



**Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank  
Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI)  
PARTNERS & MEMBERS WORKSHOP 1**  
Wednesday, May 26, 2021, 6:00 to 8:00 pm

**SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK**

While introducing themselves, everyone in the meeting briefly explained their programs and partnership with Food Bank. The discussion focused on the following questions:

1. What do you like about your experience with the Food Bank? What's working well?
2. What don't you like about your experience with the Food Bank? What's not working well?
3. What suggestions do you have to help strengthen or improve the Food Bank's operations and services?
4. What's your vision for the future of the Food Bank?
5. How can the Food Bank do a better job of connecting with people and partners that it doesn't currently reach?
6. How can the Food Bank do a better job of connecting with partners that it doesn't currently work with?

Participants were asked to consider the who, what, when, where, and how the Food Bank provides services. Here is the feedback and advice shared by participants:

**WHAT IS WORKING WELL**

- **Food Bank staff have supportive relationships with partners.** Despite Food Bank staff changing positions or leaving, participants said they have strong connections and support from their contacts in the Food Bank who continue to go above and beyond to support partners.

On Wednesday, May 26, 2021 representatives from partner and member stakeholder organizations participated in a workshop as part of the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI). Participants represented 5 organizations (see list in Attachment 1).

The focus group was held online using Zoom video conferencing software and included a brief introduction of the project from Chris West, followed by facilitated discussion between all participants.

The meeting was facilitated by Nicole Swerhun and Ruth Belay from Swerhun Inc., who also wrote this summary. As facilitators that are not advocating for any particular outcome of this project, the intent is to capture the perspectives shared during the discussion, not to assess the merit or accuracy of any of these perspectives. This summary does not indicate an endorsement of any of these perspectives on the part of Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank.

The summary was subject to participant review prior to being finalized. If you have questions about what's here, please don't hesitate to get in touch with the SEI Project Team through Erin Spangler, Engagement Initiative Project Manager, 412-460-3663 ext. 498 or [espangler@pittsburghfoodbank.org](mailto:espangler@pittsburghfoodbank.org) (also available on [SEI webpage](#)).

- **Food Bank has grown into a large organization.** Participants were supportive of the Food Bank's growth. One participant commended the progress reports produced by the Food Bank.
- **Food Bank partners have positive experiences collaborating with the Food Bank.** One partner noted that their relationship with the Food Bank has continued to evolve and partner in different ways, particularly around nutrition education.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE

- **Food Bank has grown into a large corporation with a network of staff which can be hard to access.** This growth also poses a challenge when trying to maintain strong connections with service delivery partners. Participants appreciated having an opportunity to share feedback through the workshop and noted confusion about not knowing where to share feedback outside of this process. *Suggestions to consider: Find ways to make it easy for partners to navigate the Food Bank as it grows, including ways to stay connected to Food Bank staff and other partners. The Food Bank should continue to look for ways to really know their partners and develop processes for better engaging and connecting with individual partners. One option is restarting the Network Meetings and hosting these meetings 3 to 4 times a year.*
- **The current 8 am to 4 pm pick-up or deliver hours hinders food pantries abilities to recruit volunteers who work during those hours.** *Suggestions to consider: Food Bank needs flexible hours of operation for pick-up and delivery. Expanding the Food Bank's hours of operation to include evening hours would greatly benefit the pantries abilities to recruit more volunteers.*
- **Partners would appreciate increased variety of foods available on inventory and would like to see more information about products on inventory including nutritional quality, content and size of packaging, expiration dates, photos of products, and other relevant information.** Participants also noted that the poor quality of produce or frozen meat products required volunteers to sort through bulk foods, which is a barrier for handling and selection of those items by partners. *Suggestion to consider: Partners would like a mix of products options and more information on selected products and/or inventory.*
- **Food Bank should continue to focus on nutrition education and better support partners to make informed decisions when they are selecting food from the Food Bank.** A couple of partners affirmed the

importance of providing partners information on nutritional value and “wise choice selection” for their programs. *Suggestion to consider: Nutrition education is an opportunity to connect with partners and other organizations committed to raising awareness. “Wise choice selection” information can help partners make the best choices for their communities and provide the proper nutritional information for people managing health issues (diabetes, hypertension, obesity, etc.).*

- **Look for more ways to co-locate services through partnership with other social service providers and community organizations.** *Suggestion to consider: Food Bank could explore opportunities to co-locate services or programs in proximity with other services providers (daycares, health clinics, etc.). Participants noted that close proximity to other service providers (i.e. Head Start) allows communities to easily access Food Bank services. One participant noted that their organization conducts a food insecurity screen and provides a few staple items through their food closet for immediate support which is followed up by contact information for local food pantries.*
- **Partners noted that word of mouth was the primary method of raising awareness of local pantries and programs.** Despite the decreasing number of people accessing services, partners noted that there were challenges reaching underserved populations. *Suggestion to consider: Food Bank should support advertising and increase awareness of local pantries and programs by developing a menu of options to inform residents about local pantries and programs (i.e. posters, public resources, etc.). The Food Bank should also go beyond menu of options and leverage their reach and network to connect with local schools, institutions and senior centers to build awareness of local service delivery partners or issues around food insecurity.*

## **VISION TO SUPPORT FOOD BANK’S MISSION**

Participants shared several suggestions for future improvements and opportunities in the previous section. Listed below are additional elements for consideration:

- **Food Bank network should continue to work towards the goal of eliminate food insecurity.** Continue to reach people who need the support and develop interactive ways to collaboratively help people remain food secure long-term.
- **Food Bank should continue to prioritize nutrition and dignified process to accessing food.** There needs to be continued advocacy

regarding the stigma around food insecurity and healthy food options. Nutrition education needs to also focus on teaching people how to cook and use ingredients provided in food pantries/food boxes. Participants noted that the Food Bank and other partners need to be explicitly aware of the spectrum of cooking capacity and utensil/equipment (i.e. microwave, stove, oven, cutting board, knives) among the population using Food Bank services and support pantries in surveying and addressing those local needs. Cooking recipes and videos are helpful tools for helping Food Bank users prepare food options.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Chris West, SEI Program Sponsor, told participants that the discussion was extremely helpful, and that it was exactly the type of feedback needed. He asked them to share the online survey with their networks. Erin Spangler would also follow up to connect participants with each other and sharing the link to the online survey.

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## **Attachment 1. Organizations participating in the meeting**

Adagio Health  
Brentwood Presbyterian Church Food Pantry  
Catholic Community of Bloomfield Food Pantry  
Central Food Pantry.  
Pittsburgh Community Services Incorporated