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Mary Leslie Patterson

Entry details

Entry Name: food4VOLS in partnership with Vol Dining

Institution Name: University of Tennessee

Entry Completed By (*name and position*): Mary Leslie Patterson - Sr. District Marketing Manager

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Essay:

NACUFS Sustainability Award Submission
Program: food4VOLS (in partnership with Vol Dining)
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Program Overview

food4VOLS is a cross-campus sustainability initiative led by the UT Culinary Institute in strategic partnership with Vol Dining. The program recovers surplus food from campus dining operations and transforms it into safe, nutritious, ready-to-eat meals for students and community partners.

By leveraging Vol Dining's scale, culinary systems, and food safety standards alongside food4VOLS' mission-driven leadership, the program creates a closed-loop food recovery model that advances waste reduction, food access, and student engagement.

Operating from the UT Culinary Institute, food4VOLS produces an average of 600 meals per day, demonstrating a highly scalable model that diverts significant volumes of food from landfill while delivering measurable social impact. This partnership exemplifies how independent campus units can align operations and purpose to achieve shared sustainability goals.

Innovation & Operational Excellence

The success of food4VOLS is rooted in a structured partnership model that integrates:

Vol Dining's food recovery pipeline, capturing high-quality surplus food from multiple dining locations

Standardized food safety and handling protocols, ensuring compliance from recovery through distribution.

Centralized production at the UT Culinary Institute, enabling efficient batch cooking, packaging, and storage.

Clear cross-departmental coordination, aligning logistics, staffing, and daily production targets.

This system transforms excess food into a reliable production stream, moving beyond donation to a replicable, high-volume recovery operation.

Measurable Impact - food4VOLS delivers quantifiable outcomes across environmental and social metrics:

~600 meals produced daily, totaling thousands of meals weekly - Significant diversion of surplus food from the waste stream, reducing landfill impact and associated emissions

Expanded access to nutritious meals for both campus and community populations.

Consistent utilization of recovered food, maximizing resource efficiency.

These results demonstrate a sustainable model that balances operational feasibility with meaningful impact.

Campus & Community Impact - This partnership strengthens the university's commitment to sustainability and food security by connecting dining operations with broader campus and community needs. Recovered meals support on-campus initiatives, through the 6 on campus Big Orange Pantries in connection with Center for Basic Needs, which offer free prepackaged single-serve meals to students facing food insecurity. Additionally, food4VOLS provides meals to nonprofit partners throughout Knoxville, extending the reach of university resources beyond campus boundaries.

By aligning two distinct entities - food4VOLS and Vol Dining—the program creates a high-impact collaboration that advances institutional priorities, while addressing on campus food insecurity and serving as a model for peer institutions.

Student Engagement & Experiential Learning - food4VOLS is student-driven, with participants leading food recovery, production, packaging, and distribution efforts. Through its partnership with Vol Dining, students gain exposure to large-scale culinary operations, food safety systems, and sustainability practices.

This hands-on experience builds practical skills in logistics, production, and nonprofit collaboration, while reinforcing the value of resource stewardship and community impact. Students are not only participants, but they are also active contributors to a measurable sustainability solution.

Log in to nacufs.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.

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VOLUNTEER WITH food4VOLS

Get involved and help make a difference right here on campus! If you are interested in our mission or are looking for a fun environment to get your service hours, consider volunteering with Food4VOLS!

Scan the QR Code and sign up for a shift to receive a free Food4VOLS Water Bottle!



2:00-5:00
MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY!

2024 MEYLAND DRIVE



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COMMUNITY IMPACT
Food4VOLS Jr. Summer Program

Total Meals Distributed: **1281**

Total Kids Served: **668**

Most Popular Needs: QUESADILLAS, FRIED FISH LUNCH & LASAGNA

Number of Schools Represented: **61**



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Where Else Is food4VOLS

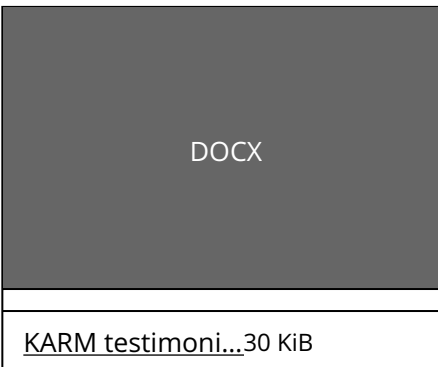
- Pendergrass Library**
2407 River Drive #101
- The Nursing Building**
1000 Volunteer Blvd, Third Floor
- The College of Communications**
1045 Circle Park Drive, The Scripps Convergence Lab
- The Health and Wellness Center**
800 Volunteer Blvd, First Floor
- The Jessie Harris Building**
128 Cumberland Avenue, Room 110
- The Veteran's Success Center**
John C. Hodges Library 0200
- The Big Orange Pantry**
902 Cumberland Avenue Suite 276C



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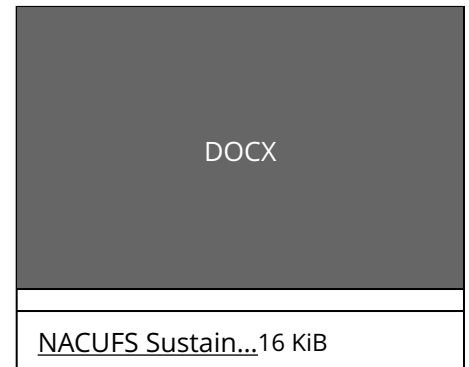
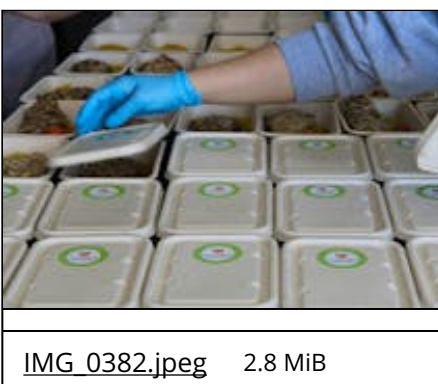
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