

"take what you need, leave what you can"

*a zine about community fridges and how to
get one started in your neighborhood*

"We're each of us alone, to be sure.
What can you do but hold your hand out
in the dark?" - **Ursula K. Le Guin**



what is a community fridge?

a community fridge is a free-standing, outdoor refrigerator, open 24/7 for neighbors to take and donate food. they are anarchist and anti-capitalist mutual aid projects that exist outside of government channels and address food insecurity directly. we often say that community fridges are "for neighbors, by neighbors" because they are a direct, community-driven response to larger forces of government inaction, food insecurity, food waste, and food deserts.



community fridges and the collectives behind them are inspired by works like *The Conquest of Bread* by Peter Kropotkin and other mutual aid legacies like the Black Panther's *People's Free Food Program*, the Young Lords' *Free Breakfast Program*, and Food Not Bombs.

these projects and the collectives behind them are rooted in radical compassion and solidarity. when you see every member of your community as your neighbor, you cannot ignore their suffering.

as a comrade in the Allston-Brighton fridge collective said, "someday, the pandemic will be over, but oppression and inequality will not disappear with it. we will continue supporting, defending, and uplifting all of our neighbors as long as capitalism, means-test welfare, and unresponsive representatives continue to fail them."

list of community fridges in MA, as of 2024

Andover:

- 23 Clark Road

Boston:

- 404 Washington Street, Brighton // @allstonbrightonfridges
- 110 Claybourne Street, Dorchester // @dotcommunityfridge
- 15 Tufts Street, Charlestown

Cambridge:

- 5 Callender St // @cambridgecitygrowers

Lawrence:

- East Haverhill Street // @lawrencecommunityfridge

Lynn:

- 16 City Hall Square // @lynncommunityfridge

Malden:

- 155 Beach Street (across the street from Dunkin Donuts)
- 195 Canal Street
- 420 Eastern Avenue
- 414 Pleasant Street

Medford:

- 75 Riverside Avenue (parking lot)
- 33 St. Clement Road // @somervillecommunityfridge

Newton:

- 420 Watertown Street // @newtoncommunityfreedge

Somerville: @somervillecommunityfridge

- 35 Prospect Street
- 36 Sewall Street

Watertown:

- 80 Mt. Auburn Street // @watertowncommunityfridge

Worcester: @woofridge

- 44 Portland Street
- 16 Brooks Street
- 42 South Street
- 695 Southbridge Street
- 2 Kansas Street

isn't a community fridge like a food bank?

while food banks and pantries are largely essential resources that help provide food for people facing food insecurity, they ultimately operate under a principle of conditional aid. food banks & pantries often limit what kinds of food, how much food, and how often a person can take food. they also often decide this for people in need of food, which leaves them without agency in determining what food they want and how much food they need. additionally, many factors influence accessibility, such as: citizenship status, income, family size, age, race, housing status, and sobriety.

community fridges operate under principles of mutual aid. there are no barriers to access when taking from a community fridge. fridges are outdoors and open 24/7, so neighbors don't have to enter a facility, check in with anyone, fill out paperwork, or meet certain criteria to use the fridge. we hope that this can help lessen the stigma and shame surrounding food insecurity, and that neighbors will be able to take what they want in addition to what they need, and feel supported and heard.



the first MA fridge in JP



South End Fridge in Boston



Somerville Community Fridge



Roslindale Community Fridge

how do community fridges work?

community fridges are set up and maintained by neighbors in a collective who do twice-daily fridge checks, collaborate on projects and outreach, and coordinate food rescue donations, pickups, and fridge restocking.

fridges require a "host" location- an establishment willing to allow a fridge collective to plug the fridge into their store and set it up in front of their business.

fridges are often accompanied by a dry pantry, which allows for more flexibility in what can be provided for your neighbors. these can be stand-alone pantries or built into a shed that houses the fridge. with a pantry, you can stock shelf-stable and non-perishable foods, baby care items, PPE, household goods, pet food, menstrual supplies, etc.! it also gives you space to gather feedback from neighbors on what they'd like to see more of at the fridge, and places where you can post flyers, zines, and other community resources.



fridges and pantries are stocked in a number of ways: neighbors, restaurants, local businesses, churches, schools, grocery stores, farmers, and farmer's markets can donate food. some fridges accept financial donations through Paypal or Venmo so that fridge collective members can shop and load up the fridge on their own, and some only fundraise for specific projects.

while fridges seek to address food insecurity, they also help combat food waste. often, farmers at farmer's markets are more than willing to donate unclaimed CSAs, comrades working at restaurants or bakeries can liberate day-old baked goods, unclaimed takeout orders, or food still good to serve. fridges emphasize quality is care- don't donate what you wouldn't eat yourself!

fridges are often decorated by community artists and accompanied with slogans like, "take what you need, leave what you can!" to stress that community fridge use is unconditional and not transactional. you don't have to donate to the fridge in order to take food! there are no limits on how many times you can take food, or any requirements, forms, or criteria to be met to use the fridge! it's truly for everyone.

i feel inspired, how do i get one started?

1. **build an affinity group**: with a group, you can brainstorm together and share tasks of: finding a fridge, securing a location, doing temperature/ cleaning checks, restocking the fridge, coordinating social media and outreach, and helping to onboard more neighbors who volunteer as time goes on! there are a lot of moving parts to making sure that a fridge is running well and running safely, and the work is easier when shared.

2. **do your research**: use your affinity group as an education space. learn together about mutual aid, building consensus, food insecurity, food waste, and your community's specific needs. this will help build a foundation for your collective rooted in community care and solidarity- with your neighborhood and with each other!

2. **social media**: Facebook and Instagram can be used to find refrigerators, artists excited to paint them, donations when the fridge is empty, volunteers willing to help out, and can help you build connections with community fridges nearby and across the country.

- a. in addition to social media, you'll want to create a Signal chat or Discord server for communicating within your fridge group.
- b. you'll also want to create an email address specifically for your fridge. this helps people know how to contact your fridge, and it's a way for you to reach out for donations or respond to interviews without giving any personal information away.
- c. connect with your local mutual aid group(s)!
 - our Allston Brighton community fridges are inspired by and connected with collectives like Allston Brighton Mutual Aid, Warm Up Boston, Solidarity Supply Distro, Boston's Food Not Bombs chapter, and the Lucy Parsons Center.

3. **find a fridge**: check Craigslist, Facebook marketplace, restaurants, moving companies, or reach out to the community on social media before buying a new fridge. you can always crowdfund to purchase a new fridge, but you'll be surprised what you can find just by asking!

i feel inspired, how do i get one started? (continued)

4. **secure a host**: you'll need to find a place willing to "host" the fridge, meaning let you set up the fridge + pantry in front of their location and plug the fridge into their store. this could be a restaurant, convenience store, church, small business, or anywhere that gets foot traffic and is interested in being a part of the community fridge project. electricity costs about \$30/month, and some hosts opt to cover that cost themselves or ask for reimbursement from the community fridge collective. you'll want to factor in a few variables in choosing a location: how close your host is to public transit, how many grocery stores exist in the community (if any), and how many community fridges are already nearby. it's helpful to choose a location where multiple bus/train lines intersect, to maximize fridge usage.

5. **fridge checks**: fridge checks are crucial to making sure that the fridge is functioning and the food inside is safe. you'll want to do a minimum of 2 checks per day to ensure: temperature inside the fridge and freezer are in food-safe ranges, there are no pests, any rotten/ expired food can be disposed of, and high touch surfaces can be disinfected. it's helpful to ask volunteers to check in for their fridge check shift in advance and ask for coverage in case they can't make it, provide pictures of the fridge and pantry, clean any spills/ disinfect high touch areas, dispose of expired/ rotten food, and immediately let the group know of any issues (electrical, pests, damage to the fridge, etc.)

but wait... what about liability?

good question! it helps that some of our collective members have been/ are ServSafe certified, so that we can apply safe practices to the fridge. generally speaking, you'll need to make sure your fridge operates in a safe temperature zone, you clean/ disinfect regularly, and throw away expired goods. we reference the following guides when researching liability:

- the USDHHS/ FDA Food Safety Roadmap
- the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act
- Liability Protection for Food Donation in Massachusetts
- MA Food Waste Policy

other helpful resources:

- In Our Hearts NYC
- Freedge.org's "*Freedge Yourself!*" guide
- Queens Fridges 4 Accountability statement on the appropriation of mutual aid