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The background of the slide is a repeating pattern of various food-related icons in a light green color. These icons include plates, bowls, forks, knives, spoons, calculators, and other kitchen items. A solid green vertical bar is positioned on the left side of the slide.

Challenging One Size for All

Exploring Non-Traditional Food Access Models
for Holistic Support and Marginalized Groups



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Beyond the Pantry

Building Student-Centered Food Access Ecosystems

Session Presenters



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1

“Who Is Our Pantry Missing?”

What if the pantry isn't the right pathway for every student who needs food support?

Different Circumstances. Different Access Needs.

Students experience food insecurity under different circumstances.

- Different levels of need
- Different schedules
- Different household circumstances
- Different ways of accessing campus
- Different preferences for seeking support

No single food-access strategy will work for every student.



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From Food Initiatives to a Food Access Ecosystem

2

What if the pantry isn't the right pathway for every student who needs food support?

We Started by Responding to Needs



We Didn't Start by Building an Ecosystem

Student needs → Listening → Additional pathways → Stronger infrastructure → Continued adaptation

From Programs to Pathways



FOOD RESOURCES: What do we provide?



MULTIPLE ACCESS PATHWAYS: How can students reach support?



FOOD ACCESS ECOSYSTEM: How do the pathways work together?

Listening → Learning → Adapting → Connecting

Multiple programs don't automatically create an ecosystem.

Three Campuses. Different Experiences. Shared Questions.



Rockville

Germantown

TPSS

What existed? → What evolved? → What are we learning?

Rockville

ROCKVILLE: An Evolving Food-Access System



Earlier Localized Support



Formal Campus Pantry



Multiple Access Pathways



Stronger Operations + Partnerships

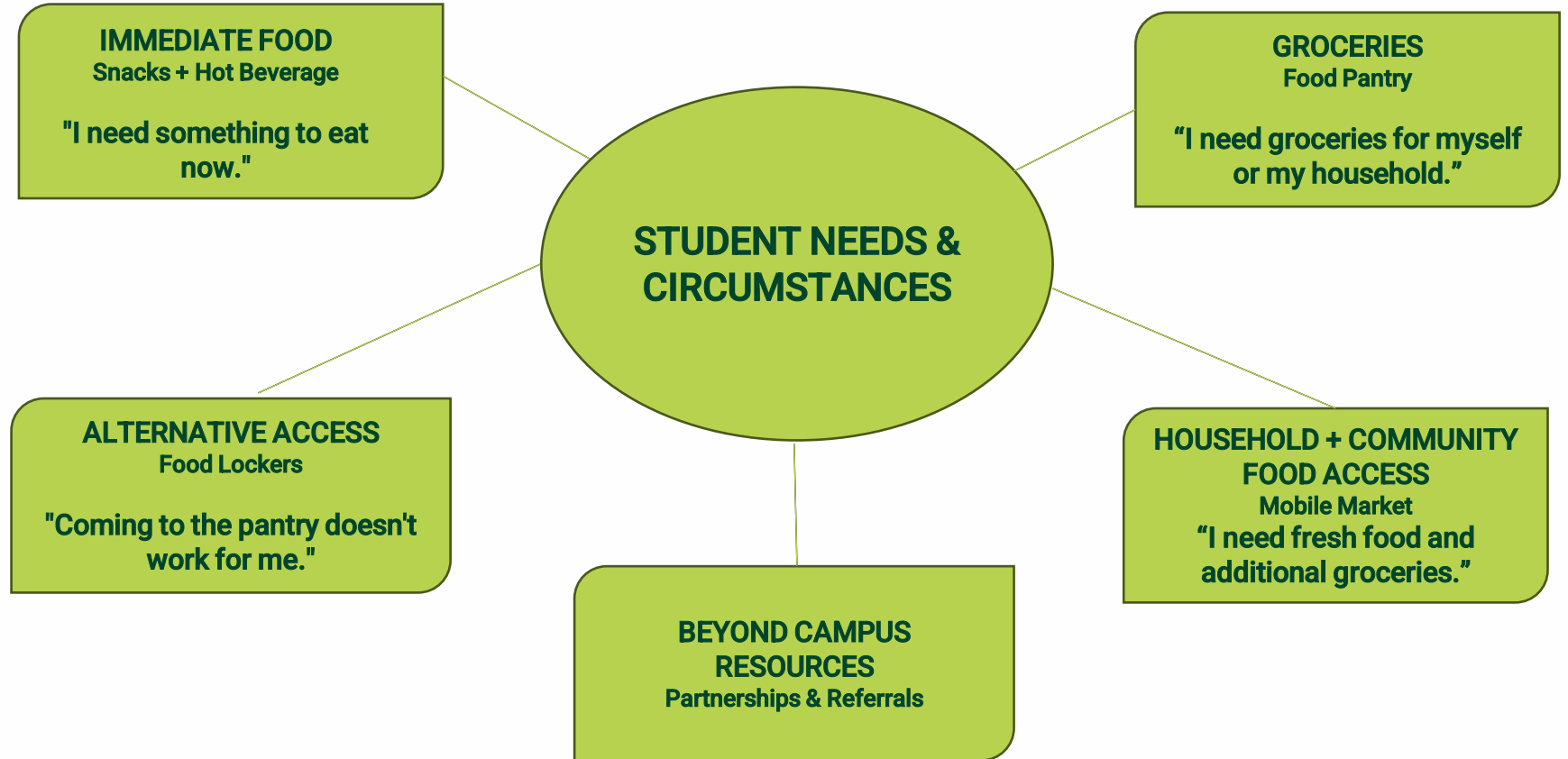


Continued Assessment + Adaptation

The pantry became one pathway within something larger.

Rockville

Different Circumstances Require Different Pathways



Students don't all enter the ecosystem through the same door.

And pathways can complement one another—not compete with one another.

What Rockville Is Learning

Availability ≠ Access

- Having food available doesn't mean the pathway works for every student's circumstances.

Operations Are Part of Access

- Hours • Registration • Staffing
Communication • Workflow
Inventory • Data

The Ecosystem Is Never Finished

- Needs change.
- Programs change.
- Resources change.

We adapt.

Listen → Learn → Adapt → Reassess

Germantown

Germantown: From Informal Support to Formal Pantry

Informal Food Cabinets
Limited visibility + donation dependent



Need for More Consistent Support
Minimal food access when donations were unavailable



College Realignment
Basic-needs support became campus-based



Formal Pantry Established
Dedicated location + funding + partnerships



Building Capacity
Staffing + space + expanded resources

Formalizing the pantry created more consistent access—but also revealed what infrastructure is needed to sustain and expand it.





Germantown: Building Access While Building Capacity

SPACE

- Current temporary pantry space limits what can be offered

STAFFING

- Basic-needs responsibilities require dedicated capacity

PARTNERSHIPS

- CAFB, donors, organizations and businesses extend what the campus can provide

CAMPUS OWNERSHIP

- Local oversight creates opportunities to respond to the needs of the campus population

Access depends not only on having food—but on having the capacity to deliver it.



What Germantown Is Learning

Capacity Shapes Access

- Space and staffing determine what services can realistically be offered.

Local Knowledge Matters

- Campus-based leadership allows services to respond to the population and circumstances of that campus.

Partnerships Expand Possibilities

- Donors and community organizations can extend institutional capacity—but require coordination and relationship management.

Today's limitations can also point toward tomorrow's opportunities.

More space → More food options → More privacy → More resource support

TPSS

TPSS: Taking Food Access to Students

Existing Food Access
Pantry • Snacks • Coffee



Premade Grocery Bags
Faster, easier distribution



Pop-Up Food Access
Bring food to other parts of campus



Food Lockers on the West Side
Another pathway closer to students

Sometimes improving access means bringing the resource closer to the student.



TPSS: Designing for the Students You Serve



DIETARY NEEDS

- Halal • Kosher • Vegan/Vegetarian • Spices

WHOLE-STUDENT NEEDS

- Menstrual products • Baby items • Hygiene items

FOOD PREPARATION

- Ready-to-eat + microwavable options for students with limited cooking access

ACCESS EXPERIENCE

- Registration • Data collection • Privacy • Partnerships

Meeting students where they are also means understanding what they can actually use.

«————» What We Are Learning Institutionally

Access Is More Than Having a Resource

- Location, hours, space, privacy, registration, food preparation and other circumstances determine whether students can actually use what's available.

Capacity and Operations Shape the Student Experience

- Staffing, space, workflow, data systems, partnerships and campus-level knowledge aren't behind-the-scenes details. **They are part of access.**

Different Circumstances Require Different Pathways

- Pantries matter, but so do lockers, pop-ups, immediate food, markets, partnerships and other approaches.

The Work Has to Keep Evolving

- Each campus is still learning, adapting and identifying gaps.



Five Design Principles for Multiple Food-Access Pathways

Start With Student Circumstances

🔑 Design around what students need—not around the programs you already have.

Create Multiple Ways to Access Support

🔑 One pathway will not work for every student.

Design the Experience, Not Just the Resource

🔑 Hours, processes, communication, staffing, privacy, and operations affect access.

Connect the Pieces

🔑 Pathways, partnerships, referrals, and resources are stronger when they work together.

Keep Listening, Learning and Adapting

🔑 Needs change. Resources change. Your system must evolve too.



The goal isn't to replicate our programs.

- The goal is to identify who your current approach may not be reaching—and design intentionally from there.

Who are you missing? → Why? → What might work differently?





Who Is Your Pantry Missing?

Start with one student circumstance.

WHO?

Who might your current food-access approach not be reaching?



WHY?

What may be getting in the way of access?



WHAT?

What different or additional pathway might help?



HOW?

What would your institution need to make it work?

Don't start with a program. Start with the student circumstance.

3

Who Is Your Pantry Missing?

WHO → WHY → WHAT → HOW

«————» Start With the Student

1 — WHO?

- Who might your current approach not be reaching?
- *Identify one student circumstance.*

2 — WHY?

- What might be getting in the way of access?
- *What about your current approach may not work for this student?*

Don't start with a program. Start with the student circumstance.

From Barrier to Pathway

WHAT?

- What different or additional pathway might respond?

HOW?

- What would your institution need to make it work?

Don't start with a program. Start with the student circumstance.

«» What Did You Discover?

Share one insight from your table:

- **WHO** might you be missing?
- **WHY** might your current approach not be reaching them?
- **WHAT** pathway might you explore?

What would need to change or be in place to make it possible?



Who Are We Missing?

- What is creating the barrier?
- What might we design differently?

The goal isn't to have every food-access program.

The goal is to create pathways that work for the students we're trying to reach.

Thank You!

We appreciate your time, your questions,
and your commitment to supporting
students.



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Scan to visit our
Basic Needs Support page

Resources. Support. Student Success.





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From Waste to Wellness: Food Rescue for Student Success

Presenter Information



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Assistant Director for Basic Needs
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PhD Student, College of Education
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Session Agenda

1. Defining Key Terms
2. Institutional and Departmental Context
3. Exploring GMU's Food Rescue Programming
4. Components of Successful Food Rescue Programs
5. Reflection and Questions

The background of the slide is a repeating pattern of various food and kitchen-related icons in a light green color. These icons include plates, bowls, fruits like apples and lemons, vegetables like carrots, and kitchen tools such as forks, knives, spoons, and calculators. A solid green vertical bar is positioned on the left side of the slide.

Exploring Food Security and Rescue



Defining Terms

Surplus food

All food that goes unsold, unused, or uneaten that are donated, fed to animals, repurposed to produce other products, and wasted.

Food security

Access to enough safe food for an active, healthy life, being nutritionally adequate and acquired in a socially acceptable way.

Food waste

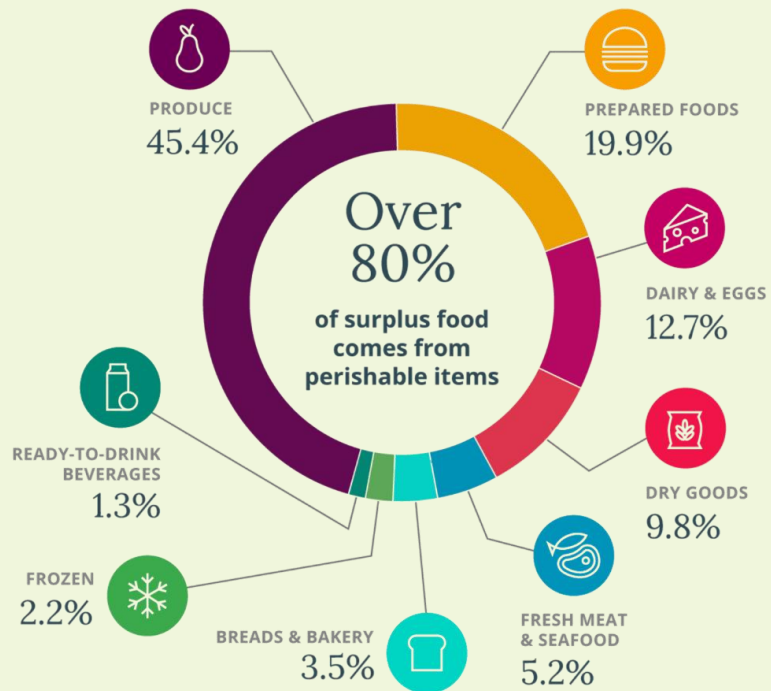
Uneaten food and inedible parts going to the destinations categorized as waste.

Food rescue or recovery

Gathering safe and quality food and redirecting it for human consumption.

“Some surplus food is inevitable, but the goal of food waste reduction efforts is not only to get food out of landfills. It’s also to make sure food is going to its “highest and best use”—that is, being eaten by people.”

-ReFED, 2026



Source: ReFED/2024 Data (Published April 2026)

Barriers to Food Waste Reduction

Organizational Silos

- Implementing food waste reduction solutions requires collaboration between different departments.

Liability Concerns

- Concerns that could result from a food safety issue around donation and unawareness of federal protections.

Handling, Transportation, and Storage

- Lacking sufficient facilities to store food for donation, especially of perishable foods requiring refrigeration or freezing.

Accessing to Financing

- Food waste reduction solutions have varying return, resulting in a perceived lack of direct return on investment.

The background of the slide is a repeating pattern of light green line-art icons. These icons include various kitchen items like plates, bowls, forks, knives, spoons, and calculators, as well as school-related items like pencils, rulers, and books. A solid green vertical bar is positioned on the left side of the slide.

Institutional Context

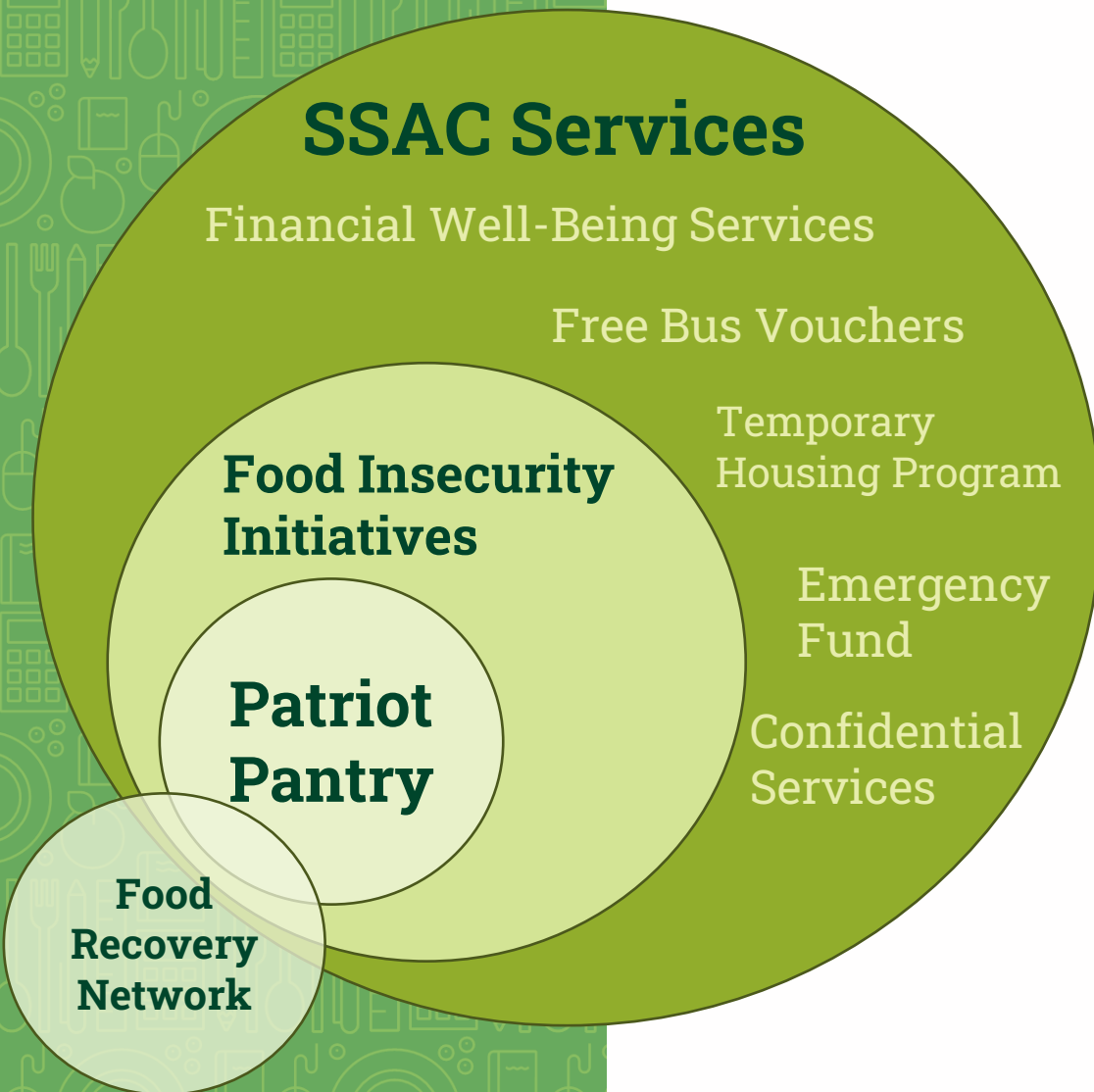
A small green icon of a fork, positioned horizontally below the title text.

George Mason University

- Four Campuses
- 40,000 student enrollment
- 1:4 First Generation Students
- 1:3 Pell-Eligible Students

Student Support and Advocacy Center

The Student Support and Advocacy Center empowers students to navigate barriers to academic success and personal well-being through advocacy, holistic support, inclusive services, and prevention education.



Potential Food Waste Sources



DINING HALLS



RETAIL DINING



CONVENIENCE STORES



DINING-CATERED
EVENTS



STUDENT
ORGANIZATION
MEETINGS



DEPARTMENTAL
EVENTS



GREENHOUSE AND
GARDENS

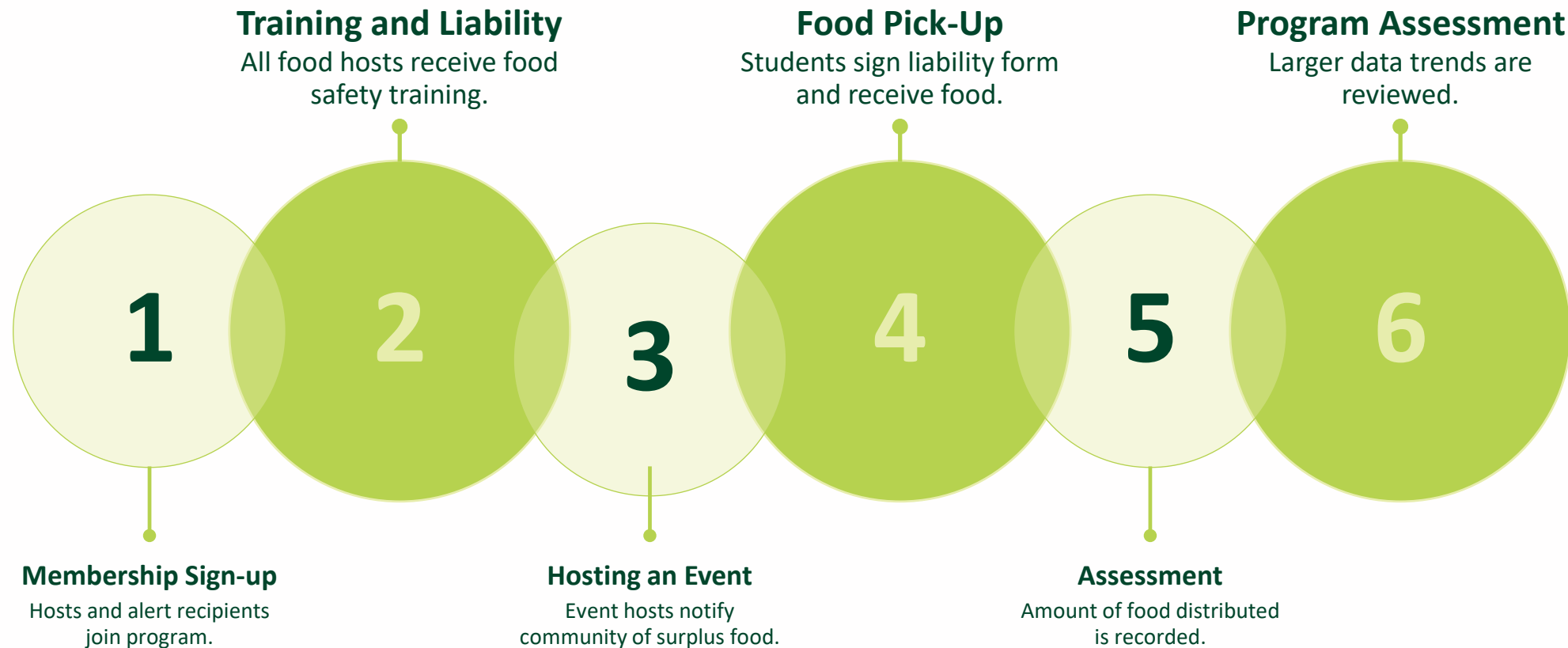
The background of the slide is a repeating pattern of various kitchen and dining items, including plates, bowls, forks, knives, spoons, and calculators, rendered in a light green line-art style. A solid green vertical bar is positioned on the left side of the slide.

Current Food Rescue Programming

A small green icon of a fork, positioned horizontally below the word "Programming".

Patriot Food Alert Program

The Patriot Food Alert Program alerts George Mason University community members of food at University sponsored events that can be accessed free of charge.



Free Food Giveaway Announcement

We're hosting a quick free-food giveaway and would love for you to stop by!

🍷 **Giveaway Summary:** {Food}
(See image of what's available) at the {Location}

🏠 **Campus:** Fairfax Campus

📍 **Location:** [On Campus]

🕒 **Duration:** 20 minutes

🍲 **Food Available:** [Food]!

Feel free to swing by and grab a [food] while supplies last.

If you have any dietary restrictions or allergen concerns, please check in with the host when you arrive.

See you soon!

Best regards,

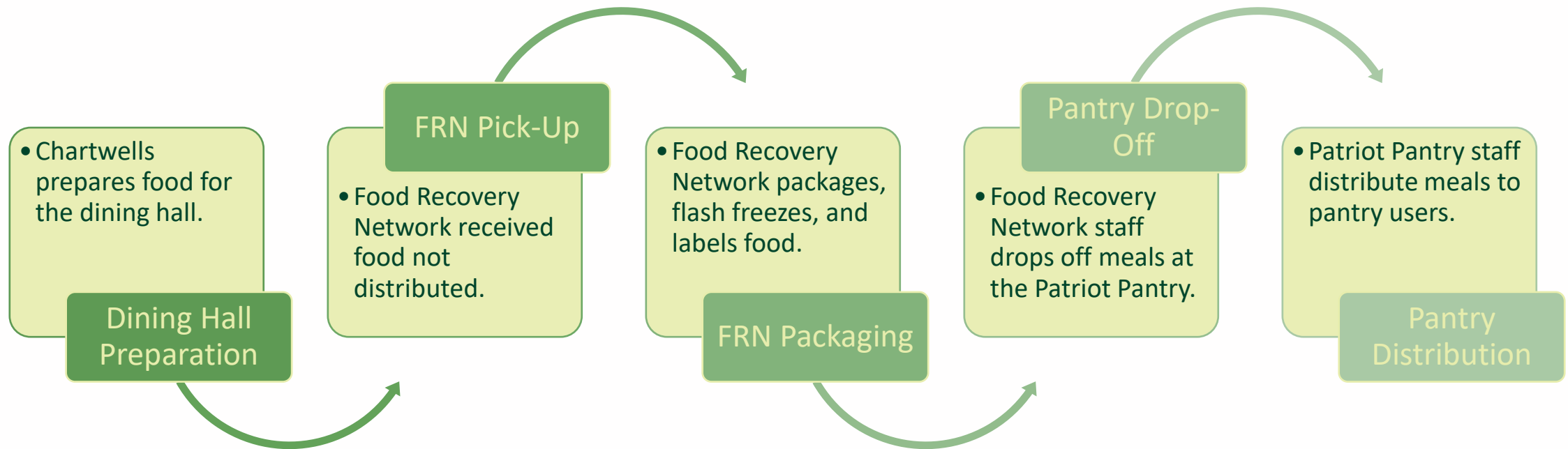
[Your Name / Organization]



Patriot Food Alert Program Example

Food Recovery Network Partnership

The Food Recovery Network receives surplus food from the dining hall, flash freezes the meals, and delivers them to the Patriot Pantry for distribution.





Previous Food Packaging Model

- Over **100 pans** of food donated
- Over **500 pounds** collected
- An estimated **415 meals**

Thanks to our volunteers!



Spring 2026 Food Recovery Network Review

Food Recovery Origins at GMU



New Pantry Construction

New construction allows the Patriot Pantry to now accept perishable food.



Dining Partner Transition

New dining partner promoted Mason students receive FRN meals.



Leadership Push

Divisional leadership emphasized the need to expand food security services.

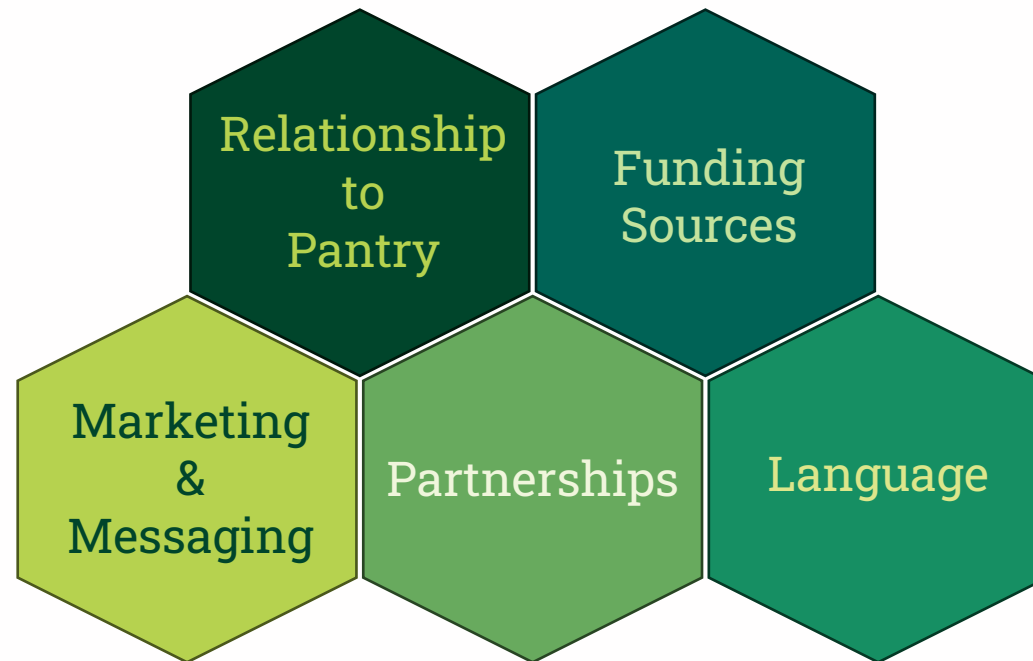
The background of the slide is a repeating pattern of various icons. On the left side, there is a solid green vertical bar. The rest of the background is a light green color with a repeating pattern of icons. These icons include kitchen items like plates, bowls, forks, knives, spoons, and calculators, as well as school-related items like pencils, rulers, and books. The icons are arranged in a grid-like fashion, creating a textured background.

Components to Successful Programming



» Food Rescue Program Components

The five components allow for well-rounded program development that explores both human-centered and operational considerations.



«» Relationship to Pantry

To create synergy between nontraditional food access programs, creating a clear relationship between these programs and the pantry is key.

Patriot Food Alert Program

- External to the Patriot Pantry
- Creates a new type of food access on campus

Food Recovery Network

- Internal to the Patriot Pantry
- Expands the level of food access within the Pantry

Funding Sources

Consider innovative funding sources not used by the pantry when creating non-traditional food access programs.

Patriot Food Alert Program

- Hunger-Free Campus Food Pantry program through the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia

Food Recovery Network

- Department of Environmental Quality for the Food Rescue & Composting Subaward Program

Marketing and Messaging

Intentional program description is a key to reducing stigma surrounding and exploring alternative solutions to food insecurity.

Patriot Food Alert Program

- Waste reduction
- Sustainability
- **Community action**

Food Recovery Network

- Waste reduction
- Sustainability
- **Student-led initiative**

Internal/External Partnerships

Partnership is crucial to expansion alongside content area experts, especially through creating new intersections within the larger campus food security landscape.

Patriot Food Alert Program

- Mason360
- University Life (UL) Information Technology Services
- UL Marketing and Communications
- University General Counsel
- Risk Management
- Business and Auxiliary Services

Food Recovery Network

- Food Recovery Network student organization
- Business and Auxiliary Services w
- Sustainability Office

«————» Speaking Partners' Language

All partners might not initially see food access programming within their purview, so establishing alignment through shared mission is crucial.

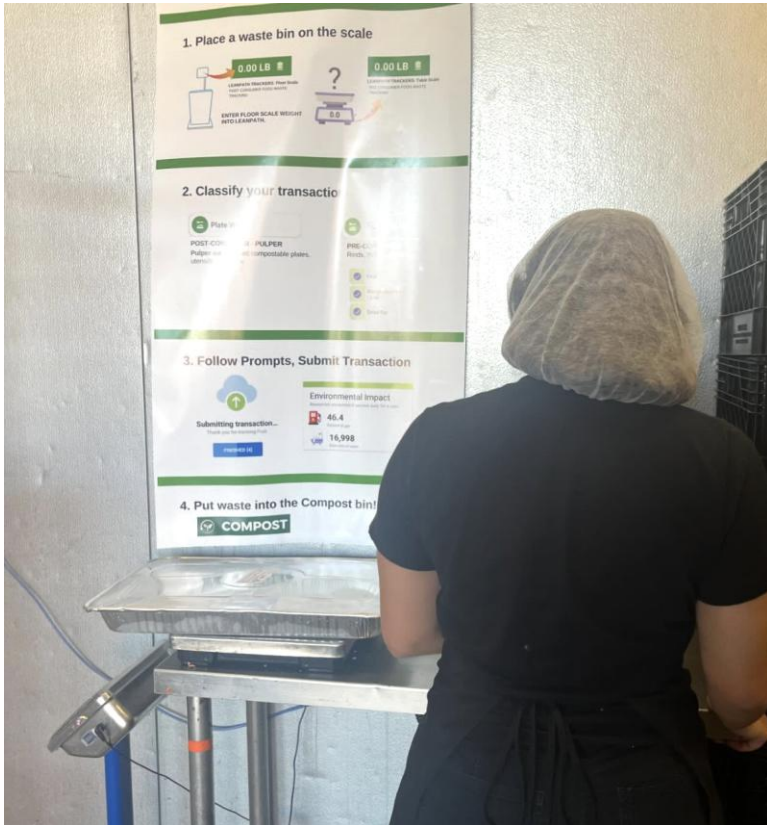
Patriot Food Alert Program

- University Life Student Engagement Journey Team
 - Technological Synergies
 - Collaborative Programming

Food Recovery Network

- Climate Pollution Reduction
- Food Rescue and Composting

Starting the Food Recovery Journey



Should you be the leader or the collaborator in this work?



Where are excess sources of food on your campus?



Are any offices or organizations already engaging in this work?



Do any infrastructures already exist that could support program creation?



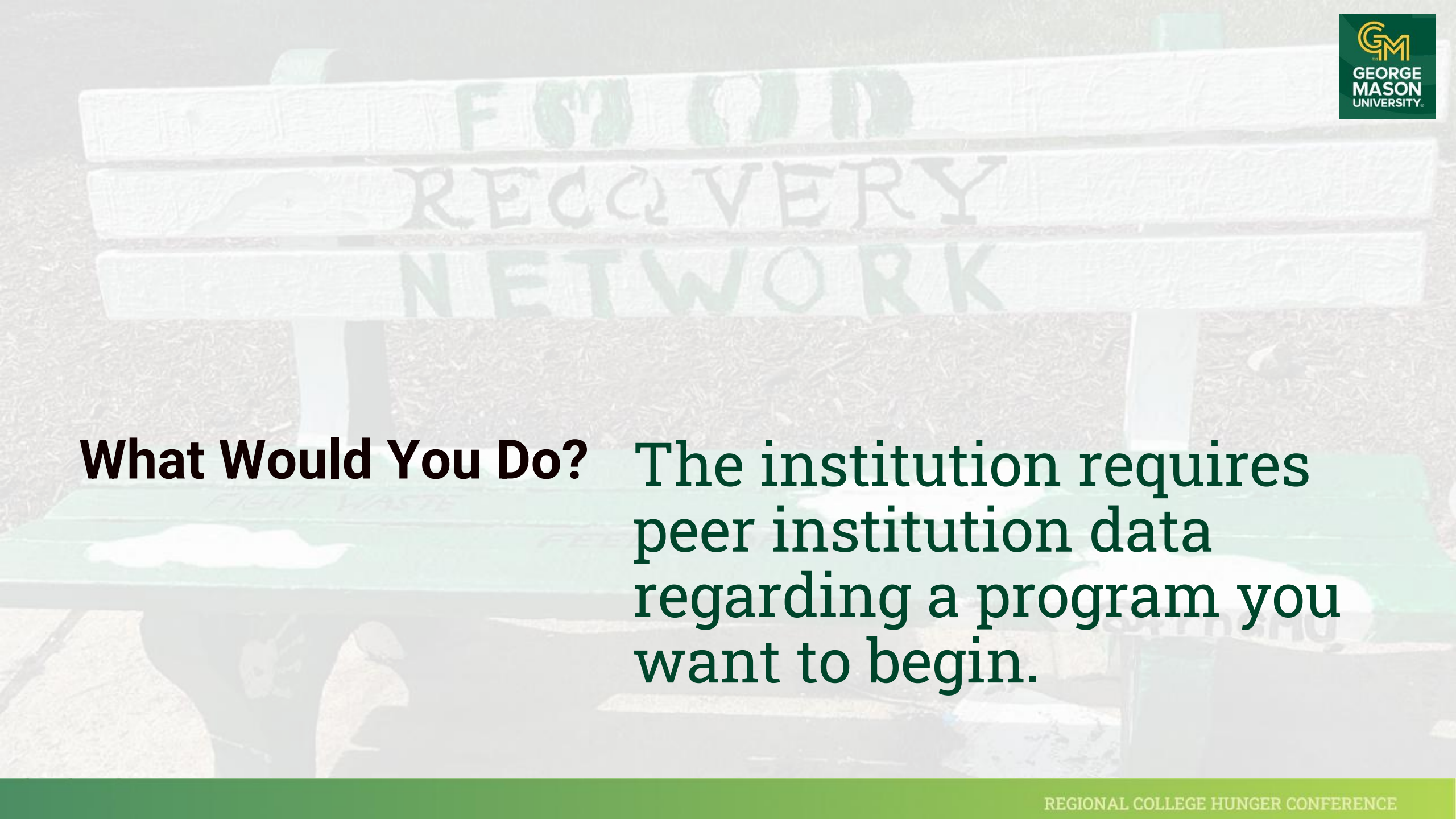
What partnerships have you not considered that you could reach out to?



What type of messaging would resonate most with my student population?

What Would You Do? The institution sees more risk than benefit in the program you're creating.

What Would You Do? The institution insists that you continue to use previous methods because they "still work."

A faded background image of a wooden park bench. The bench has several horizontal slats with graffiti painted on them. The most prominent graffiti reads 'FIGHT FOOD RECOVERY NETWORK' across three slats. Other faint graffiti includes 'FIGHT WASTE' and 'FEE'.

What Would You Do? The institution requires peer institution data regarding a program you want to begin.

What Would You Do? Campus partners necessary for the process are at capacity and cannot support your project.

References

Feeding America. (n.d.). *Food waste in America: How you can help rescue food*. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/reduce-food-waste>

ReFED. (n.d.). *How big is the food waste problem in the U.S.—and what are its causes and impacts?* <https://refed.org/food-waste/the-problem/>

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. (2026, March 30). *Food security in the U.S. - Measurement*. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement>



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Thank you!

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