

One in nine Americans are food insecure, yet approximately 40 percent of food in the United States is wasted each year. In 2017 the country's largest grocery chain, The Kroger Co. (Kroger), launched the Zero Hunger | Zero Waste Initiative (ZH|ZW) to address this disconnect and end by 2025 hunger and food waste within the communities it serves. Kroger created the Zero Hunger | Zero Waste Foundation (Foundation) to pursue and coordinate this Initiative.

The Foundation asked the Capstone class to provide actionable recommendations involving infrastructure, policy, and engagement (IPE) that will help the Initiative meet its goals. To do this, the Capstone class conducted extensive research and met over the course of several weeks to develop and refine action items that are data driven and feasible. Research included:

- Analysis of data on food donations and food waste provided by Kroger and by major community partners in Indianapolis and Bloomington, the two sample communities studied[1];
- Analysis of relevant demographic and other data regarding Indianapolis and Bloomington;
- Structured interviews with the ZH|ZW Project Director, community partners, and food policy scholars;
- Extensive reviews of scholarly literature on hunger and food insecurity, food waste and loss, effective public engagement methods, and related areas such as motivating employees to engage with employer initiatives;
- Examination of data and materials published by relevant government agencies, civil society leaders, and think tanks.

Based on this research, the class identified numerous actions that the Foundation could take to advance the Initiative, and actions it can urge Kroger corporate offices and stores to take. In view of the Foundation's lean resources and staffing, the class prioritized actions that would increase the impact of Foundation giving and communications and leverage the resources of Kroger, current and potential community partners, and the public.

Accordingly, the top five recommendations were to:

Incentivize Kroger associates and managers to participate fully and creatively in the Initiative.

To achieve its goals the Initiative requires sincere and sustained buy-in from front-line personnel dealing with food donations and waste;

Focus Foundation giving on programs that alleviate hunger in children and that can prevent the lifelong health, educational, and economic harms that hunger causes;

Revamp the Foundation website and engage extensively with social media to boost the Initiative's profile among potential donors and to help build sustained community engagement;

Support, and urge Kroger to adopt, measures that increase local farmers' ability to sell products in stores; and

Urge Kroger to lend its powerful voice in support of sensible public policies that tackle hunger and food waste, including their root causes.

The COVID-19 pandemic that emerged during the Capstone project has greatly exacerbated problems of both hunger and food waste, and the class also included recommendations focused directly on alleviating emergency conditions imposed by the pandemic and building resilience to lessen the impact of future emergencies.