

MEAL EXCHANGE



Lakehead University Grocery Bus Service Pilot

Phase One Report

JANUARY 2019

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SUMMARY

The Grocery Bus Service was a four-week pilot initiative to reduce lack of transportation as a barrier to food security for Lakehead University students. The Grocery Bus Pilot is a collaborative initiative between the Students Feeding Change (SFC) Project at Meal Exchange, the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy (TBAFS), and Lakehead University Student Union (LUSU). The Grocery Bus pilot operated on four dates during the Fall of 2018 and served 45 Lakehead University students in total, who accessed between 1- and 2-weeks' worth of groceries each trip. The majority of students who accessed the bus identified "lack of transportation" as a barrier to their ability to access fresh, healthy food options. The Coordinating Committee (Victoria Pullia, Rob Strachan, and Merryn Maynard) will be sharing the learnings and recommendations from the pilot to inform the next phase of the Grocery Bus Service in the winter of 2019.

Background

Canadian research has demonstrated that a lack of access to transportation can result in increased risk of food insecurity (Perez et al. 2017; Gorton et al. 2010). In 2016, the national charitable organization Meal Exchange launched the Hungry for Knowledge report which found that 39% of post-secondary students across five Canadian campuses experienced food insecurity, with some of the highest rates at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay; nearly 1 in 2 students (46%) had experienced moderate or severe food insecurity (Silverthorn 2016). As the voice of the national student food movement, Meal Exchange works with students, campuses, and community organizations to support fair, just, and resilient campus food systems across Canada. In response to student and stakeholder action on student food insecurity at Lakehead University, and with support from the Maple Leaf Centre for Action on Food Security, Meal Exchange launched the Students Feeding Change project and has been working with local partners to facilitate programs in Thunder Bay with the goal of supporting student food security, access to education, and well-being.

Meal Exchange's Students Feeding Change project held a series of Student Food Security Innovation Labs in the spring of 2018, where campus and community stakeholders engaged in discussions about the barriers to student food security. Transportation emerged during these conversations as a key barrier to Lakehead student food access; in particular, the distance between the Lakehead campus and grocery stores in the Thunder Bay area. In response to stakeholder momentum on the barrier posed by transportation, Meal Exchange Student Coordinator Jasra Rasmath partnered with the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy in the early stages of the Grocery Bus Service pilot process, as both groups play a critical role in ensuring access to healthy foods for post-secondary students in Thunder Bay.

The TBAFS's mission is to create a healthy, equitable, and sustainable food system that contributes to the economic, ecological, and social wellbeing and health of the Thunder Bay area and local First Nation communities. Seven pillars of the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy include: Food Access, Forest and Freshwater Foods, Food Infrastructure, Food Procurement, Food Production, Urban Agriculture and School Food Environments. The Grocery Bus Service Pilot fit well within the Food Access and School Food Environments pillars and was an important initiative in the Thunder Bay Area to support in order to increase student food access.

Key Partners Involved and Roles

*Victoria Pullia, Intern/Administrative Coordinator at the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy
Marketing and communications, sponsorship, coordination and logistics in-kind support

*Rob Strachan, Meal Exchange Students Feeding Change Coordinator at Lakehead University
Coordination and logistics lead, marketing and communications support

*Merryn Maynard, Meal Exchange Knowledge Mobilization Manager
Oversight, administration, and outreach to the Lakehead Food Security Committee

Lakehead University Student Union
Sponsor, paid for the majority of the bus costs for the month-long pilot

Thunder Bay Country Market
Sponsor, provided \$2 off coupons to all attendees

*Coordinating Committee Member

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PRE-PILOT PLANNING

A survey was administered through Google Forms by Victoria Pullia of the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy at the Lakehead University Health and Wellness Fair on October 3rd, 2018. The survey was used to ask students if a Bus Service would help them access healthy and affordable foods and which locations they would be interested in visiting. Questions regarding preferred dates and times were also included. The three sites were chosen due to geographical distance from Lakehead University's campus, product availability and pricing. The sites were chosen in direct response to student interests. Students also mentioned their interest in purchasing local foods which is why the Thunder Bay Country Market was a site option. See Appendix A for the Health and Wellness Fair Survey shared with students.

The Coordinating Committee met frequently over the course of two months beginning early October 2018 until the end of November 2018 using phone calls, in person meetings and Zoom's virtual meeting room.

Objectives of Pilot

1. To increase Lakehead University student access to fresh food options in Thunder Bay
2. To assess student demand for transportation support in accessing fresh food options
3. To support Lakehead University student food security

Output Indicators

1. Number of students attending
2. Demographics of students attending

Outcome Indicators

1. Students have improved physical access to groceries
 - a. Student perspective: "As a student at Lakehead University, when it comes to having access to enough healthy food, do you encounter any of the following barriers?"
2. Students have improved food security
 - a. Student perspective: "How many days worth of groceries did you purchase/are you planning to purchase during this Lakehead Grocery Bus Service trip?"

Barriers and Needs

Most elementary and secondary schools in Canada do not have an operating budget for food programs. Available food on school property is sold at the discretion of the school itself and requires students to purchase items (Holmes 2019). Nutrition programs geared to students experiencing food insecurity rely on donations, financial or material, to support their school food needs (Holmes 2019). To improve food programming and access, those who work within the school food environment reported that their school needs additional and sustained funding, human resources and infrastructure to maintain nutrition programs (Holmes 2019).

In the social innovation labs that took place at Lakehead and Ryerson Universities, participants identified awareness of and access to culturally appropriate foods, with emphasis on Indigenous students and newcomers, as an area needing attention.

In “Hungry for Knowledge” post-secondary students across Canada were asked to identify barriers to food insecurity. They named food costs, tuition fees, housing costs, inadequate income supports, and limited time to prepare food as key barriers to food security (Silverthorn 2016). Like their younger counterparts, post-secondary students experiencing food insecurity also lack infrastructure to address it, however many have access to temporary resources to access to mitigate the short-term impacts of food insecurity. These include but are not limited to “emergency food programs, finding free meals, food sharing, borrowing food or money for food” (Silverthorn 2016: 9). Although these options exist to mitigate the worst aspects of being food insecure, they do not necessary offer nutritious or culturally appropriate foods and, most pressing, they are not solutions to the causes of food insecurity.

Budget

<i>EXPENSES</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>REVENUE</i>	<i>Amount</i>
First Student Canada (Bus Service)		Lakehead University Student Union (LUSU)	\$1265.60
<i>November 10th</i>	\$293.80	Meal Exchange	\$203.40
<i>November 14th</i>	\$293.80	Meal Exchange Student’s Feeding Change	In-Kind
<i>November 17th*</i>	\$293.80	Coordination (Coordinator and Manager)	\$1812.32
<i>November 24th</i>	\$293.80		
<i>December 1st</i>	\$293.80		
Printing <i>Posters, Evaluation Forms, Resource Sheet</i>	LUSU In-Kind	Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy (TBAFS) Coordination	In-Kind \$812.50
TOTAL	\$1469.00	TOTAL	\$4093.82

*trip cancelled due road blockages due to Fort William Rotary Santa Claus Parade

Promotion

Promotion of the pilot was important to ensure students and the broader Thunder Bay community were aware of initiatives being implemented to increase food security for post-secondary students. A media release was sent out on November 7th, 2018 which resulted in four phone interviews, one live radio interview and one television interview held on the first route date of November 10th. Posters were displayed throughout the Lakehead University main campus and residence buildings, and the Bora Laskin Faculty of Law Campus. The Coordinating Committee also utilized social media to attract student’s interest. The Grocery Bus pilot was very well received by the community and a final media release will be issued early 2019 to provide a follow up on the findings and impact of the pilot.

Pilot Route

The Grocery Bus Service ran on 4 dates throughout November 2018 and one date in December 2018 for a total of two hours on each date. Saturday routes were scheduled from 11:00 am until 1:00 pm, and Wednesday routes were scheduled from 4:00 pm until 6:00 pm. Students were picked up at 11:00 am on Saturday dates and 4:00 pm on Wednesday dates, from the Agora Circle on Lakehead University's main campus and Bora Laskin Faculty of Law campus. Students were then transported to three local grocery stores, Walmart Supercentre, Superstore and the Thunder Bay Country Market. Students were required to reserve their spot on the bus route before the route date by emailing the Coordinating Committee (Victoria, Rob, and Merryn) to secure their spot and receive the route information.

Two route cycles were completed in a two-hour time frame to ensure students could be dropped off at one location during the first rotation and be picked up during the second rotation. Students were returned to the Agora Circle and Bora Laskin Faculty of Law campus at 1:00 pm on Saturdays and 6:00 pm on Wednesday. This route did not allow students to shop at more than one location or begin shopping during the second rotation. See Appendix B for the Route Map provided to students.

EVALUATION OF PILOT

Impact and student feedback were collected through a post-route survey each student participant was requested to complete before exiting the bus. See Appendix C for the Grocery Bus Feedback Form.

Outputs

1. Number of students attending

Figure 1: In total, 45 students accessed the Grocery Bus Service and 21 bus riders completed the Feedback Form.

Category	Saturday Nov 10	Wednesday Nov 14	Saturday Nov 24	Saturday Dec 1	TOTALS
Number of Students who accessed the Service	20	3	6	16	45
Number of Feedback Forms Collected	10	3	6	0	21

2. Demographics of students attending

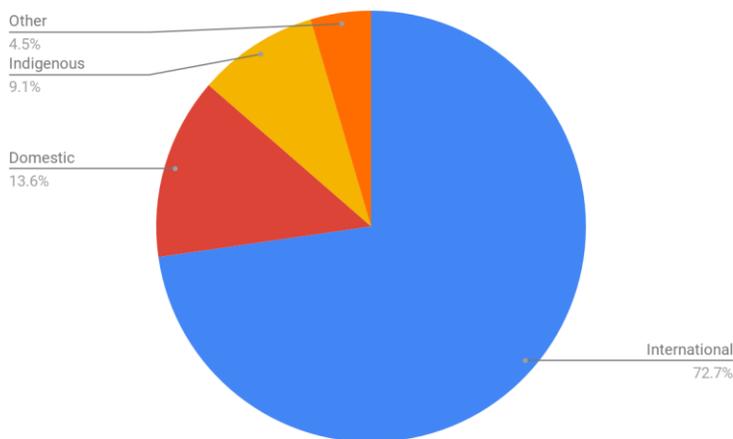


Figure 2: Majority of students who completed the Feedback Form were international students (n=16), three were domestic students, and two were Indigenous students. 62% lived on campus (13) and 38% (8) lived off campus.

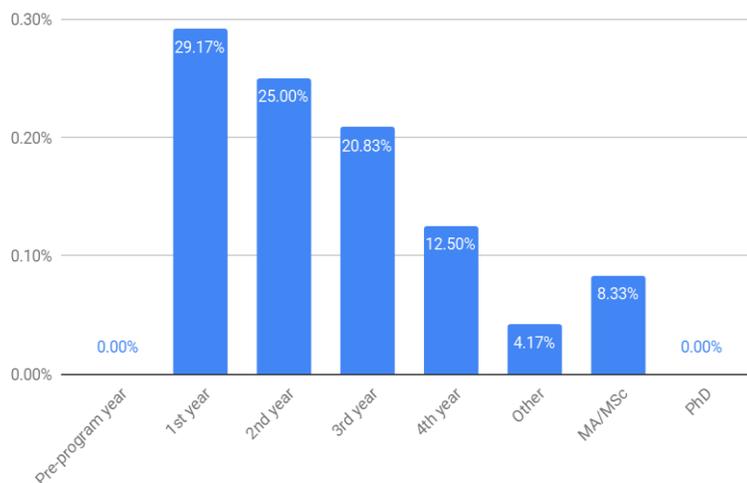


Figure 3: Students from a range of degrees of study accessed the Grocery Bus Service, with the majority in 1st, 2nd or 3rd year.

Outcomes

1. Students have improved physical access to groceries

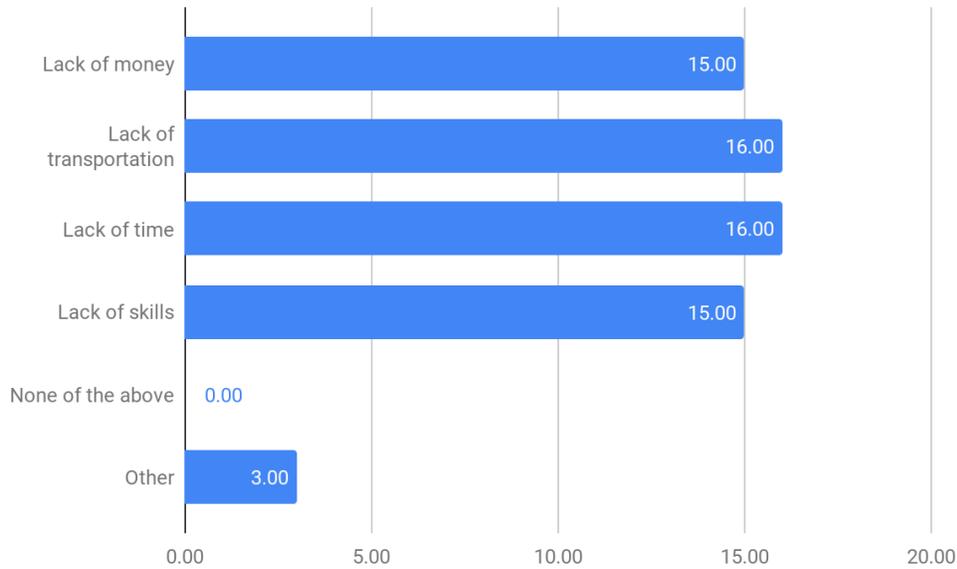


Figure 4: Of the students who completed the feedback form, the most commonly identified barriers to healthy food access were lack of transportation and lack of time.

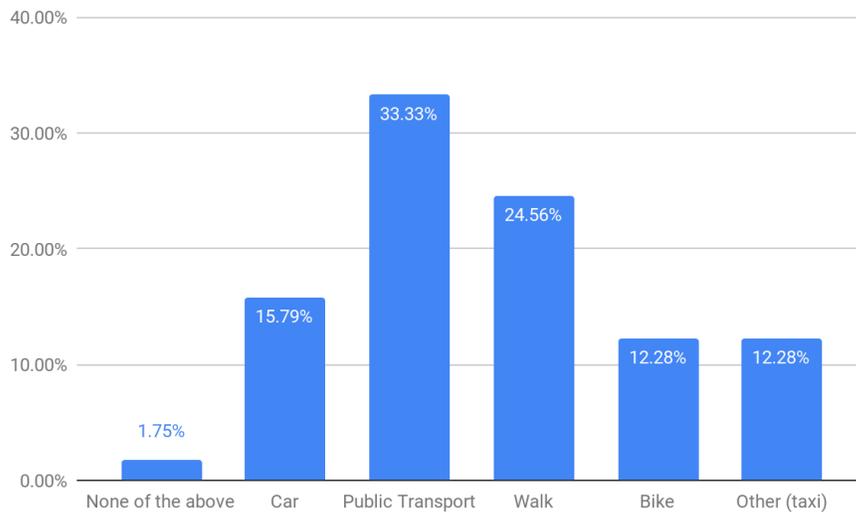


Figure 5: The primary modes of transportation that students use to access groceries are public transport and walking.

2. Students have improved food security

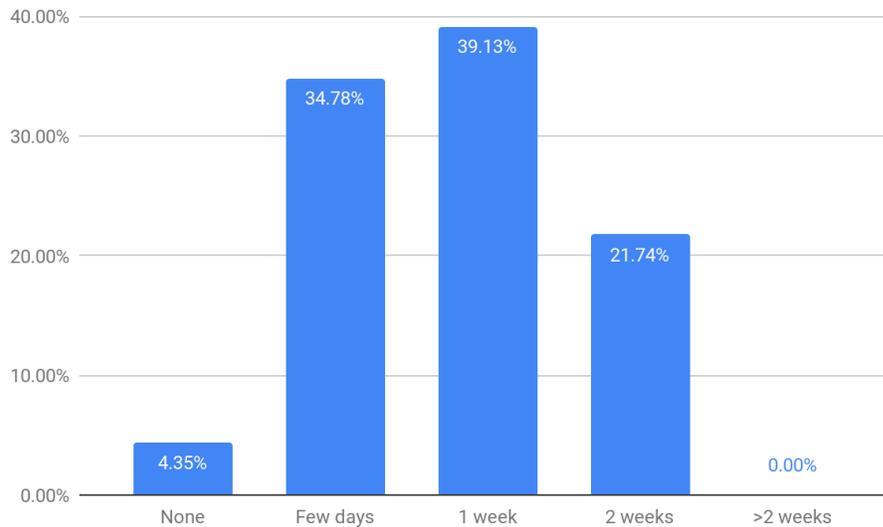


Figure 6: Majority of students purchased between one- and two-weeks worth of groceries on one grocery bus trip.

Other Reflections

Students were most interested in accessing the grocery bus service between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm on Fridays, Saturdays or Sundays, or between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. on Friday evenings.

Students varied in their opinions of how frequently the grocery bus service should operate; responses ranged from 2-3 times per week, to once per month.

Summary

The first phase of the Grocery Bus Service Pilot contributed to our learning about how transportation can impact the food security of students in Thunder Bay. We believe that this project is building upon the important work that is already making an impact on food access locally and feel its continuation could support food access among a variety of vulnerable populations alongside students including older adults and those living on a low-income in Northwestern Ontario. We hope to be able to run Phase 2 of the Grocery Bus Service during the Winter semester of 2019.

PHASE TWO RECOMMENDATIONS

Target Audience

1. Connecting with local organizations to explore the expansion of the Grocery Bus service to serve other populations who may have use of it, including The Student Union of Confederation College Inc. (SUCCI) and community groups connected to the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy.

Promotion

2. Advertise posters outside the bus (near the entrance door and back door of the bus) to advertise while driving.
3. Share pilot information (PDF Poster) via email to faculty requesting the information be shown to students at the beginning of lectures and tutorials.
4. Share pilot information (PDF Poster) to Lakehead University sports teams and other extracurricular groups to reach more students.
5. Distribute posters to local coffee shops and businesses students frequent.

Logistics

6. Add a third route loop for pickups that could allow students to shop during either the first or second route loop.
7. Operate the bus service between 9 - 5 p.m. on a Friday.
8. Connect with the Bora Laskin Faculty of Law's Law Students' Society (LSS) to determine if the Grocery Bus Service is a beneficial initiative for Law Students.
9. Require a Coordinator to remain on the bus throughout all route trips to ensure; students' questions are answered, feedback forms are dispersed and collected, students are not left behind, and the driver is aware of the route and all stops.
10. Review sustainable funding sources for future Grocery Bus Service projects.

Evaluation

11. Include a question on the feedback form that queries food security using the 6 items from the Hungry for Knowledge Survey.
12. Include a question on the feedback form that queries what site location each student visited on a specific route date.
13. Include a question on the feedback form that queries how much each student spent at each site location.
14. Track how many students stop at each site, this can be completed by the Coordinator on the bus.

REFERENCES

Gorton D, Bullen CR, Mhurchu CN. Environmental influences on food security in high-income countries. *Nutr Rev.* 2010;68(1):1–29.

Holmes, S. (2019) Food Procurement in English-language Canadian public schools: Opportunities and challenges. *Canadian Food Studies.* 6(1): 75-99.

Perez E, Roncarolo F, Potvin L. Associations between the local food environment and the severity of food insecurity among new families using community food security interventions in Montreal. *Can J Public Heal.* 2017;108(1): e49–55.

Silverthorn D. Hungry for knowledge: Assessing the prevalence of student food insecurity on five Canadian campuses [Internet]. Toronto, ON; 2016. Available from: <http://mealexchange.com>

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Health and Wellness Fair Survey

Sign Up Here

Information will be shared with the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy, Meal Exchange and some Lakehead University services.

Email address *

Valid email address

Name *

Short answer text

Where do you access food on campus?

- I have a Meal Plan (Residence Cafeteria)
- I shop at Local Grocery Stores
- On Campus Food Kiosks (Starbucks, Agora Bistro, The Outpost, The Study, etc.)
- Don't Know and/or Prefer Not to Answer

Are you interested in signing up for a "Grocery Trip" bus ride from Lakehead University to Grocery Stores?

- Yes
- No

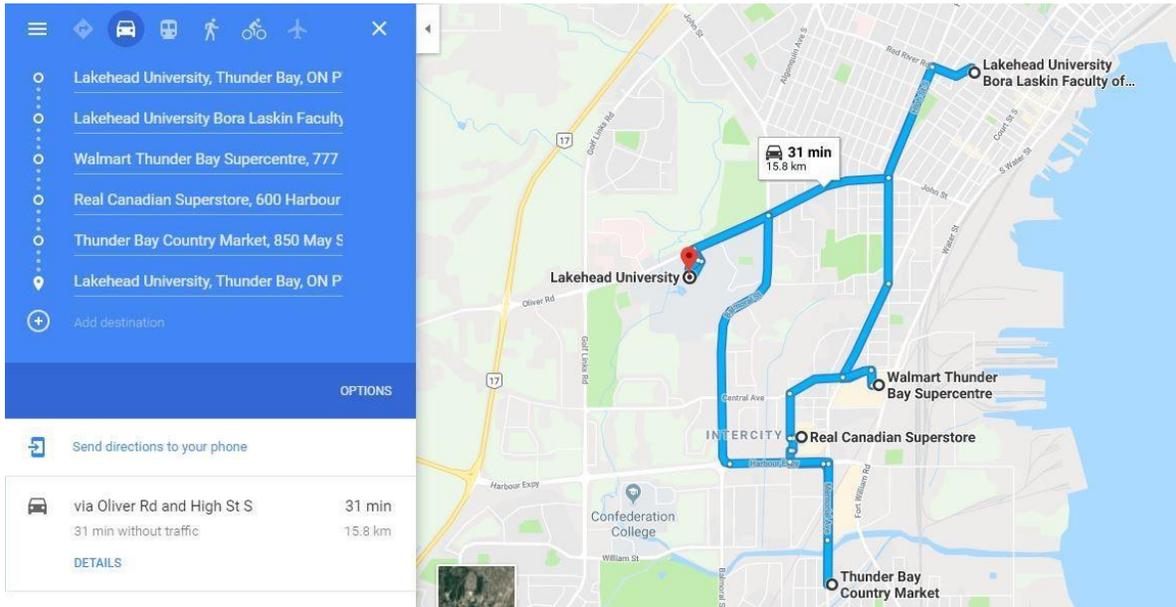
If you replied Yes, what days would be best?

- Sunday
- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday

Additional Comments

Short answer text

Appendix B: Route Map Provided to Students



EXPECTED TIME SCHEDULE

BORA LASKIN FACULTY OF LAW

Every hour for two hours

Saturdays

11:15 am; 12:15 pm

Wednesdays

4:15 pm; 5:15 pm

WALMART SUPERCENTER

Every hour for two hours

Saturdays

11:30 am; 12:30 pm

Wednesdays

4:30 pm; 5:30 pm

REAL CANADIAN SUPERSTORE

Every hour for two hours

Saturdays

11:45 am; 12:45 pm

Wednesdays

4:45 pm; 5:45 pm

THUNDER BAY COUNTRY MARKET

Saturdays

12 pm; 1:15 pm

Wednesdays

5 pm; 6 pm

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY AGORA

Saturdays

11 am; 12:15 pm; 1:30 pm

Wednesdays

4 pm; 5:15 pm; 6:15 pm

* Please keep in mind that the bus may be **15-30 minutes** late to each stop, but the bus will be at the pickup locations.

Appendix C: Grocery Bus Feedback Form

Grocery Bus Feedback Form

As a student at Lakehead University, when it comes to having **access to enough healthy food**, do you encounter any of the following barriers? Check all that apply:

- Lack of money
- Lack of transportation to grocery stores/food outlets
- Lack of time to purchase or prepare food
- Lack of skills to prepare food
- None of the above
- Other: _____

How many days worth of groceries did you purchase/are you planning to purchase during this Lakehead Grocery Bus Service trip? Please write: _____ days worth.

As a student at Lakehead University, what mode of transportation do you usually use to access grocery stores/food outlets?

- Car
- Public city bus
- Walk
- Bike
- Other: _____
- None of the above

What days and times would you be willing to use the Grocery Bus Service? Check all that apply.

How frequently should the Grocery Bus Service operate?

- 2-3 times per week
- Once per week
- Monthly

Please select all that apply to you:

- I am an international student
- I am a domestic student
- I am an Indigenous student
- None of the above
- Other: _____

Regarding your **current degree program**, please select the statement that best describes your situation:

- I am in my pre-program year (Applied sciences, skill building, etc..)
- I am a 1st year student
- I am a 2nd year student
- I am a 3rd year student
- I am a 4th year student
- Other: _____

Please state which program you are currently in?

_____ I am not in an official program

Please describe your current living situation:

- I live on campus
- I live off campus, but close to campus (within 15-minute walk)
- I live off campus, but far from campus (longer than 15-minute walk to campus)

Are there any other stops that you would like to add to the grocery bus service?

For inquiries on the information in this report or to collaborate, please contact:

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