

# iCAP Team Recommendation

Name of iCAP Team: [Zero Waste Team](#)

iCAP Team Chair and Vice-Chair: [Shreya Mahajan and Nishant Garg](#)

Date submitted to iWG: [12/7/22](#)

Recommendation title: [Project 4 Less Expansion](#)

---

*For internal use only:* Date reviewed by iCAP Working Group:

**Specific actions/policy recommendation:** We recommend that University Housing Dining Services works with Project 4 Less to divert wasted food to those in need. Project 4 Less packages pre-consumer food waste (untouched food) from LAR dining hall each week and Housing coordinates the food's delivery to local food pantries, such as Wesley Food Pantry. Meals are then provided to community members experiencing food insecurity. Project 4 Less is currently only working out of LAR dining hall, and there is much more food to be recovered, such as from Ikenberry, ISR, and PAR dining halls.

Similar to how Project 4 Less currently collaborates with Housing at LAR, we request that:

- Housing stores and sets up materials (cold carts, boxes) before packaging events
- Housing saves and stores the food that needs to be packaged
- Housing arranges the transportation logistics (perhaps stops could be added to existing routes)

Ultimately, we recommend that Housing work with Project 4 Less to expand beyond LAR. Project 4 Less has the capacity to provide volunteers as part of a gradual expansion to other Dining Halls.

**Suggested unit/department to address implementation:** [University Housing Dining Services and Project 4 Less](#)

**Rationale for recommendation:** Massive amounts of food are wasted while millions of people around the country and billions of people around the world are food insecure. The University of Illinois can address both of these issues by diverting excess food from dining halls to those in need. Project 4 Less is an established RSO that is currently recovering food from one dining hall, so these two groups could work together to prevent more food from being wasted.

**Connection to iCAP goals:** This project applies to Objective 5.4: Reduce Food Scraps. Food that would otherwise be wasted is instead being provided to people in need! In the 2021-2022 school year alone, 3,776 pounds of food were recovered from LAR Dining Hall by Project 4 Less.

**Perceived challenges:** There have been delays in expanding the program due to COVID-19 restrictions and operational impacts from the pandemic, so these factors could cause delays in the future as well. Additionally, this takes cooperation from many parties (Project 4 Less, Housing, transportation, food pantries, etc.) so it will take consistent efforts to coordinate everyone. Potential partner pantries may also not be able to accept as much food as what can be donated due to space constraints and limited days of operation.

Anticipated timeline of implementation: Three semesters: it will likely take a semester to expand our operations at each of the dining halls (Ikenberry, ISR, and PAR). This will also allow Project 4 Less time to grow our volunteer base. We will slowly reach out to nearby pantries to expand once we proceed to the next steps (<https://www.eifoodbank.org/help/champaign.html>).

Anticipated budget (identify if cost is up-front or continuous):

These estimates are based off the current needs working out of LAR, and assume that a similar amount of food will be provided and thus the same number of cold carts and meal boxes will be required.

Cold carts: 6 x \$10,539 = \$63,234 (two cold carts per additional dining hall)

(<https://metro.com/shop/metro-c5r9-sb-c5-r-series-refrigerated-transport-cabinet/>)

Small meal boxes, which are more convenient for people who may be walking: \$182.77 per case of 500 boxes x 3 = estimated \$548.31 per dining hall per semester, if packaging one night per week

(<https://store.worldcentric.com/9x6x3-fiber-hoagie-box>)

OR

Large meal boxes, which are currently in use: \$118.22 per case of 200 lids + \$251.21 per case of 200 boxes = \$369.48 x 3 = \$1,108.44 per dining hall per semester

University Housing has graciously absorbed the additional costs that are difficult to quantify, such as labor, space, and transportation for the current food packaging operations and will do the same as the program expands.

Individual comments are required from each SWATeam member (one or two sentences):

Team Member Name	Team Member's Comments
Joy Scrogum	As noted in the "further explanation" section below, huge volumes of food are disposed of in IL landfills while over a million citizens of our state face food insecurity. Food loss and waste have significant environmental, as well as social, impacts. Expanding the food rescue efforts of Project 4 Less is a relatively simple way the University can strive to reduce waste while also combatting food insecurity, environmental degradation, and climate change.
Aaron Finder	I agree with this recommendation. If the university dining halls are able to divert waste with a manageable investment while helping our community, it sounds like a win/win scenario.
Joe Bradley	I agree with this recommendation. I have worked with a pantry that has received these meals. They have provided much needed support and help in our community. Additionally, it supports the university waste reduction goals and hopefully reduces food insecurity in our community. Perhaps even aligns with the broader land-grant mission.
Daphne Hulse	I agree with this recommendation. Not only would this investment increase the quantity of wasted food recovered for those needing food assistance, but it also increases the number of U of I students who can volunteer and engage with this important initiative.
Jenna Schaefer	I support this recommendation. It would be great for the University to further reduce food waste and help people in need at the same time.

Justin Holding	I support this recommendation. I think this a great partnership and initiative between the University and the community. It helps combat food waste and food insecurity.
Thurman Etchison	I support this recommendation and believe a slow, systematic expansion would be beneficial to those in need. This will also allow for more people to be involved. The program has been very successful since inception and is more important than ever.
Nikki Palella	I support this recommendation because I believe it will succeed in reducing carbon emissions associated with food waste while giving back to members of the local community.
Shreya Mahajan	I support this recommendation. I believe that diverting food waste with Project4Less will help people in need while also bringing us a step closer to our waste reduction iCAP goal.
Nishant Garg	I support the Project 4 Less recommendation.

Further explanation and background (can be supplied in an attachment): According to the [Materials Management Advisory Committee \(MMAC\) report to the Illinois General Assembly](#) (Table 2, pg. 26), in 2018 an estimated 2,637,076 tons of food scraps were disposed in landfills in IL, making food scraps the number one component of the IL landfill stream. While not all of the food that ends up in IL landfills would be suitable for human consumption, some of it surely is. [According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#), more than one-third of the food produced in the U.S. is never eaten, and food waste is also the most landfilled material nationwide. Meanwhile, [Feeding America estimates that in 2018, 1,283,550 people, or 10.1% of the population experienced food insecurity in Illinois](#). Although the rate of food insecurity in IL fell to 8.3% in 2020 [according to Feeding America data](#), this still represents over a million food insecure citizens in our state. This tragic mismanagement of material has implications not only for food insecurity, but also for environmental sustainability and climate change. The U.S. EPA states [the resources that go into a year of food loss and waste in our country \(excluding impacts of waste management itself, such as landfill methane emissions\) are equivalent to: the greenhouse gas emissions of over 42 coal-fired power plants; enough water and energy to supply over 50 million homes; an area of agricultural land equal to the states of California and New York; and the amount of fertilizer used in the U.S. to all plant-based foods for human consumption domestically.](#)

Comments from consultation group (if any; these can be anonymous):