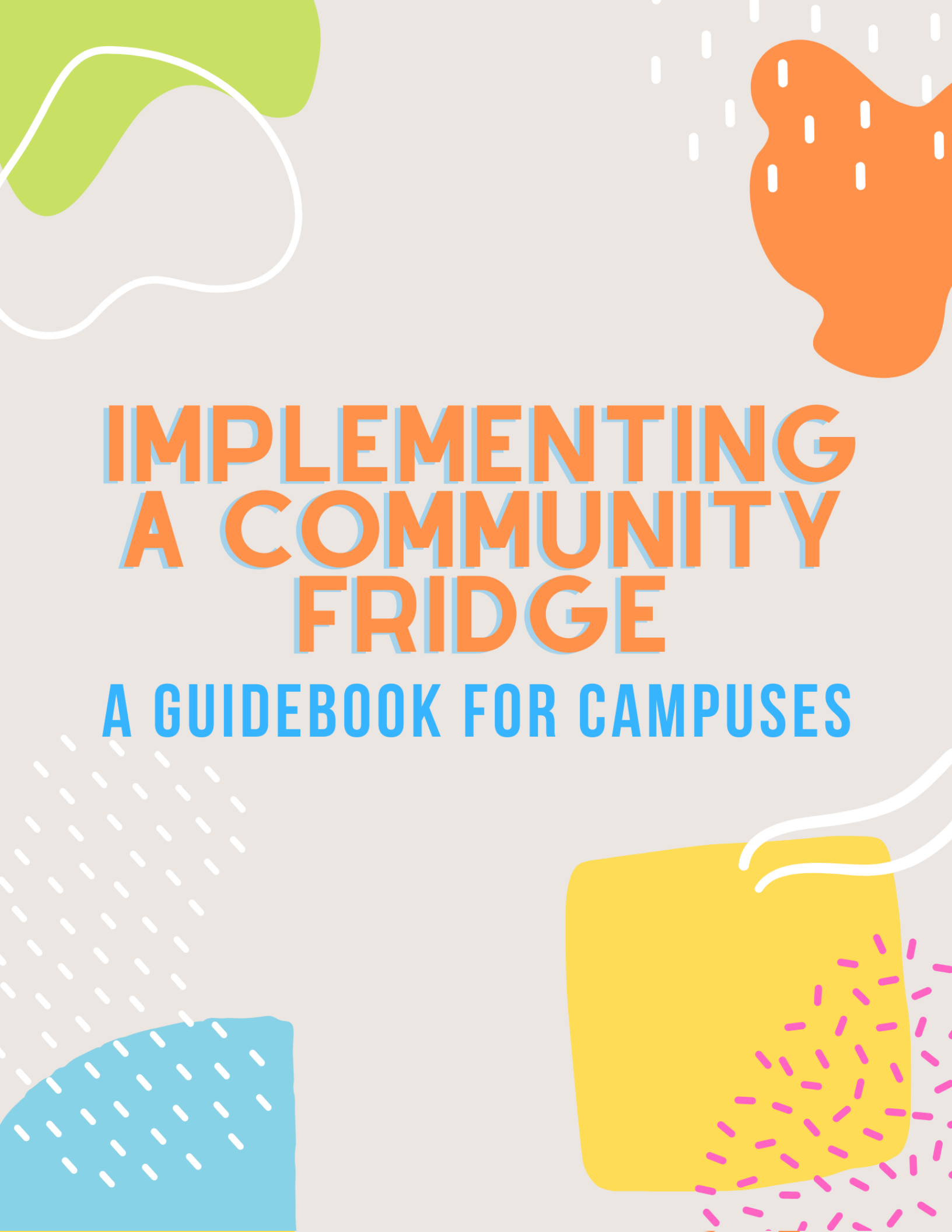


The background is a light gray with several abstract elements: a green shape in the top left, an orange shape in the top right with white vertical dashes, a blue shape in the bottom left with white diagonal dashes, and a yellow shape in the bottom right with pink diagonal dashes. A white line curves across the top left and bottom right.

IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY FRIDGE

A GUIDEBOOK FOR CAMPUSES

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Getting Started

About this Guidebook

This Guidebook was developed with and for campus communities and includes sections they have identified as important. The contents are intended to support individuals and groups who are interested in implementing a community fridge at educational institutions/campuses. It is based on and informed by the experience of building a Community Fridge Shed at [McMaster University](#) in Hamilton, Ontario. This Guidebook will be updated frequently based on feedback from users and it is important to recognize that individuals might have different perspectives. If you have suggestions and/or tips please reach out to [Abbie Little](#).

For an overview of each stage in this Guidebook, check out this [graphic](#)!

Defining a Community Fridge

A community fridge is an accessible fridge, freezer, and pantry complex that is open 24/7 and stocked by the community for the community. The fridge, freezer, and pantry are typically located in a shed to help protect it from the elements, but can also be located inside buildings without a shed. A community fridge doesn't require any demonstration of need to be used and is a great way to divert perfectly good food that would otherwise be wasted to someone else to enjoy!

Collaborators

It was essential to have input from various parties to ensure this Guidebook communicates the values and experiences shared by those working towards a common goal of reducing food insecurity. A massive thank you to the following parties who contributed to the initial launch of this resource by reviewing this Guidebook and engaging in dialogue:

McMaster University — Student Wellness Centre and MSU Food Collective Centre

The University of Alberta

The University of Guelph — MealCare Guelph

The University of Victoria

Community Food Hub — Scarborough, Ontario

Community Food Centres Canada

“The sharing of power involves the sharing of skills, knowledge and expertise, and it must involve the sharing of access to resources to exercise decision-making” (Fursova, 2020).

Stage 1: Planning

Identifying Need

It is important to begin with determining the need for a community fridge, freezer, and pantry. The determined need will be why one is necessary to be implemented. This step creates a baseline for where you are starting from, opportunities for growth, and helps to determine your intended users.

For example, a 2018 survey at McMaster University found that 39% of students experienced some degree of food insecurity due to competing finances, difficulty meeting the diverse meal needs of students, and student life factors such as perceptions, education and skills (McMaster Health Forum, 2020). Additionally, in March of 2019, ~23,000 visits were made to Hamilton Food Share sites, which is about 8,677 households (Reihani et al., 2019).

Identifying the food insecurity problem at McMaster helped the group have conversations with campus and community stakeholders and highlighted the dire need for a community fridge.

Here is a list of ways to help you identify the need for a community fridge on your campus:

1. Creating, distributing, and analyzing a survey.
2. Obtaining data from local food banks, collective centres, and/or community fridges about who accesses the resources.
 - If municipal data is not available, consider provincial data on food insecurity.
3. Feedback from your campus hospitality services about food options, programming, and feedback received from users.

TIP: Consider creating a Logic Model for your project, which acts as a roadmap for users and helps to communicate the story in a visual way. See [Appendix 1](#) to view McMaster's.

Getting Approvals

To implement your community fridge, you will need approvals to place the shed on your campus. Depending on your institution and where you intend to put your sheds the process and timing of getting approval will vary. Below are some approaches that might work for your group.

Top Down approach

- Present the issue to a very senior group or individual, such as the President's office. Once you have approval to move forward, you can use this to help get support from other departments on campus.
 - Pro: Likely easier to get other departments on board with this project. You may also have a defined budget you've been given.
 - Con: Departments may be less intrinsically motivated to support, as it is more mandatory than out of personal interest.

Bottom Up approach

- In a bottom up approach, you can begin work on the project by gaining interest from departments who have shown genuine interest in supporting the cause. Once you have support to build the shed and a location for it, you can seek approvals.
 - Pro: The departments working with you will likely be intrinsically motivated to support the cause, which can help foster an ongoing and reciprocal relationship.
 - Con: This route might be slower, and the direction may not be as linear.

The bottom up approach was the method taken by McMaster and Guelph University. At McMaster, the Facility Services became involved in helping to design and build the shed. Then the location was selected based on student preference, and the manager of that building was consulted. Finally, a senior member from the University Provost Office was aware of the project and provided their support. There was a lot of back and forth negotiation and sometimes the project's direction was unclear.

Creating a Working Group

Implementing a community fridge may begin as an individual passion, but working with others will add value in a number of ways. You can create a group at the beginning of your implementation process or assemble a working group as you progress. Below is a list of groups you might want to consider working with on your campus:

1. Student Wellness Centre/Campus Grocer/Food Bank — can help maintain the community fridge and act as the main touch point for the initiative.
2. Facility Services/Carpentry team — can help to design, build, and maintain the community fridge shed.
3. Advancement department — can help set up a donation site and promote the community fridge to donors.
 - a. This is [McMaster's iFund Mac page](#).

4. Communications department — can assist in communicating about your community fridge through news stories, social media posts, and interviews.
5. Art department — can assist in the art design and painting of the mural on the community fridge shed.
6. Students and Staff — it takes a large base of volunteers to check the fridge, freezer and pantry every week. Creating a network of passionate and accountable volunteer checkers will help you maintain it.
 - a. McMaster has ~80 volunteer checkers who sign up for shifts every week.
7. Experiential programs — See if your campus offers experiential learning opportunities to students.
 - a. McMaster has a number of experiential programs. One course in particular is about [implementing sustainable change](#) which allows interdisciplinary groups of students to work together with a campus or community member. Students in this course have worked on the community fridge project semester over semester.
8. Other departments or student-led groups — can help support the initiative in any way they can (promote, share, network).

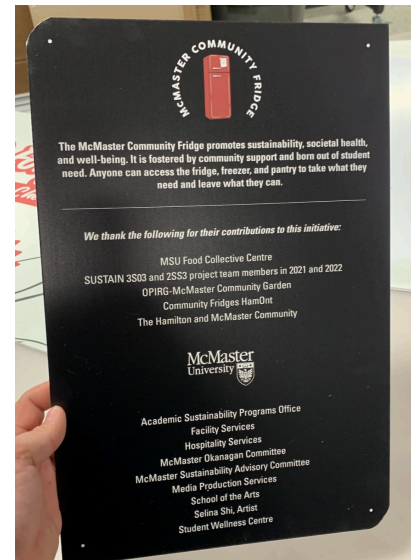
“If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far go together.” -African Proverb

Sponsors and Donations

Implementing a community fridge, freezer, and pantry is no easy task and can be very expensive. The cost of labour, building materials, fridge, freezer, electricity, etc. add up quickly. Here are some tips on how to seek out sponsorships and donations:

1. Tell your story and incorporate the ‘why’ in your sponsorship letter, package, and/or presentation.
 - a. McMaster created a powerpoint presentation and at each initial meeting, it was used as a tool to tell the story in a visual way. Remember to include that community fridges reduce food waste by diverting it from the landfill on top of the support it provides for those experiencing food insecurity!
 - b. MealCare Guelph started as a club designed to divert food waste and support those with food insecurity. They implemented their community fridge to continue these efforts. They had been tracking their diversion rates and highlighted how much food could be saved through the fridge.
2. Seek out sponsorship/donations internally first.
 - a. Guelph and McMaster work with their hospitality services team to receive donated or at-cost food. You can work together to create a schedule and have volunteers pick up and transport food to your fridge.

3. Illustrate how your values align with the various businesses/departments.
4. Seek out grants (big or small) that can help support the cause and get the ball rolling.
 - a. McMaster applied to a local grant that the University offers.
5. Do the heavy lifting to make donating easy and safe.
 - a. If you are asking for a business/department to donate a fridge for example, do the research ahead of time to suggest 1 or 2 models that would work best.
 - i. McMaster selected the following fridge and freezer models after conducting extensive research: Freezers Whirlpool WSZ57L18DM and Refrigerators Whirlpool WSR57R18DM
 - b. The [Food Safety and Quality Act](#) outlines that the donor would not be responsible for anything that happens to people who take the donated food that might be spoiled. This can help the donor feel comfortable with the idea.
6. Highlight their business/department as a sponsor.
 - a. Consider and ask for ways the business would like to be recognized.
 - i. For example, McMaster included a plaque on the front of the shed that listed every member who supported the project. By the time the shed launched, every single item was sponsored and more departments wanted to have their name added to the plaque. Pictured on the right is the plaque that McMaster created and installed (Little, 2022).



Stage 2: Implementing

Location for your Community Fridge

When looking at locations to put your community fridge shed, there are a few things to consider:

1. Will your community fridge be inside or outside?
2. Access to a power source.
 - a. Ensure there is an electrical outlet that your fridge/freezer can plug into.
 - i. McMaster ran additional power and lighting via a conduit from a nearby building since their community fridge was located outside.

3. Accessibility to drop off donations.

- a. Consider how users will donate food. Ideal locations are accessible by car, foot, and/or bike. If you have a kiss & ride or drop-off location on your campus, this is a great spot to put a community fridge. If your community fridge is located inside, consider if the building it is located in is open 24/7 and during holidays.
 - i. McMaster located their community fridge beside the student centre which has free 15 minute parking, bike racks, and is a heavy foot traffic location.

4. Visibility

- a. Consider and ask (social media can be a great engagement tool) your intended users of the community fridge and what their preferences would be to access the food. Having a community fridge shed in a very visible location can help to destigmatize accessing food.
 - i. McMaster asked students through an Instagram poll and focus group where they would like to access the community fridge. The majority of individuals said a visible and open area would feel most safe. This may not be the case with your community, and is important to consider.

5. Nearby lighting and security

- a. For security reasons, having lighting nearby is important. This can be existing light poles or other lighting.
 - i. McMaster has Red Assistance Poles across campus, and it was important to users that the fridge was located close to a pole in case of emergency.

6. Sturdy base

- a. Your community fridge shed will need a sturdy base to sit on if it is outside. Consider if your campus has an existing concrete pad that is unused or can be adjusted to accommodate your community fridge shed.
 - i. McMaster had a concrete pad with two bike racks on top. The bike racks were re-located close by and the shed was placed on top. Below is a picture of the concrete pad used (left) and the installed shed after (right).



(Little, 2021)



(Little, 2022)

7. Weather considerations

- a. Depending on the climate you live in, you will want to consider if your fridge and freezer will experience extreme temperatures. This will impact how your shed is insulated to help regulate temperatures.
 - i. During summer months, extreme heat can impact fridge and freezer functionality. The extra shade from a nearby tree or building can help a little!
 - ii. During winter months, the area around the community fridge shed will need to be snow plowed if it is outside. Consider locating your shed in an area that is already plowed by your campus crew.

8. Possible expansion

- a. Depending on the population size of your campus, you might want to consider if your shed can continue to support your intended audience over the years. Expansion can look like building an initially large shed or possibly having a few in different locations on campus.
 - i. McMaster created a large shed that could expand as needed.

Designing your Community Fridge Shed

A community fridge shed can be built in many different ways! Here are a few considerations:

1. Dignified access and decreasing the stigma

- a. Consider your location and the visibility of the shed, who will be accessing it, and the stigma around food access for the communities accessing the shed. By having a mural on your shed, it makes it more fun, approachable and encourages anyone to use it. The risk of having your fridge in a hidden place is that it can perpetuate shame in accessing food.
 - i. McMaster users identified that since the shed is in such a prominent and visible location, it was essential to have a large enough shed that users could walk into it and close a door. This allowed users to access the shed in a dignified way since no-one would know if they were dropping off donations or taking food.
- b. If your community fridge is inside, is there video surveillance that could impact users accessing it?

2. Dimensions

- a. To determine the dimensions of your shed, first you need to decide on the fridge and freezer. Many shed complexes have a fridge/freezer combo unit that you would typically find in a home.

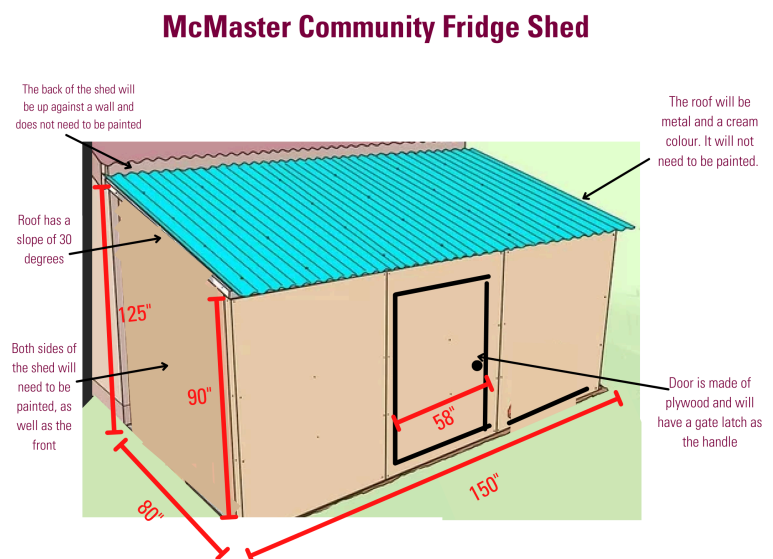
- i. McMaster decided to purchase two separate units: a fridge unit and a standup freezer unit, and have them side by side. The reason for this is the campus population is very large and they anticipated a large need for food. It might be helpful to note that the fridge is used far more than the freezer, especially during the winter months when the pantry items are kept in the fridge to prevent freezing.
- ii. If purchasing a brand new unit is not available to you, consider finding a used one or seek out a donated fridge/freezer.

Note: See [Appendix 5](#) to view McMaster's shed dimensions

- b. Consider the accessibility of the shed. Can people of all heights reach top shelves? Can individuals in mobility devices open the door/enter the shed? Is a ramp required to access the shed? Does your door have an automatic accessibility button?
 - i. McMaster Facility Services ensured that the shed complied with AODA standards to ensure a mobility scooter or wheelchair could turn around inside the shed.

- c. Create a sketch of your shed and then work with an individual(s) who has experience with drafting.

- i. McMaster started off with a simple sketch made on Canva pictured on the right (Little, 2021). The carpentry team and McMaster took the drawing, created a sketch with dimensions (see [Appendix 5](#)), and began building it.



3. Painting your community fridge shed

- a. Your community fridge shed can be a beautiful public art display! Consider putting out a call out for art submissions and assembling a committee (including students, staff/faculty, community members, and your working group) to select

the design of the final art. You can also post on social media and have users vote on their favourite.

- b. Reach out to local art shops and/or your art department to see if they can help spread the word and possibly donate some materials.

4. Sustainability considerations

a. Roof

- i. A lighter coloured roof will help deflect the sun and keep your shed cooler.

1. McMaster installed a white metal roof.

b. Repurposed materials

- i. Consider if reclaimed wood or pallet boards can be used to construct the shed.
- ii. See if old paint from your art department is available to use.

There are many ways to design your community fridge. Below are a few community fridges that exist in Canada (right click the image and click the Alt-text option for a description).



Top left: (Groleau, 2021), (Pipe, 2021), (Abeego, 2021), (Howard et al., 2022)

Bottom left: (Taekema, 2021), (Kouniakias, 2022), (Passafiume, 2021)

Installing your Community Fridge Shed

1. Building the shed

- a. Ideally, there is an inside location where the shed can be built. You will need ventilation and heating/cooling depending on the weather.
 - i. Pictured below is the McMaster community fridge in the early stages with the carpentry team who built the shed. As you can see, the shed changed design part way through being built. The team initially was going to install 3 separate units with 3 doors; a fridge section, a freezer section, and a pantry section. The team realized this would be inconvenient for users and removed the two side doors and kept the middle door.



(Little, 2021)

2. Painting the shed

- a. Depending on the weather, painting the shed outside can be difficult. It is ideal to paint it inside (with ventilation) to allow the paint to dry.
- b. Consider putting a call out for volunteers to help paint the shed. Here is a suggestion for how to paint it:
 - i. Step 1: sand the wood unless you are using high quality plywood
 - ii. Step 2: prime with high quality wood paint
 - iii. Step 3: stencil the design onto the shed with a projector and chalk
 - iv. Step 4: work with volunteers to paint the background colours on one day, and then the details on another
 - v. Step 5: apply a clear varnish and let dry
- c. You could hold a painting party and bring in treats for volunteers. Below are pictures of volunteers painting.



(Little, 2022)



(Abeego, 2021)

3. Installing the community fridge shed

- a. Depending on the size of the shed, you might want to consider how the shed will be installed. Will it need to be disassembled and reconstructed? Can it be constructed at the permanent location?
 - i. McMaster hired a truck and small crane to install the shed. Since it was built in a wood shop and painted, it was not possible to take it apart and reassemble it.

4. Food inspector and food safety rules

- a. You will likely need to have an official food inspector check out your fridge and freezer to ensure it meets public health food safety guidelines. Depending on your campus, you may also need campus health approval.
 - i. Guelph sought out public health first and then went to their campus health inspector, which helped them obtain approval.
 - ii. Freedge.org recommends contacting your local food inspector once the community fridge is installed (Freedge.org, 2022).
- b. You will need to have a thermometer to ensure the temperature is regulated, located inside the fridge and freezer.
 - i. Some campuses experienced the thermometer being removed from the fridge; consider using crazy glue to attach it.
- c. Include food safety rules for donations visibly inside your shed and have your fridge checkers be mindful of this too.

Stage 3: Maintaining

Maintaining your Community Fridge Shed

Once your shed has been implemented, the fun part is next — maintaining it! Here are some tips on what has been helpful from groups who have implemented community fridges.

1. Communication outlets

- a. Social Media: Consider creating an Instagram account for your community fridge, freezer, and pantry. It can be used to promote it and post daily updates of what food is available. It is important to communicate in a way that promotes that the fridge is for anyone and everyone. Use your social media as a platform to show how it diverts excess food, which will hopefully decrease the stigma around food insecurity.
 - i. Here is McMaster's [Instagram account](#) which is run by volunteers. McMaster decided not to create a webpage because it would take additional resources that were not readily available.
- b. Media outlets: local news stations, community newsletters, and social media accounts (to name a few) can be a great way to help promote and provide updates on your fridge. Take a look to see what your campus and surrounding communities have and reach out to see how you can work together.
- c. Email: Consider creating an email address where folks can contact you with questions.
- d. Donation site: Create a donation page for monetary donations. This is great for promotion during holiday seasons.
 - i. Here is McMaster's [iFund Mac](#) page. The funds go directly to the McMaster Student Wellness Centre who purchase food on a needs-basis from local food vendors.
- e. Signage
 - i. It's a great idea to add a whiteboard or chalkboard to the inside of the shed. This allows users to add items they'd like purchased and encourage individuals donating to pick up those items.
 - ii. Include a sign of what can and cannot be donated to help prevent incorrect items from being donated (see [Appendix 3](#))
 - iii. Include a Community Support and Resources corkboard where individuals can leave coupons, recipes, resources, and more.

- f. Adding your community fridge to the map
 - i. There is a great resource called “change X” that has compiled a map of community fridges globally. Consider adding yours to the [map](#)!
- 2. Volunteer Checkers and Donation Guidelines
 - a. Volunteer checkers: Your community fridge, freezer, and pantry will need to be monitored (aim for twice a day) to ensure that the appropriate food is being donated, that the fridge and freezer are set to the correct temperature, and that there is no food that has gone bad. Creating a volunteer base of ‘checkers’ is a great way to have the community involved and help maintain it. The volunteers will also need to report on the temperature of the fridge and freezer every day to comply with food safety standards.
 - i. McMaster University created a number of resources to maintain their community fridge shed. See [Appendix 2](#) to view the resources.
 - b. Social media volunteers: Having a group of volunteers who create posts for your social media accounts with tips and fridge activity can be very helpful. Consider putting a call out for individuals who can help with social media!
 - c. Community fridge liaison: once your fridge is up and running, you will notice there are quite a few moving pieces that need to be tended to everyday. Consider hiring a liaison who can act as the main point of contact between the volunteer checkers and the staff who supports the fridge. They help address issues that arise, coordinate daily needs, and support transitions that occur.
 - i. McMaster identified the need for this role and applied for grant funding which is used as an honorarium to pay for the liaison.
- 3. Appropriate food donations
 - a. Food safety is very important and it is crucial to ensure that -expired or contaminated food is not donated. To avoid unsafe food, we recommend not accepting pre-made meals without proper labelling, uncooked meats, wilted food, alcohol, and more. For a full list of accepted and unaccepted foods, check out [Appendix 3](#). The donation guidelines will also be part of your public health approval process.
- 4. Ongoing stakeholder involvement
 - a. Once your community fridge is up and running, it is important to thank and recognize your working group and discuss ways that each member would like to be involved.
 - b. Consider having departmental offices and groups on campus sign up to make monthly donations and recognize these groups for their continued support.
 - i. McMaster piloted a program in which a few departments collected food at their monthly staff meetings and one designated member brought the donations to the community fridge.

5. Engaging community food vendors

- a. Having food vendors such as grocery stores, community gardens, and restaurants support your community fridge is a great way to have a consistent food supply which users can depend on. This is also an opportunity to highlight their support.
 - i. McMaster found that their fridge, freezer, and pantry would receive large inconsistent donations and users would clear out the food within 24 hours. They connected with local food vendors to discuss if they would be able to make a consistent (bi-weekly/monthly) donation to the community fridge. McMaster created a calendar of donations to help track which vendors would bring in food throughout the month to help ensure it was a reliable food source.

6. Improving efficiency and effectiveness

- a. Over time, your group might begin to notice trends; for example, there might be frequent requests for specific items, periods in which the fridge is empty, and more. It is a good idea to begin tracking these trends to help ensure efficiency and cater to your community's needs.
 - i. McMaster collected data on frequently requested items (from the whiteboard) and commonly donated food to help the purchasing team identify items that would best serve the surrounding communities who access the fridge.

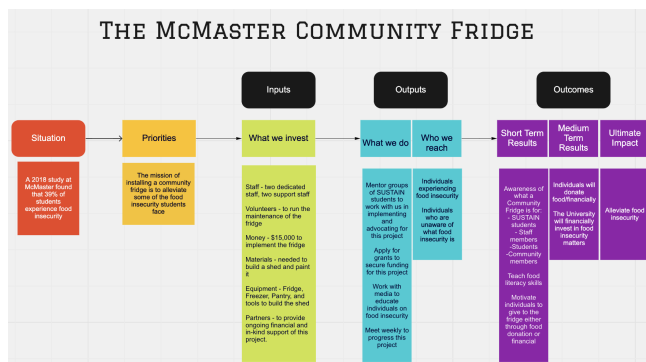
Final Notes

You did it! You made it through this comprehensive Guidebook packed full of tips and resources. We do hope it was helpful for you and we wish you a successful journey implementing your community fridge, freezer, and pantry on your campus.

If you would like to connect with an individual to ask questions, give feedback, or share success stories, please [email](#) Abbie from McMaster University.

Appendices

Appendix 1: McMaster University's Logic Model - [LINK](#)



(Little, 2021)

Appendix 2: McMaster volunteers support documents

- [Training Overview](#)
- [Volunteer Guide](#)
- [5 Ws of the Community Fridge video](#)
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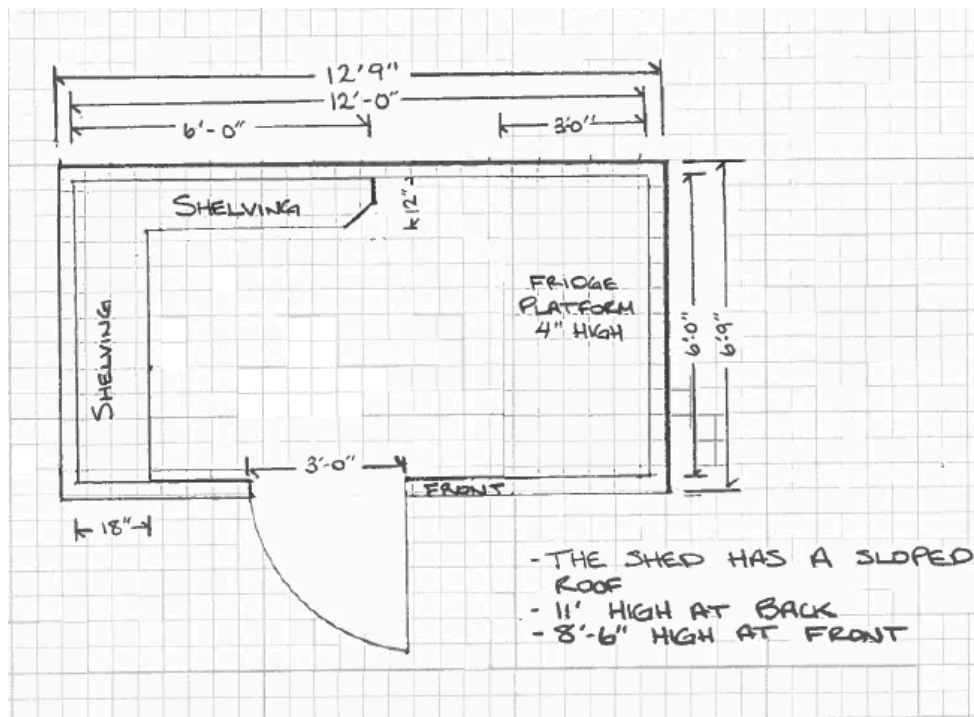
Appendix 3: Donation support documents

- [McMaster donation guideline graphic](#)
- [Guelph donation guideline graphic](#)
- [Guelph donation do's and don'ts](#)
- [Guelph usage instructions](#)

Appendix 4: Additional resources

- Overview of each stage - [LINK](#)
- Legal tips and host support [guide](#)
- Another guide by [Hubbub](#) on implementing a community fridge
- Guelph [Food Safety Plan](#)

Appendix 5: McMaster Sketch of Shed



(Little, 2022)

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