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Respondent

11

Jenna Schaefer

42:44

Time to complete

Final Project Report

1. Date of this final project report submission *

4/30/2025

2. Name of project exactly as it was listed in your award letter *

Project 4 Less

3. Date (or semester/year) of original award letter *

December 2019

4. Expiration date of award as listed on original award letter or approved scope change letter - whichever is more recent *

12/15/2025

5. Enter the amount of the award, including any budget increases as a result of a previous scope change. *

\$5017

6. How much (in dollars) of your award (including previous approved budget increases) is remaining? *

\$8.96

7. Briefly describe the goals of your project. *

Project 4 Less aims to reduce food waste and food insecurity in the Champaign-Urbana community by connecting surplus food from LAR dining hall with local food pantries. Student volunteers package this surplus food into meal boxes, showing them how big of an issue food waste is and providing them with an opportunity to make a difference.

8. Did you complete your project as it was outlined in the original award letter or in a subsequent approved scope change? *

- ☒ Yes, the project was completed as originally outlined.
- ☐ No, the project was not completed as originally outlined.

9. On what date did you consider the project finished or that you stopped working on it? *

The account funds were spent (as close as possible to \$0 remaining) in March 2025.

10. Describe, in detail, the challenges / obstacles your project faced. *

Project 4 Less team members originally applied for funding in Fall 2019 and had plans to expand food recovery operations in 2020, which was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. We were unable to recover food in part of the 2020-2021 school year due to dining hall closures and safety concerns about the pandemic, and our expansion plans did not come to fruition that year. Later on, we coordinated with LAR dining hall to establish another night of food packaging to recover more food. However, they found that there actually was not enough surplus food for this to be worthwhile (which is actually great that they don't have THAT much surplus food!). We have repeatedly reached out to various contacts within University Dining to expand our operations to other dining halls, but we have unfortunately never found success and buy-in from their end. However, I would like to note that we are very grateful for all of the support they provide to our current operations, and the staffing issues and strike have understandably made it difficult for them to help us expand.

11. Describe, in detail, the successes your project experienced. *

Project 4 Less has packaged thousands of boxes of surplus food since obtaining the SSC grant in the 2019-2020 school year. We have been able to recover surplus food from LAR dining hall nearly every Wednesday while school is in session since then, with the exception of some disruptions in 2020. Each week, we are able to package around 20-50 boxes of surplus food, with each box providing 3-4 meals. Instead of going to waste, this food has fed countless members of our community after being distributed at Wesley and UniPlace food pantries. We hear from Wesley food pantry that its patrons are very grateful for these meals. In addition, dozens to hundreds of students have volunteered at our food packaging sessions. This has exposed them to how much food goes to waste in just one university dining hall, and teaches them to be more mindful of their own food waste. Our volunteers come from across campus, not just environmental majors.

12. Describe, in detail, how your implemented project addressed sustainability. *

By packaging surplus dining hall food, we have prevented thousands of pounds of perfectly good food from going to waste. While our campus is lucky enough to have the Grind2Energy systems in place that would prevent this food from going to the landfill, growing and producing food is resource intensive - requiring land, water, and energy inputs - and it is much more efficient for this food to be eaten than for it to be used as energy. The boxes that we use for food packaging are not made of plastic or polystyrene foam - we use compostable boxes made of plant-based materials. Our food packaging sessions are an opportunity for students to learn about the environmental issue of food waste and to get directly involved in sustainability efforts on campus.

13. Describe, in detail, how your project integrated student involvement and community outreach. *

Three to four volunteers help at our weekly food packaging events, and these volunteers are all students. Project for Less also has biweekly meetings that allow more students to get involved with the logistical and planning side of food packaging, as well as outreach efforts related to food waste and insecurity, such as educational presentations, tabling opportunities, and fundraising. By working with local food pantries, the work we do is inherently community-focused. These pantries are open to anyone, not just students. We have food resource information on our social media for anyone experiencing food insecurity. Students involved in Project 4 Less have visited local elementary and middle schools to educate students about food waste and food insecurity. We have also increased our community engagement by becoming a University YMCA-affiliated organization in spring 2024, connecting us with more organizations dedicated to social justice.

14. Describe how the project engaged individuals from underrepresented groups and/or how it promoted diversity, equity, and inclusion. *

Project 4 Less works with local food pantries by providing meals to community members experiencing food insecurity, and underrepresented groups are more likely to experience food insecurity. Additionally, Project 4 Less is a University Y-affiliated organization, and the Y is committed to social justice, environmental protection, interfaith cooperation and global engagement. We were selected as a group that embodies these principles, and we engage with the Y and other Y-affiliated organizations that have a similar focus.

15. What key takeaways should the campus community know about your project? *

Food insecurity and food waste aren't separate issues, but solutions to one another. Estimates report that 30-40% of food goes to waste, yet hundreds of millions of people around the world experience food insecurity. While these are huge issues way beyond the scope of this project, we are proud to be doing our part in reducing both food waste and food insecurity in our community and we are grateful for all of the individuals and organizations who have supported our food recovery over the past few years.

16. Describe the marketing material developed for promotion of your project, including but not limited to advertising (including digital) and/or signage related to this project. All marketing must include SSC's logo and/or a statement of which fee funded the project. Projects must coordinate with SSC to ensure the promotion appropriately highlights the SSC's contributions to the project. *

Project 4 Less has an active Instagram account that promotes our food packaging events, meetings, other events, and information about food waste and insecurity.

17. Upload project marketing and/or media not previously submitted in semester progress reports. *

 IMG_6909_Jenna Schaefer.jpg

18. Complete and upload the final financial documentation for your project. You should reflect all expenditures since your last semester project report. We strongly suggest that you also upload supporting financial documentation from Banner for your award's CFOP. Any remaining funds will be transferred back to the SSC. It is the sponsoring department's responsibility to close the CFOP after the account is at a zero balance.

<https://studentengagement.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/2024-09/SSC-Budget-Timeline-FINAL-PROJECT-REPORT-template.xlsx>

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