On Thursday, June 3, 2021 representatives from a diverse range of partner and member stakeholder organizations participated in a workshop as part of the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI). Participants represented 18 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 small group discussions and a plenary discussion between all participants.

The meeting was facilitated by 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 (also available on SEI webpage).

Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank
Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI)
PARTNERS & MEMBERS WORKSHOP 3
Thursday, June 3, 2021, 1:00 to 3:00 pm

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

While introducing themselves, everyone in the meeting briefly explained their programs and partnership with Food Bank. The small group discussion focused on the first three questions, followed by a group plenary conversation to cover the last three 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 is responsive and willing to adapt to partner and community needs.** Partners appreciate having one place (the Food Bank) to call when they need to help connect people to food. The Food Bank staff are always willing to work with partners to find creative solutions to help people get food.

- **Local community is aware of the Food Bank's services.** Food Bank has done an excellent job of reaching out in this area.

- **Ready-to-eat food and meals work well for populations experiencing homelessness.** Partners noted that people experiencing homelessness appreciate having access to food that can be eaten cold out of a can. There needs to be a balance between finding healthy canned food that at the same time is not unpleasant to eat out of a can like canned fish, chicken, and ravioli. The ready-to-eat military meals were great because of their convenience (grab-and-go) but relying on these types of meals on an ongoing basis is not necessarily the message we want to send (i.e. forcing a parallel between homelessness and being in the military).

- **Drive-up services are working well in some areas.** The drive-up service is a safer approach for both COVID-related reasons (i.e. allows for physical distancing) and non-COVID-related reasons (i.e. people, especially seniors, don't have to be outside in poor weather conditions). One partner organization uses two parking lots – people come to the top parking lot and get a number and then when their food is ready for pick-up, they are directed to the bottom parking lot and pick up a food box. People here have said that they like this approach better than waiting in line. They said that they like being able to stay in their cars (a separate line is available for people walking).

- **Food Bank users appreciate having an opportunity to select culturally relevant foods.** Before the pandemic, service providers were moving towards models that supported the selection choice of Food Bank users. The shop-through model increased autonomy and dignity of the process to self-select food relevant to them and their families. For example, one partner said that about 85% of the population they serve is from Nepal and would prefer having the option to select items because they don't like a lot of canned goods (so the shop-through approach works better).

- **Food Bank is a reliable service in providing and helping partners to source food to distribute to people in need**. Partners highlighted that without the support of the Food Bank that they would not be able to provide fresh vegetables and fruit. Senior boxes have been well received by Food Bank users and partners. The Food Bank is also great at helping partners connect people to food in emergency situations and providing grants to partners.

- **Food Bank does more than just provide food.** Partners shared that working with the food bank, they have discovered that the Food Bank also helps connect people to other services they need (employment and other life stabilization programs).

- **Pop-ups distributions in low-income and under-served communities have been an effective approach to meeting local needs.** Several partners acknowledged that pop-ups in low-income housing complexes have been well received in local communities.

- **Partners enjoy the Primarius website for ordering food or checking stock.** Partners are happy with the ordering system but would appreciate more specific information on the product's weight, packaging, or size so there are no surprises when food is delivered.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE

Who is being served

- **Critically reflect on how to respond to the needs of under-served communities through tailoring resources for specific groups.** It is critical to think about ways to tailor resources based on different age groups (e.g., what they need, how they access it, what barriers they experience). *Suggestions to consider: The drive-up process is great for lots of reasons, but it does limit people's choice (i.e., everyone more or less gets the same thing in their box of food). This can be a problem for people with dietary restrictions.*

- **There needs to be a plan for the transition to a new normal after COVID-19 pandemic.** New strategies were implemented during the pandemic to deliver food (i.e. home deliveries). *Suggestions to consider: The pandemic has made services providers more comfortable with home delivery which in the future can be an excellent way to reach seniors, homebound populations, and underserved communities.*

How food is received

- **Transportation can be a barrier to accessing Food Bank's and partners' services.** In some cases, people are prevented from accessing services because they don't have transportation or because the schedule means that the bus only comes once an hour. In other cases, the 20-pound boxes are too heavy to carry, especially on the

bus. *Suggestions for consideration: Food Bank needs to support partners who are doing home deliveries and directly targeting underserved communities. One partner noted that they use the church van to serve local communities and increase the visibility of their services by introducing themselves to residents. Another partner noted that the Food Bank can develop/coordinate a transportation system that brings groups of people to the farmers' markets or pick-up points.*

When food is received

- **Hours of operation are a barrier to accessing food for Food Bank users.** Some Food Bank users aren't able to access food because they work all day and can't take time off work to access food. *Suggestions to Consider: Look at different ways of adjusting the hours of service to better accommodate people that work.*

Communications

- **Food Bank users should have a mechanism to share their feedback directly with the Food Bank.** *Suggestions to consider: Create a mechanism to receive feedback from the Food Bank users to understand what is working well and what isn't. People give the Food Bank's drivers (both employees and volunteer drivers) feedback and suggestions, but it doesn't get back to the Food Bank.*

- **Not everyone has access to digital info-sharing mechanisms.** Food Bank needs to ensure that information is accessible for those living in the digital divide. Some seniors can't register for events or access information on Food Bank programs. *Suggestions to consider: A simple solution is to make website information into printable PDFs so pantries and partners can print out information and include them in food boxes.*

What food is received

- **Packaging is a barrier to accessing food for younger Food Bank users.** Some partners noted that they serve youth/children populations that are often responsible for preparing food for their siblings and themselves. The packaging can be difficult for youth to open. *Suggestions to consider: To best serve youth (and to help them serve themselves), more flip-top cans (e.g. soups) or other accessible options are needed that they can prepare for their siblings or themselves.*

- **Food is being wasted because partners are receiving unwanted food items**. A partner noted that this occurs when a supply of miscellaneous meats (beef, pork, veal, poultry, chicken, turkey) are provided. For example, most people don't like turkey, but the pantry still receives 3 boxes of turkey. *Suggestions to consider: It would be better if the Food Bank would not send random types of meat and instead was more specific in providing meat that people will eat.*

- **Food Bank should prioritize providing nutritious food options to Food Bank users.** Partners emphasized the importance of providing healthy and nutritious food to all Food Bank Users, but especially for seniors and individuals with health conditions (high blood pressure, diabetes, etc.). Senior boxes are appreciated but there are too many canned and high carbs items. *Suggestions for consideration: The Food Bank should continue to prioritize 50% of the food distributed being produce. Overall, the pre-packaged boxes should have healthy options with reduced canned items and increased lower-carb items.*

- **Some partners have difficulties reaching the right person or team at the Food Bank**. *Suggestion to consider: Partners would like a curated partner contact database and resource page for pantries and partners to be able to reach the Food Bank for any questions/information. It can be a logistical guide on who to call for different information. Current contact information is outdated, and some service providers spend hours being transferred to different departments to ask a question. It can also include contact information for the different resources available to the public.*

- **There are challenges around the limited storage capacity of partner organizations and not enough notice for deliveries.** Partners explained the challenges posed by unscheduled deliveries (including those made outside of the scheduled time) and not having enough space to store delivered items. *Suggestions to consider: Partners would appreciate advance notice prior to delivery and more information on items that will be delivered to adequately plan for storage needs.*

- **Programs like Green Grocer need to be accessible for everyone, especially seniors.** Participants would like to have more access to fresh produce through programs like Green Grocer or other famers market style initiatives. *Suggestions to consider: The Food Bank can do this by making shorter wait times, priority lines, adding more seating/rest areas and providing more assistance to those who need it.*

Coordination and Partnership

- **Partners and agencies want to share information about food assistance programs and resources with other life stabilization organizations.** Staff from organizations that don't provide food directly (i.e. transit providers, hospitals) often get information from the people they serve about their food insecurity. *Suggestions to consider: Partners noted there is a need to have a mechanism to support these other service providers (i.e. doctors, nurses, bus drivers, etc.) in connecting people who are experiencing food insecurity with proper resources. These other service providers need to be aware of the Food Bank's services (some participants were unaware that the Food Bank delivers to partner organizations).*

- **There are challenges related to lack of awareness and information about organizations providing food delivery services.** This means that sometimes different partner organizations bump into each other because different food services have delivery dates and times that consistently overlap. During small group discussions, a number of partners were learning about the Food Bank's programs for the first time (i.e. doorstep delivery, meat boxes and delivery services to member agencies). *Suggestions to consider: It would be helpful if there was a way for organizations to increase their awareness of each other and sharing plans/schedules of different initiatives or programs. Also, food could be better distributed if it wasn't all delivered on the same day but instead spread out over the week or the month (increased awareness and coordination would help this). They suggested that increasing awareness of the full breadth of existing Food Bank programs would be helpful for organizations with existing relationships with the Food Bank. Another partner suggested restarting the partner meetings hosted by the Food Bank, which is a great opportunity to connect with other organizations and coordinate efforts. Other partners suggested creating a GPS mapping of local agencies, pantries and partners and the services they offer (such as delivery) to reduce duplication of services. This would also help in coordinating which agencies have the capability to deliver which services to reach a higher number of people in need using different methods.*

- **There are challenges related to the lack of awareness and information about non-food-related supports available.** Partners said that they are often unaware of organizations they could potentially refer folks to. *Suggestions to consider: The Food Bank Application Form asks clients*

to "check off" the services they need, but the organizations don't have any information on organizations to refer those clients too. It would be helpful to give a referral list so that the food-supplying organizations can also connect their clients to other non-Food Bank-related resources. Additional partners suggested adding an outreach package to the food boxes so the community knows about local resources and programs. Another suggestion is to provide community partner organizations with information on peak service times so these organizations can coordinate times do outreach and inform clients of other programs in the community.

Other feedback

- **Use SEI survey strategically to understand how much of the food insecure population is being served by the Food Bank.** The current data from Feeding America identifies the number and percentage of food insecure population, but it doesn't identify who of those people that are food insecure are being served by the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank and its partners. Use the data from the SEI survey to understand who is and isn't being served by the Food Bank to support unserved populations.

- **Personalize the SEI survey to specific places and partners where people are accessing food and other resources.** The name of the SEI Part 1 survey only identifies the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank. People may not be filling it out because they get their food from a local food bank or agency and don't have a direct connection with the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank. The Food Bank should develop different approaches for local pantries/agencies/partners to identify themselves with the survey and get important information from the populations they serve.

- **Some partners have noticed a drop in people served.** Partners attributed this decrease to the increase of available services and the increased amount folks are receiving in SNAP benefits and have flexibility to shop at grocery stores.

- **Use this process to be clearer on what the Food Bank's ultimate mission is, and work towards that goal.**

NEXT STEPS

Chris West, SEI Program Sponsor, thanked participants for sharing their ideas, suggestions and feedback. He acknowledged partners' contributions in sharing the paper survey and coordinating with Erin Spangler, SEI Project Manager. Partners were also reminded to continue sharing the online (www.pittsburghfoodbank.org/feedback) with their networks. SEI Team is looking for feedback from all kinds of different audiences (open until the end of June).

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Attachment 1. Organizations participating in the meeting

412 Youth Zone
ACCESS Transportation Systems
Allegheny County Health Department WIC
Christ Centered Community Church
Cloverleaf Food Pantry
Habitat for Humanity of Greater Pittsburgh
Hilltop Alliance
Indiana County Office of Planning & Development
Joseph's Harvest Pantry at Petra International Ministries
Just Harvest
Partner4Work
Rankin Christian Center
Salvation Army - Chartiers Valley Service Center
Second UP Church
Somerset County Mobile Food Bank
South Hills Interfaith Movement (SHIM)
UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh
Wesley Family Services