

ATTACHMENT B: SEI Part 1 Meeting Summaries



**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 (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.

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

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



Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI) PARTNERS & MEMBERS WORKSHOP 2

Wednesday, June 2, 2021, 9:00 to 11:00 am

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

While introducing themselves, everyone in the meeting briefly explained their programs and partnership with the 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

- **Participants appreciated the Food Bank's ability to adapt during the pandemic**, especially the increased communication levels, the fresh vegetable options, the delivery of as many pre-packaged food boxes as needed by pantries and the online ordering system.

On Wednesday, June 2, 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 23 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](#)).

- **Partners highlighted the accessibility and convenience of Food Bank’s services.** Partner organizations noted that the Food Bank has a variety of services and resources to support partners. The affordability of the Food Bank services allows partners to primarily order from the Food Bank, in particular fresh produce.
- **Pre-packaged boxes have reduced the burden of packing on partners.** Several partners noted the benefits of the pre-packaged boxes for easy distribution to families and local communities. There is an interest in continuing pre-packaged boxes post-pandemic.
- **Food Bank’s effective and fast response to partners.** Participants noted that Food Bank’s staff were always quick to respond to questions and requests whenever partners call or email staff. The responsiveness helps partner organizations do their job and makes Food Bank’s partners feel valued.
- **Food Bank’s existing connection with other life stabilization programs.** The Food Bank has been supportive of other life stabilizations organizations (e.g. those focused on employment and social services). Participants noted that the Life Stabilization Team at the Food Bank has continued to promote efforts of other life stabilization partners.
- **There’s a great range of resources and supports available from the Food Bank.** Partners have really embraced Food Bank’s efforts to support through assisting with new equipment, grants, and much more. In particular, this support has been beneficial for small pantries working with the Food Bank.
- **The waiving of documentation requirements and restrictions during COVID helped partners reach more people.** It was suggested that opportunities to continue this approach be considered (as opposed to returning to past systems where people had to “prove” their level of need).
- **The pandemic has created opportunities for doing things differently. The Food Bank should look for different ways to embed the learning from the pandemic.** The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a lot about what people need and how they access it. We should hold onto these lessons and carry them forward beyond the pandemic.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE

Communications

- **Food Bank needs to create a better system for awareness and access of their services for both partners and clients.** Some counties and towns are unaware of the Food Bank services available to them. Food pantries are also unaware of other service providers in the area, creating duplication of services. *Suggestions to consider: A map of services (like which pantry offers delivery services) can be created for both clients and partners to create a better network of services. Other suggestions include creating a post about services on the local town webpages, regular newsletter, county-specific packages with information on all types of services available in their area, and better awareness on phone numbers people can call to find out about food services in their area. Similarly, another participant suggested creating a program guide specific to partners and clients to be shared in digital and print formats.*
- **Food Bank should look for innovative ways to connect with communities through leveraging technology and mobile devices.** Corporations like Amazon have figured out how to use technology and systems to make deliveries accessible. The Food Bank should use technology to expand its reach and programs. *Suggestions to consider: Food Bank can create different programs that allow for the use of food lockers for immediate service needs. Participant also noted 412 Food Rescue has pivoted to allow for home delivery through the usage of an app. Another example provided was United Way 211 which provides free and confidential services for finding resources.*
- **Better communication between delivery drivers and pantries receiving the food.** This would help those receiving the food coordinate and organize themselves better to receive the delivery of food. *Suggestions to consider: Food Bank delivery drivers should call 30 minutes before they arrive to help partners/drivers be there on time.*

Coordination and Partnership

- **Pantries have capacity to serve more people but have difficulty connecting with them.** *Suggestions to consider: Use regional hubs to support collaboration between counties and reach smaller food pantries in rural communities. Further collaboration between these*

pantries and the Food Bank can help direct people to these regional hubs.

- **Food Bank is a larger institution that can help support partners and leverage their position to make partnerships with other institutions and organizations.** The Food Bank is in a great position to support system change through advocacy and connecting with other institutions like the United Ways, and Department of Human Services (Allegheny County). *Suggestions to consider: Food Bank should partner and collaborate with other organizations to increase attention to food security issues and other life stabilization supports (employment, transportation, education, etc.). The Food Bank should have lobbyists on retainer to support advocacy efforts and Food Bank's government relations team.*
- **Continue to focus on communication, transparency and access so partners or volunteers know how to contribute to the Food Bank's mission.** The system as a whole may feel impenetrable for smaller organizations/individuals, creating silos. *Suggestions to consider: Work to ensure smaller groups can contribute and intermingle with the Food Bank.*
- **Be aware of the impacts of mission drift for the Food Bank and other life stabilization organizations.** The COVID-19 pandemic has increased financial support from different actors (donations, volunteer support and other organizational support) and interest from other life stabilization organizations to provide emergency food support. *Suggestions to consider: Food Bank should prioritize long-term food security and work through other partners to deliver other life stabilization services like employment. These other life stabilization supports can be transformational to stabilizing families and achieving long-term food security to shorten the line. The Food Bank should continue to support through spreading awareness of these different life stabilization organizations to Food Bank users and where possible supporting these organizations (i.e. providing employment and volunteer placements and sharing flyers of other organizations). One participant emphasized the importance of being aware of other life stabilization organizations' capacity. Referrals are great but if partners don't have the capacity, it poses a challenge for delivering the services needed.*
- **Support systems are not well coordinated with other organizations and local communities.** It also means that participants must register in multiple places and share their stories multiple times. *Suggestion to*

consider: It would be helpful to have better coordination between the food bank network and other non-food networks. Suggestions for consideration: The Food Bank could connect with “Welcoming Pittsburgh”, a group that works out of the Mayor’s office and sees things through a refugee/immigrant lens. The Food Bank and its network could better utilize technology to coordinate the back-end of the work (this already happens in Indiana County where 28 social services agencies share one Release of Information Form and a Google Drive that all partners have access to – which has worked very well, eliminating receipt of services sharing their story multiple times). Rather than inventing a new system, consider directing people to United Way’s 211 services and recognize that when working with seniors that still operate in a world of landlines and paper, it’s essential to reach them through word-of-mouth referrals from people they trust.

What food is received

- **Partners have no control over how much the Food Bank sends—especially when it’s more than the organization’s storage capacity.** One Partner noted multiple instances where they received more than their warehouse can hold which resulted in organizations getting refrigerated box truck that they had to be running 24-7 to keep things cool. Participants noted that was a challenge in particular with the Advance Choices program. *Suggestion to consider: Partners want a mechanism to control the volume received in deliveries.*
- **A few participants said that sometimes produce is not in a good condition.** Some of the produce boxes can be moldy and then the pantries must use their own funds to pay to dispose of it. *Suggestions to consider: It would be good if the Food Bank had a way to ensure that the produce was in good condition. Produce from the American Heart Association has always been beautiful, however that program will end soon.*
- **There’s a dire need to provide healthy choices and culturally relevant foods (i.e newcomer families).** This is especially necessary for people with diabetes, obesity, and refugee/newcomer families who want access to food familiar to them. *Suggestion to consider: The “Thrive” boxes are pretty healthy, including canned tuna (for example) and shelf-stable foods. The Food Bank has a large presence and can use its sphere of influence to be a powerful advocate for improving healthy food provided in senior’s boxes. Additionally, Food Bank should survey partners and Food Bank users to find out what kinds of food would be relevant to their local communities and find ways to meet needs for*

culturally different diets/cultural practices (i.e Halal, vegetarian). When possible, food bank users should be able to select their own food. One participant suggested partnering with the Welcome Pittsburgh group run through the mayors' office to connect with refugee and newcomer organizations.

How food is received

- **Heavy pre-packaged boxes are difficult to transport and can be a barrier to access Food Bank services.** People have trouble transporting heavy 20-pound food boxes, especially when travelling by public transportations. *Suggestions to consider: Participant noted that bags were easier to transport than boxes and their pantry was looking into buying bags with wheels. Other participants suggested expanding the Doorstep Delivery program or other programs that bring boxes directly into communities.*
- **Service delivery has shifted during the pandemic which has increased a burden on people receiving food to contact the Food Bank directly.** People are used to receiving food from their local pantry. For Doorstep Delivery, it meant that people now received the service directly from the Food Bank (because many pantries didn't have the capacity to support delivery). With this change, people were told to contact Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank directly. The process is intimidating and often didn't work. Partners were told by Food Bank users that they called the main phone number at the Food Bank and left a message, but they didn't hear back. Partners have tried calling themselves and had to select from 9 options provided by the phone message and then ended up on hold for 43 minutes. This isn't something that many people can or will do, so partners ended up signing people up themselves for services. *Suggestions to consider: For current and future programs, consider the Food Bank as the "mothership" and the pantries as the "children". The pantries do the work in the trenches and are the people that the community is used to dealing with. The Food Bank is too big and too intimidating.*

When food is received

- **There are seasonal gaps to access food during the summer.** Some programs and funding offered during the school year don't carry over into the summer months and other programs that support SNAP users accessing fresh food like the West Pittsburgh Food Trust (funding ends June 1st). *Suggestions to consider: Partners noted that the Food Bank needs to explore options to provide/replace food to students*

(and their families) during the summer months that they typically receive through school programs.

Other Feedback

- **Promote the SEI survey(s) with food boxes.** Include a sticker on the food boxes that encourages people to complete the survey(s) for this process.

WHAT'S YOUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE FOOD BANK

Participants shared the following thoughts:

- Food Bank's mission should support a future where if the community would see someone in need, they would recognize that need and move to fill it by connecting those in need with resources provided by partner organizations and the Food Bank.
- Food Bank should permanently adopt the approach taken during the COVID-19 pandemic that everyone in need can receive support from the Food Bank without having to prove need through documentation.
- Through continued support from different partners, levels of government and blended funding opportunities, everyone in need of food deserves access without having to prove their need.
- Food Bank should continue to support integration of programming across multiple services (food, workforce development, housing, etc.) both meeting immediate needs and also achieve better outcomes in the long-term.

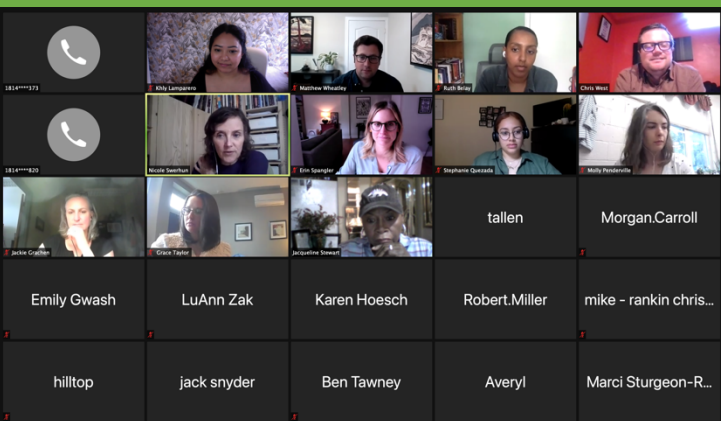
NEXT STEPS

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 survey (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).

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

Allegheny County Department of Human Services
AmeriCorps - The Institute for Non-profit Leadership at Slippery Rock University
Auberle
Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh
Boys & Girls Clubs of Western PA
Bridge City Church
Chartiers Center
CISS HOUSE OF HOPE MINISTRIES
Conemaugh Memorial Medical Center
Coraopolis Community Development
Farm to Table Buy Local
Hello Neighbor
Human Services Center Corporation
Indiana County Community Action Program
Jubilee Ministries International
Lawrence County Social Services, Inc.
Partner4Work
Project Destiny Inc.
Rainbow Kitchen Community Services
Salvation Army - Harbor Light
South Hills Interfaith Movement (SHIM)
United Way of Southwestern PA
Victory Family Church



**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.

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](#)).

- **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 farmers 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).

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

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



Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI) **POTENTIAL LIFE STABILIZATION PARTNERS MEETING**

Wednesday, June 9, 2021, 1:00 to 2:30 pm

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

While introducing themselves, everyone in the meeting briefly explained their programs and relation to the 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 are the feedback and advice shared by participants:

WHAT IS WORKING WELL

- **Providing food delivery services to their clients has allowed organizations to maintain connections with the populations they serve.** One participant said (and others agreed) that being able to deliver food during the pandemic has allowed them to keep an eye on the people they serve, which would have been difficult otherwise.
- **Work towards reducing the stigma around food insecurity.** One participant appreciated Green Grocer's ability to normalize access to fresh produce and fruits through open access to the community. The Food Bank's Life Stabilization activities and partnerships can

On Wednesday, June 9, 2021, representatives from a diverse range of potential life stabilization partner organizations participated in a meeting as part of the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank's Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI). Participants represented 14 organizations (see list in Attachment 1).

The meeting 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 who 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 espanglers@pittsburghfoodbank.org (also available on [SEI webpage](#)).

- **Overall positive experience with the Food Bank.** Participants described the Food Bank as being open and flexible to working with agencies and communities. Food Bank staff are outstanding, energetic, flexible, and collaborative. Staff are also quick to respond to questions and are willing to adapt their programs as best they can to meet the needs of partners. One participant said they have had no trouble getting frequent and reliable deliveries of food even though they are a small organization. Another organization mentioned that their social workers and families they referred to the Food Bank were happy with the Food Bank's services. Several participants were also happy that families were not being turned away from receiving services during the pandemic.
- **There is an appreciation for the Food Bank's leadership in connecting with current or potential life stabilization partners.** The pandemic has shifted the way organizations deliver their programs which has increased the importance of partnership development. Participants appreciated the Food Bank reaching out to build stronger connections, especially through engagement efforts from the Life Stabilization area.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE

Who is being served

- **Certain populations are not reached by services.** The Food Bank needs to look for ways to accommodate groups with different needs. *Suggestions for consideration: reaching people over 60, those who don't have access to cars, those who can't get out of their homes, those with different needs (e.g. pregnant, breastfeeding women, experiencing postpartum depression, differently-abled physically or mentally), and those who have difficulty navigating systems (e.g. experiencing substance abuse or mental health issues). There was a suggestion to use private delivery or transportation companies to get food to people and/or people to food locations (e.g. Postmates and Uber), and partnering with services or organizations that already go to the homes of these populations (e.g. EMS and Meals on Wheels).*
- **Resources, programs, and service providers are concentrated in urban areas, making it challenging to serve people in rural communities.** It is important to identify and work with community champions in rural communities (i.e. Cambria, Fayette, Greene). *Suggestions for consideration: Community champions can help establish connections and trust, which are crucial to successfully interacting with and serving the local community. Another participant suggested having more distribution sites in rural areas. And another idea was using malls like Pittsburgh Mills Mall as a potential permanent distribution site.*
- **Stigma around food insecurity discourages people from accessing services.** Food insecurity is a faceless crisis that impacts diverse communities. The

pandemic has shifted the narrative around food insecurity to be more representative of different people. *Suggestions for consideration: The Food Bank should continue to support efforts that address issues of stigma and work to normalize different life stabilization supports.*

How food is received

- **Different experiences from users at informal providers compared to pantries.** Some participants have heard from users that they have positive experiences using informal services (like at community organizations) compared to going to formal services (like pantries). *Suggestions for consideration: A participant said it feels like informal services are “undervalued” at the Food Bank – in the past, there was a staff person who had excellent relationships with informal service providers.*
- **Not everyone can access drive-up distributions.** Drive-up distributions have been a great and safe way to get people who have cars food during the pandemic. However, they are a barrier to accessing food for people who don't have access to a vehicle and primarily use public transit. *Suggestions for consideration: Look into different opportunities to support individuals and families who don't have access to cars or public transportation. For example, the South Hills was mentioned as an area where there was a lack of transportation options.*
- **Communities need both emergency food sources and help becoming food secure.** The Food Bank should explore strategies that help people become food secure in the long run, in addition to providing people food in emergencies. *Suggestions for consideration: the Food Bank should leverage its network and reputation to share information and connect Food Bank users with other organizations supporting different life stabilization areas (e.g. housing and employment).*
- **Stigma and shame associated with carrying Food Bank boxes.** *Suggestions for consideration: Put food in unbranded bags/boxes to prevent shame associated with receiving support by making the bags/boxes more discreet.*
- **The food boxes are too heavy or difficult to carry.** Food bank users, particularly seniors, those who are not feeling well, and those who rely on public transit, have difficulty carrying and transporting big, heavy boxes of food. *Suggestions for consideration: Provide rolling carts to help seniors and others transport the food items they receive. Another suggestions was receiving less food to be able to better transport boxes.*

When food is received

- **Need for more access to fresh produce and fruits in local communities.** *Suggestions for consideration: Community gardens can help people access food and provide money-saving options by increasing access to fruits and*

vegetables. Community gardens can also help people earn money if they are able to sell the food they produce.

What food is received

- **There is an interest from these partners in exploring opportunities to use food to address food insecurity needs that their clients may have.** Participants said food is one of several social determinants of health that the population they serve require support with. *Suggestions for consideration: Continue discussions between the Food Bank and life stabilization partners to explore opportunities to work together to meet all life stabilization needs.*
- **There needs to be more culturally relevant food options.** Participants said the cultural barrier with receiving food that is not familiar to their community can create waste of unwanted food items. *Suggestions for consideration: Offer more culturally relevant options with fresh fruits and vegetables and provide culturally relevant recipe cards that show how to use the items provided in the food box. Recipe cards should also include lots of pictures to address language barriers.*
- **Prioritize distributing healthy food options.** There needs to be a systemic change to the food distributed by food banks and food pantries. If food provided in food boxes is unhealthy, we are continuing the epidemic of health issues that we're trying to stay away from and solve. *Suggestions for consideration: The Food Bank should have a dual approach that includes healthy non-perishable items and fresh foods that provide options for those experiencing high blood pressure, diabetes, allergies, and other health complications.*

Communications

- **Navigating/accessing services in the Food Bank's network is challenging.** Some participants highlighted difficulties of Food Bank users knowing about different hours of operation and types of food available in Food Bank partner locations. *Suggestions for consideration: Create a central place to get information about location, hours, and types of food available. Other suggestions were creating one larger location that can accommodate multiple/different needs and providing more home delivery options.*
- **The Food Bank should share information about the variety of both Food Bank and other life stabilization services available with Food Bank users and partners.** *Suggestions for consideration: Build on resources/systems that already exist, and don't create something new where it isn't needed. "Aunt Bertha" is an online resource that is used by some organizations. However, Aunt Bertha is accessible only online, and many people who use food (and other) services aren't online and primarily use a phone to get information. People often call 211 to get help with food (food security is one of the top 3 reasons people call 211 - the other two currently are financial assistance and*

utility funding assistance). For those experiencing language barriers, consider translating materials or having multi-lingual maps that can locate the closest pantry or distribution sites that can accommodate that language.

- **There is a need to continue educating communities on nutrition and food preparation.** *Suggestions for consideration: One participant shared that their organization has run a pilot program to help adolescents learn about general nutrition education and cooking.*

Coordination and Partnership

- **The Food Bank should partner more with life stabilization partners to deliver services.** The Food Bank can reach under-served populations through partnerships with life stabilizations organizations. *Suggestions for consideration: Provide training to the Food Bank's potential life stabilization partners on how to screen for food insecurity and develop a process for connecting these individuals with appropriate food/nutrition supports. One participant shared an example of an initiative for pediatric offices to house pantries that distribute backpacks of food to kids they serve. Through co-locating services with other life stabilization organizations (i.e. health or child care), there will be more opportunities for those in need to receive support from the Food Bank. Another participant suggested the Food Bank should support smaller organizations by providing funding supports.*
- **Identify clear contact information and processes so agencies can more easily partner with the Food Bank.** Clarifying this process would help agencies figure out who to contact easier and faster. *Suggestions for consideration: Food Bank staff could have ready-made presentations that they can send to potential new partners (this will include information about who to contact, what services they have, etc.).*

Process feedback

- **Provide honorariums to increase participation in engagement meetings.** Compensation for participation is very helpful for getting people to attend these engagement meetings.

VISION TO SUPPORT THE FOOD BANK'S MISSION

Participants shared the following thoughts:

- **The Food Bank needs to continue developing a mindful and dignified approach.** It is important to always be respectful and understanding of Food Bank users – they may have to overcome pride and ego before accessing Food Bank services.
- **The Food Bank should prioritize increasing food access in rural areas (e.g. Cambria).** Cambria County would be an ideal location for sites with local

fresh food and partnerships with local farmers. These sites should be accessible to everyone and could include both subsidized and for-purchase retail options and serve as a Food Bank distribution location as well.

- **The Food Bank should shrink long-term as partnerships grow to create centralized opportunities.** The goal is to cut out middleman opportunities and prioritize centralized partnerships. The Food Bank and its partners should also get creative about how education and advocacy can help progress efforts around get more people food secure.

NEXT STEPS

Chris West, SEI Program Sponsor, thanked participants for sharing their ideas, suggestions, and feedback. Partners were also reminded to continue sharing the online survey (www.pittsburghfoodbank.org/feedback) with their networks and that the 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 who participated in the meeting

Allegheny Center Alliance Church
Allegheny Health Network (Front Door Initiative at Jefferson Hospital)
Career Links
Catholic Charities
Early Learning Connections
Freedom Transit
Hello Baby Priority and Healthy Start, Inc.
Macedonia FACE
Mon Valley Initiative
NeighborWorks Western Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh Job Corps
Pittsburgh Mercy
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center
United Way of the Laurel Highlands

On Thursday, June 17, 2021, three individuals from the community participated in a focus group as part of Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank's Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI). All participants were very familiar with the Food Bank as volunteers and/or using Food Bank services to access food for their families.

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 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) Community Members - Focus Group 1 Thursday, June 17, 2021, 6:00 to 7:30 pm

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Discussion was generally organized around 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?

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

- **Drive-up distributions work well.** The process was well organized and very convenient. People could sign up and carpool with neighbors to pick up food (which is necessary, since transportation is still a barrier for some).
- **Senior boxes were amazing.** This is especially true in areas with a lot of elderly people. The boost for nutritional needs that the boxes provided was good.
- **Food pantries with shop-through locations are fantastic** because they offer choice.
- **Special efforts by individuals really make a difference.** There was a woman baking bread and giving it to families at one food distribution site that made an extra effort to connect with kids and returning families (for example, putting candies on the bread at Easter). The police also dropped off food boxes, which was appreciated.
- **Produce to People has been well received by the community.** The monthly food pantry day was supplemented by Produce to People on a separate day to fulfill the monthly food/nutritional needs of people.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE

Participants identified both challenges and opportunities to address those challenges. The challenges are in regular text and their suggestions (for the Food Bank to consider) are *in italics*.

Who is being served

- **Your zip code can limit your access to food.** Some families arrive at pantries because they need food, but they get turned away because they're from a zip code that doesn't qualify for support from that particular pantry. These families are told to go to another pantry, but without transportation, that other pantry isn't an option.

What food is available

- **Some communities lack fruits and vegetables.** It's "heartbreaking to be in a place with no fruits and vegetables."
- **Sometimes people don't know what do to with what they receive in their boxes.** Some foods are unfamiliar to people or they don't know how to prepare it or use it. Examples are eggplant, squash, ground turkey or even canned potatoes. People don't want the food to go to waste, so they try and share those items with their friends or family, but they'd prefer to have food that works for their own family. *Suggestions to consider: One participant was active in creating videos with recipes and cooking tips with food that they got from the Food Bank and sharing them on social media. Through discussion, several ideas were shared for Food Bank to consider, including:*
 - *put recipe cards in food boxes (which is good for people that aren't savvy with Zoom or social media or able to get online);*
 - *record short videos of how to prepare different types of food typically included in food boxes;*
 - *offer food demos on-site where people pick up food to show them how to easily prepare different foods and give them the opportunity to taste it;*
 - *offer virtual cooking classes and bring in a chef (e.g. 5pm on Tuesdays on Zoom or on the public cable TV network) and people can tune into the class online; and*
 - *partner with a culinary school and have students come in to work with the Food Bank as part of their work placement program (for example) – they can spend a rotation contributing to the Food Bank by offering recipes, demonstrations, providing samples, etc. for credit at school and to get the experiences they need. This is a good practicum and also transitions them from school into the community and building relationships with people – especially with schools re-opening.*
- **Sometimes people have food restrictions that means they can't eat everything they receive in their boxes.** Some people are vegetarian or don't eat pork. Some people are picky eaters and don't like certain tastes and textures. When people receive foods they can't eat, most try and find someone they know who would eat it so it doesn't go to waste. *Through*

discussion, ideas shared for Food Bank to consider included:

- *use separate smaller boxes to distribute food, putting vegetables in a box on their own and meats in a box on their own - so a vegetarian family could say “no, thank you” and not accept a meat box;*
- *have one location for food that is vegetarian-friendly and let people know that.*
- **Sometimes food in the boxes is not fresh.** A bad orange can make the whole box spoil quickly, especially if the box isn't opened immediately. If kids get to the box first, sometimes they end up eating bad fruit, which is worrying. *Participants suggested that Food Bank have some type of screening process (or a better screening process) so spoiled fruits and vegetables are removed before delivery.*

How food is served

- **Boxes can be difficult to physically manage.** Transportation can be difficult, as is cutting up the box so it can be put into the trash. If the trash pick up isn't happening soon, it means the box is sitting around for a week. *Consider having food picked up in reuseable bags and providing people the option to pick what goes into those bags.*
- **The sign-up processes are different in different locations which can be confusing (for example, in Oakland it's different than in Homestead), and it can also be invasive.** If people are at a pantry, it's because they need to be there. It's unclear why it's necessary to fill out a questionnaire and a lot of paperwork - it's a barrier to some people accessing the food they need because they don't want to explain their situation and they don't want to express their need.
- **There aren't enough volunteers to meet the need in some locations.** For example, in Homewood there are hundreds of families that receive food but volunteers are mostly women, often elderly, and it's difficult for them to unload the truck and prep boxes. They are relied on because they're available (since they're no longer working). *Participants said that it would be great if the Food Bank could help with the recruitment of volunteers in its community locations. Also changing the time the truck comes (maybe on the weekend or outside of the 9am-5pm hours) so more people are available to volunteer would be helpful.*

Communications

- **Some people aren't aware of opportunities to receive food.** *Suggestions included: have print ads available for community leaders to share; and have more locations in communities that distribute food (e.g. doctors' offices, churches, etc.).*

WHAT'S YOUR VISION FOR THE FOOD BANK IN THE FUTURE?

Participants said they imagine:

- a Jetsons-like drive-up where you push a button and food comes out.
- pantries where they know what's in your bag without having to "check out" like some stores do.
- more accessible locations on a smaller scale to better support freshness, better match supply and demand, and increase convenience – almost like pop-ups in the community (similar to the Little Libraries some people have) that serve as satellite centers that could even be opened up by entrepreneurs.
- Food Bank as a place/building where people can take cooking classes, there's something for kids to do, there are supports for those who are homeless, and a location that generally offers people help/services and is seen as a community place. Sometimes people accessing the Food Bank are worried about being labelled. With several different things happening at one location, there's more privacy because people won't know which of those activities in the building you're there for. Then it wouldn't be viewed as the Food Bank and sometimes have a negative stigma. It would also be good to have a place where visitors could talk in private with someone where they could say what was really going on and what they needed help with (people may not want to provide info and do things in a public setting).
- regular focus groups because people are resourceful, and the Food Bank should keep listening to them.

OTHER THOUGHTS

The group discussed the choices facing food banks across the USA regarding how best to balance the need to "feed the line" and at the same time to "shorten the line". Participants said that:

- When there's a state of emergency, like is the case with the COVID-19 pandemic, feeding the line is essential. People only come to the food pantry when they need it. Sometimes the gas bill is higher (like in the winter) or someone has an injury with no insurance coverage, and then it's important that the Food Bank be available. *They suggested the Food Bank continue to focus on feeding the line, recognizing that people only use it when they need it, but acknowledging that shorten the line work was important as well. They also suggested:*
 - *The Food Bank use data to determine where, when, and why people need food and best align Food Bank resources with that need (and at the same time always recognize that there may be limits to what the data can tell you because it's hard to identify people who need food but don't feel comfortable – for whatever reason – revealing that).*
 - *The Food Bank offer resources for community members to advocate for themselves, for example, the Black Women's Policy Agenda is an organization that does this.*
 - *The Food Bank could create a quarterly newsletter and put it into every food box as a way for people to volunteer, change policy, and maybe even*

change their careers if employment/workforce development opportunities were included.

- *Continue the important work of food pantries, recognizing that there may be another pandemic or other crisis that means people will need it.*

NEXT STEPS

Chris thanked participants for sharing their ideas, suggestions and feedback and looked forward to staying connected through Parts 2 and 3 of the Stakeholder Engagement Initiative process. 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) **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

On Thursday, June 24, 2021, eight individuals from the community participated in a focus group as part of the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank's Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI). All participants were familiar with the Food Bank in their local communities.

The meeting 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) SEI FOCUS GROUP 2

Thursday, June 24, 2021, 6:00 to 7:30 pm

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Discussion was generally organized around 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?

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

- **Produce to People** is a popular program that has a great reputation.
- **Our Family Support Center distributes food** and that works well for us as an access point. Did they also talk about how they liked the co-location of those services?
- **Media coverage of the food boxes was effective.** My family heard about it on the news and my step-mom was able to pick up a box for our family.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE

Participants identified both challenges and opportunities to address those challenges. The challenges are in regular text and their suggestions (for the Food Bank to consider) are *in italics*.

Who is being served

- **It's important to help mothers with kids.**

- **People need to be able to connect to other life stabilization organizations when accessing the Food Bank's services.** The whole process of being in need is not easy. Navigating different support systems (i.e. Welfare and 211) is a challenge. *Suggestions to consider: The Food Bank should connect people accessing food services to other services (housing, clothing, employment, and other emergency supports). Having this information in a format that people can take home with them would be good – then they can make phone calls and explain their situation in a place that they have some privacy.*

What food is available

- **Food options available at different pantries differ from area to area.** A couple of participants highlighted that the variety of food items available are different depending on the location they went. Others described receiving unwanted items or items that they did not know how to prepare. *Suggestions to consider: Families would appreciate more selection of a variety of items, including fresh vegetables and fruits. Several participants said that would like to select items and receive recipe cards for both familiar and unfamiliar items. One participant also emphasized the importance of having staff to support in the food selection process at a pantry so that community members are not discouraged by a difficult/confusing process. Another suggestion was to develop a mechanism for those accessing services to know what items are available at different pantries.*

In response, the SEI Project team also explained that not all pantries have the same items. It depends on the funding, equipment, and staffing the pantry has available and its different partnerships.

- **Community members require other necessities, outside of just traditional food items.** The Food Bank should not direct people to other partners but should offer those other necessities themselves. *Suggestions for consideration: Some participants said that there were food pantries that offered both food and other supplies like diapers, baby formula and pet food and that should be expanded to other locations.*

How food is served

- **Food Bank services are not available at different times of the day.** Several participants described the challenges of accessing services outside of traditional hours of operations (usually 9:00 - 5:00 pm). *Suggestions for consideration: Flexible hours of service at local locations is important for people to be able to access services. One proposed option was creating evening distributions hours or establishing a 24-hour distribution site. 24-hour permanent distribution sites would increase access to emergency supports.*

- **Nutrition education is an existing gap for senior and youth populations.** *Suggestions for consideration: Seniors and youth should have access to nutritionists to provide advice and education on healthy options.*

Where food is served

- **Not everyone has access to either transportation or childcare options required to travel to pantries or distribution sites.** It can also be hard to transport food if you don't have a cart (especially if someone lives on the second floor). These are barriers to accessing services. *Suggestions to consider: Distribution sites should be accessible for those who do not have cars or access to transportation. The Food Bank should look for ways to bring services to local communities by exploring different mobile or delivery options. Another suggestion was to expand the doorstep delivery to mothers with children under 5 years old. Coordination with partner organizations is another suggested option for meeting people where they access other services (i.e. family support centers, employment and education service providers).*

Communication

- **People don't necessarily know what they need to bring when they visit a food pantry.** New food bank users can be unsure of how to use the pantry once they arrive there. *Suggestions to consider: Create a list of things that people can reference before they travel to a pantry - whether that's documentation, a bag to carry things, etc. Also, once someone arrives, it's important that they have a good experience in the pantry. Consider having someone there who can help the visitor orient themselves, understand how the system works, what choices are available to them - without this, some people have had bad experiences that left them uncomfortable and that's meant that they won't come back to the pantry in the future.*
- **People are not aware of the Food Bank's services.** The Food Bank should look for ways to inform the communities on different services through a variety of mechanisms. *Suggestions to consider: Several participants suggested using flyers, posters, opt-in text messaging and email systems, and social media to notify recipients about upcoming distributions and send reminders to people registered for distributions in their area (5- or 10-miles radius) and other local updates from the Food Bank and partner organizations. Additionally, word of mouth is also an important method for reaching community members. One participant said that families had previously given them boxes from the Food Bank distribution, despite never personally accessing services from the Food Bank. The Food Bank can explore informal distribution methods of other community members distributing boxes.*
- **It can be difficult to access information on services or apply for support through centralized phone systems, like 211.** A participant described the

challenge of getting a representative on the phone or not having their phone call returned. It was so difficult to get through they ultimately decided not to pursue it further. Other participants affirmed that they had also had similarly experiences. It is a missed opportunity when people are unable to access services from a lack of awareness or from barriers to navigating different support systems. *Suggestions to consider: Those in need of services should be able to quickly access services.*

NEXT STEPS

Chris thanked participants for sharing their ideas, suggestions and feedback and looked forward to staying connected through Parts 2 and 3 of the Stakeholder Engagement Initiative process. Participants also shared their interest in helping identify where pop-up sites for future engagements could be. 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](#)).