

Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI) **REGION-WIDE LEADERS MEETING** Tuesday, June 22, 2021, 12:00 to 1:00 pm

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Discussion was focused on seeking participants' insights in response to the following questions:

1. What do you see as the greatest opportunities and challenges facing our region?
2. How can Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank best contribute to addressing them?
3. Are there opportunities for collaboration and partnership that we can explore? If so, what are they?
4. What's your vision for the future of the Food Bank?

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

REFLECTIONS AT A REGIONAL LEVEL

- **Disparities related to racism, sexism, income have exacerbated poverty in the region.** The gap between those who have more and those who have less has continued to grow. The entire region has been dealing with an opioid epidemic, especially Fayette and Greene counties. There are also people experiencing homelessness and in need of help. Networks are doing direct outreach to the homeless - there's a real need for supports.
- **Pandemic support programs and initiatives will be ending in the next couple of months and community needs will potentially ramp up at that time.** People are currently receiving rent rebates and accessing other supports and services because of pandemic programs. It's unclear if these programs will be extended or not.



On Tuesday, June 22, 2021, representatives from a diverse range of regional leaders and organizations participated in a discussion as part of the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank's Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI). Participants represented 21 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](#)).

- **The Food Bank should continue to work holistically to address a variety of needs.** Acknowledge that hunger is related to other social issues and the Food Bank can be a connector and partner to other organizations. This could include exploring ways to collaboratively tackle not only food insecurity but other social issues the community faces such as housing, backlog of utility bills, evictions and other types of supports. It is important for service providers to drop territorialism to be able to reach all communities with all services.

WHAT IS WORKING WELL

- **Overall, Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank has credibility, and organizations in Allegheny County are aware of Food Bank programs and/or services.** Especially throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Food Bank has risen to the occasion of serving diverse needs in the region. The Food Bank is a regional leader with the ability to be a strong advocate for poverty reduction.
- **There was interest in continuing and expanding partnerships with the Food Bank.** Partners are excited about the work the Food Bank's life stabilization team is undertaking. A couple of participants said that they had positive experiences working with the life stabilization team and partnering on a variety of opportunities.
- **The Food Bank was able to adapt, partner and collaborate with frontline workers during COVID-19.**
- **The Food Bank should continue to prioritize equity and addressing issues of accessing services.**

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

Who is being served

- **Shame and stigma are barriers to accessing and utilizing different types of social support.** This may stop people from accessing services or reaching out to different organizations. *Suggestions for consideration: The Food Bank and other organizations need to work together to figure out how to normalize accessing services. Food bank should work with partners (schools, clergies, healthcare providers and other organizations) to collaboratively address the stigma around accessing services.*
- **Women, especially women of color, face barriers to accessing services and healthy food.** The Food Bank should apply an intersectional lens to the barriers that women have to accessing services and supporting their families. Women are working both inside and outside the house and this increased pressure and decreased time creates challenges for providing healthy food options for their families. *Suggestions for consideration: The Food Bank can*

help support women and their families by providing healthy food that is accessible and quick to prepare.

How food is received

- **It is not always easy for emerging food security organizations to connect and partner with the Food Bank.** *Suggestions for consideration: The Food Bank should improve outreach to informal or emerging food security organizations, especially new food pantries and school backpack programs that have emerged in an ‘ad hoc’ way throughout COVID-19. There’s an opportunity to drop any protection of “territory” and find a way to work together without fighting for space. The Food Bank and the larger network of service providers need a system that’s quick and adaptive. One suggestion is developing regional hubs to reach bigger networks of people in a quicker and more flexible way. The Food Bank and other partners can build capacity of networks to respond to needs and use other life stabilization partners to address specific needs.*
- **Pantries in rural communities need support to provide services to their communities.** *Suggestions for consideration: The Food Bank should explore opportunities to build capacity for smaller and rural pantries, especially in Greene and Fayette Counties. Along with building capacity to better deliver food supports, the Food Bank could also support partners providing other life stabilization needs for their local communities (either through partners directly providing services or partnerships with other local organizations).*
- **There is an operational, territorial, and service area divide in regional planning and service delivery.** *Suggestions for consideration: The Food Bank should work in tandem with the existing network of social service partners, such as unemployment providers. This involves understanding the partners who serve similar clients. If people are accessing one service provider, it is most likely that they need support from other life stabilizations organizations as well. The Food Bank and other partners owe our communities collaboration. It shows people we value their time, energy, and capacity. For example, some state offices work with people to assist with their unemployment claims and have been witnessing a high volume of claimants. While people are waiting for their checks to come, they aim to connect them with more emergency services such as food pantries. This increases efficiency and ensures people have access to the resources they need.*

When food is received

- **Communities are looking for more nimble or informal approaches to food distribution.** Some local volunteers and clients may find it difficult navigating the ‘checks and balances’ and ‘red tape’ of Food Bank policies and formal processes. *Suggestions for consideration: The Food Bank should invest in making more informal and accessible processes to help get more food*

distributed such as removing zip code restrictions, so people can visit pantries that are convenient and not just in their neighborhood. Another suggestion was removing requirement for pantries to provide extensive paperwork for clients receiving services.

- **Time poverty, also defined as not having enough time for meeting all basic needs, is an issue that prevents local communities from accessing services.** For people experiencing different types of disparities, it is a challenge to find time to locate and access the necessary supports. *Suggestions for consideration: The Food Bank should look for intersectional approaches to tackling issues of time poverty (people unable to attend existing distribution due to lack of time). This approach could include hosting regular mobile events that meet people in spaces that they can easily access. Several participants emphasized the importance of hosting events with multiple services providers and supporting existing ongoing efforts (another example is monthly event hosted by Dress for Success and other partners was one example provided). Another participant also emphasized that doorstep delivery is a good option for reaching people unable to access transportation.*

Communications

- **Partners are not aware of different on going and available Food Bank** *Suggestions for consideration: Partners would appreciate relevant information including who is collecting food and distributing food, who is looking for resources to support food-related projects, and what is available, when. Be clear about the overlap between services with other organizations and communicate these regularly between partners and serviced communities (flyers, social media and word of mouth).*
- **There are disparities in the level of communication across different communities in the region.** The Food Bank should continue to work with local partners to reach diverse communities across the region and let those communities know what services are available. *Suggestions for consideration: The Food Bank should consider developing an ongoing mechanism for communication across the region among many different types of organizations, which communicates what services are offered to partner organizations as the Food Bank is a cross-cutting entity that interacts with many different sectors.*

What food is received

- **Food Bank should look for ways to adapt to community food needs.** Several participants emphasized that the Food Bank should continue to be flexible and work to meet emerging needs. *Suggestions to consider: As the food bank enters the COVID-19 recovery, it should pay attention and identify ways to respond to emerging trends that are likely influenced by food insecurity, such as measurable increases in childhood obesity. Participants also*

suggested having more culturally relevant options, along with other dietary needs (i.e. vegetarian, halal, and etc.).

Other feedback

- **The Food Bank should leverage its position to advocate for region-wide change.** Participants affirmed that growing disparities continue to be a region-wide challenge which impacts the environment, housing, employment, and overall wellbeing of populations. *Suggestions for consideration: As a regional leader, the Food Bank should use its position as a trusted institution to advocate for poverty reduction and food security. A participant suggested using lobbying efforts (i.e letter-writing campaigns and hiring lobbyists) and partnership development to have a larger advocacy role for policy at the state and federal levels.*

NEXT STEPS

Lisa Scales, SEI Champion, thanked participants for sharing their ideas, suggestions, and feedback. SEI Team is looking for feedback from all kinds of different audiences (open until the end of June). 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](#)).

Attachment 1. Organizations participating in the meeting

Achieva
Allegheny County (*Department of Human Services, Department of Community & Economic Development and County Executives Office*)
Bank of America
BNY Mellon
Catholic Charities
Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania
Community Kitchen Pittsburgh
Dress For Success Pittsburgh
EQT
Family House
Human Services Center
Jefferson Regional Foundation
McCune Foundation
Office of Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf
PA Senator Costa's Office
State Representative Austin Davis's Office
State Representative Emily D. Kinkead's District 20 Office
The Buhl Foundation
United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania
Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Greater Pittsburgh