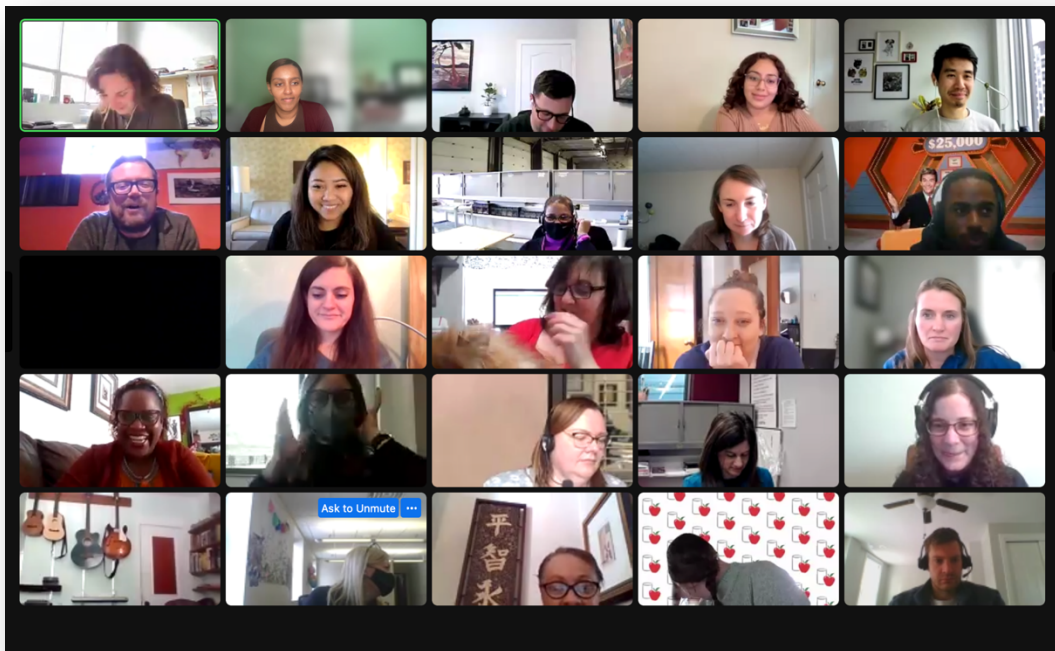


# Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank



## Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI) Part 3 Integrated Summary Report February 2022

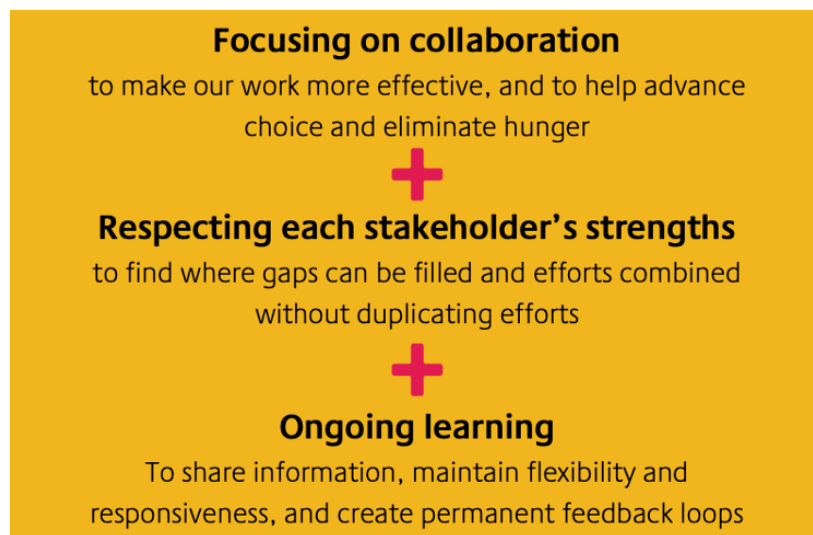


The screenshot shows the website's navigation bar with the logo, search, and language options. The main content area is titled "Project Timeline" and features three numbered steps:

- 1 Spring/Summer 2021**  
Understand what works well, what's not working well and identify suggestions to consider for the future.
- 2 Fall 2021**  
Test ideas that respond to the strengths, challenges and opportunities in our communities and region.
- 3\* Winter 2022**  
Share and refine a proposed path forward informed by feedback on ideas tested.  
**\*We are here!**

## OVERVIEW

In the Spring of 2021, Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank launched our Stakeholder Engagement Initiative (SEI) to identify how we can make our work even more effective. Over the course of the three-part process, hundreds of community members and organizations have shared their thoughts, ideas, advice, and wisdom with the Food Bank team. In Part 1, participants shared their perspectives on the Food Bank’s strengths and identified opportunities for us to improve. In Part 2, we shared and sought feedback on 10 ideas for the future that responded to the strengths and opportunities for improvement identified by our stakeholders during Part 1. Finally in Part 3, we shared and sought feedback on a proposed path forward for the Food Bank, including:



Overall, here are some of the key takeaways from Part 3 (with more details in the body of this report):

- **Food Bank stakeholders want to continue the dialogue that has started with the Stakeholder Engagement Initiative.** They said that getting together, sharing information, learning from each other, and planning together is important to build the strong working relationships required to best support communities and understand local needs.
- **Meaningful collaboration relies on the Food Bank being timely and flexible when responding to the priorities and needs of others.** Active and radical listening practices are essential. The Food Bank has a leadership role to play in demonstrating if and how it follows up on conversations held and the feedback received. “Closing the loop” on conversations is essential

to building trust and demonstrating accountability and respect for the value of the perspectives shared by others.

- **Communication and information sharing is key.** The Food Bank needs to strategically consider how to share information about Food Bank internal processes, Food Bank programs and services, and resources available in the community to a range of audiences including existing and new partners, county-level organizations, community members, and others. Determining how the Food Bank can best support communication between Food Bank network members is an important opportunity for the future.
- **Everyone in the Food Bank network has a unique and important contribution to make.** It's important to acknowledge how/when the mandates and missions of the network members and partners are shared. Collaboration can be guided by where there is alignment in mission or values, and making the best use of each other's strengths to bolster services provided and to fill in gaps in service where they exist.

## MORE DETAILED SUMMARY

Part 3 of the Stakeholder Engagement Initiative focused on connecting with the types of stakeholders previously engaged during Parts 1 and 2 of the SEI (community members, current partners, regional leaders and potential partners, and the Food Bank staff and board) through virtual meetings. In addition, county-level virtual conversations were held with organizations in 5 counties (Armstrong, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, and Lawrence) to increase the representation of voices from those counties in this process since they had the least representation in Parts 1 and 2. While there was an online feedback form during Part 3, it was not advertised as the survey had been in Parts 1 and 2, so participation was much lower using that method by design. Overall In Part 3, more than 150 new and returning participants attended a virtual meeting, participated in a county-level virtual conversation or completed the online feedback form (see attachments for more detailed information).

The following questions guided the Food Bank's engagement with different stakeholder groups:

1. What does it mean to be a good collaborator? What would you look for? What makes a collaboration successful?
2. How would the collaboration ideally happen to achieve shared objectives? What would the Food Bank do? What would partners and community members do?
3. What are the 2 or 3 most important steps that the Food Bank can take to demonstrate its commitment to collaboration?
4. How would you like to be involved going forward? Do you have any other advice?

## 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD COLLABORATION

Participants shared feedback on what it means to be a good collaborator and identified the characteristics of successful collaboration. There was considerable alignment among participants from different parts of the Food Bank network about what these characteristics were. Listed below are the key themes that emerged from participant responses to question 1, *What does it mean to be a good collaborator? What would you look for? What makes a collaboration successful?*

**Listen.** Active listening to the needs, priorities and capacity of various stakeholders is critical for mutually beneficial collaboration. Underpinning active listening is clear and early communication with the network, communities, and staff. Good communication also means being responsive to inquiries and practicing radical listening, which involves coming to a conversation or process with an open mind, really listening to what is and is not being said and not having a pre-set agenda.

**Build trust.** Trust takes time to develop and is an important step in fostering honesty and stronger connections that facilitate collaboration opportunities. Be clear on expectations and set specific, measurable and realistic goals. Being a good collaborator also means being willing to work together to align your organization's individual goals with the goals of others to achieve the greater good. Starting small by sharing information and resources can also help with building trust.

**Engage early.** Good collaboration should start early and have clear opportunities for influence by all parties. Meaningful collaboration requires opportunities to influence and participate in the decision-making process. It also requires bringing the right people to the table which includes partners, community members with lived experience and others who may have been historically underrepresented in the process.

**Establish shared mission and purpose.** Collaboration should be based in shared mission and values that align amongst collaborators. Future opportunities should also bring community members into the process and connect with local needs. The unique strengths and roles of each collaborator should be entrenched in the shared mission (strengths-based approach).

**Be responsive, timely and flexible when collaborating.** Flexibility is important to be able to respond to the needs of clients and the partners who serve them. Responsiveness and timely turnaround are important for both acknowledging requests and making sure partners and community members are being heard.

**Acknowledge different approaches to collaboration.** There are two types of collaboration that partners and the Food Bank can explore. The first type of collaboration advances the Food Bank's projects. The second type of collaboration starts by identifying issues and then working together with

partners or communities to address those issues. Collaboration can also be a mechanism for addressing issues related to hunger and other social determinants of health.

## 2. IDEAL COLLABORATION

Participants shared feedback on how to ideally collaborate to achieve shared objectives. Feedback was divided into three categories: what could be done by the Food Bank, partners and community members. The feedback primarily focused on what the Food Bank could do. Listed below are the key themes that emerged from participant responses to question 2: *How would the collaboration ideally happen to achieve shared objectives? What would the Food Bank do? What would partners and community members do?*

### What the Food Bank can do:

**Share information.** The Food Bank could look for opportunities to share information on existing programs and services in the community, and on the Food Bank's own processes, programs, connections and knowledge. Sharing information will also help strengthen understanding of "who does what" in the Food Bank network and in communities (including the Food Bank and the organizations it collaborates with), which will help ensure efforts are complementary and not duplicative and help foster increased collaboration among organizations in the community as well. The Food Bank should connect with partners and local communities in a strategic way to share what resources/services are already available and provide resources for other important needs, like employment and education, that would be helpful for the community (e.g., listing information on your website, putting flyers in food bags, posting info at all food bank/pantry locations or connecting with people through social media).

**Commit to working collaboratively.** The Food Bank should continue to work in collaboration with a range of different actors, including community members, small organizations and other large organizations to leverage different strengths and better engage local communities. The Food Bank should also remain flexible and make it as easy as possible for smaller or newly established organizations to partner with the Food Bank. Sharing financial resources and opening doors to funders is also important in order to allow partners to have access to grants and other opportunities to fund much needed initiatives.

**Help coordinate connections among organizations.** The Food Bank could make more connections between partners to help address gaps. The Food Bank can leverage its standing and reputation to help bring resources and people together to help fill gaps, address needs that are identified in communities and increase collaboration and information sharing not only among partners, but among other organizations working in similar spaces as well.

**Continue engaging with partners and community members.** The Stakeholder Engagement Initiative is a great first step for connecting with new and existing partners and community members. The Food Bank should consider continuing to host meetings or seeking open-ended feedback. Consider hosting in-person events that support better connections in local communities at a local library, restaurant or church. The media can promote these events and encourage people to join to discuss opportunities and resources. The Food Bank could also host regular regional meetings both virtual or in-person, at the county or community level. Finally, the Food Bank should consider involving partners in future strategic planning processes since the Food Bank's success is so closely tied to the success and buy-in of their partners.

**Understand how best to support partners and local communities.** The Food Bank could look for ways to develop a better understanding of the needs of partners and work with partners to agree on approaches that better support communities. Also, the Food Bank needs to build deeper connections with existing initiatives at the county-level.

**Help build capacity in network partners.** The Food Bank can look for ways to help support the capacity of network partners in the areas of technology, administrative support, volunteer recruitment and/or funding opportunities.

**Connect with youth.** The Food Bank could look for opportunities to meaningfully connect with youth (and their families) and find ways to listen. To better reach kids, connect with them in-person at school or allow them to anonymously provide their thoughts using tools that they are comfortable with (e.g., Zoom, social media).

#### What partners can do:

**Contribute experience and expertise.** Partners have deeper connections to what is happening on the ground. They have a better awareness of different local needs and gaps that exist. Partners can leverage their experiences and insight.

**Foster connections with other partners.** Partners should connect with the Food Bank network, as it is a resource to share best practices, troubleshoot and identify new collaboration opportunities.

**Develop strong lines of communication.** Partners and community members should feel comfortable asking the Food Bank for what they need to better serve their communities. Without transparent and trusted lines of communication, the Food Bank won't be aware of the needs of partners and local communities.

#### What community members can do:

**Share information on Food Bank services and resources with other community members.** Community members can use word of mouth to share information on what resources are available in their communities.

### 3. FIRST STEPS TO DEMONSTRATING COMMITMENT TO COLLABORATION

Listed below is feedback on initial steps that the Food Bank can take to demonstrate its commitment to collaboration. There was alignment across all audiences, with only some specific nuances for different stakeholders.

**Continue the conversation.** The SEI process and the Food Bank's other efforts during the pandemic have shown an ongoing commitment to maintaining and strengthening relationships. The Food Bank should consider continuing to engage different groups by hosting regular partner meetings (e.g. quarterly or twice a year, and restart the annual network conference), hosting regional meetings, hosting events for local communities, and fostering opportunities to build connections between partners.

**Share more information on Food Bank processes.** The network would benefit from having more information on the rationale for Food Bank decision-making, more support/Information on sourcing constraints and the pantry ordering process, and insight into the Food Bank's organizational chart with up-to-date contact information. Another first step could be publicly sharing the Food Bank's commitment to collaboration. This shows new partners and local communities that the Food Bank holds this commitment and can act as an invitation to collaboration.

**Listen.** The Food Bank needs to demonstrate they are practicing both active and radical listening to truly understand the needs of the community (for example, listening to learn and observe instead of listening to respond).

**Strengthen communication.** Improving communication strategies and outreach should be prioritized. Community members and partners should be aware of what services and supports are available and it should be easier for all audiences to find this information on the Food Bank's website or to get this information from Food Bank staff directly. Consider creating a "cheat sheet" for different audiences (for example, a list of all senior services available in an area). Improving communication also means having an active presence in the community and increasing the frequency of communication with communities. The Food Bank can connect with community members, ideally every 2-3 months, and offer a couple of proposed meeting times. Advisory councils are also another approach for connecting on a regular basis and bringing different voices to the table.

**Build deeper connections.** Many Food Bank relationships are currently very transactional and there is a need for more regular and deeper conversations between the Food Bank and different partners. The Food Bank should prioritize building more meaningful connections and moving beyond transactional interactions.

**Take action.** Talking with partners is a great first step, but real commitment is demonstrated by follow-through. This might look like the Food Bank identifying actions and plans to achieve specific goals and then visibly following through. The Food Bank should also be responsive to requests and inquires. Responsiveness doesn't always have to be about filling the request, it can also be done by communicating when a request cannot be met and why. The Food Bank can also take a bolder stance on systemic root causes of hunger and inequality through advocacy in policy and program reform (for example, unified advocacy for improving SNAP or around the broader issues related to the social determinants of health) and should connect with others already doing this advocacy work.

**Develop shared mission.** The Food Bank needs to honor the expertise of different subject matter experts and individuals with lived experiences to develop a shared mission among partners that emphasizes the strengths of each collaborator. The Food Bank should always be considerate of collaborators' capacity and any direct asks should be clearly thought out. Practicing intention-setting can also develop stronger and more intentional approaches to collaboration. As an initial first step, the Food Bank should begin to identify the missions and scopes of partners and potential partners to highlight opportunities for collaboration.

**Make investments.** The Food Bank should invest in technology and innovative approaches that support tech, marketing, advocacy, and collaboration. Other investment opportunities include helping member agencies fund food pantry coordinator positions and better supporting the receiving manager position at the Food Bank.

**Help streamline administrative tasks and volunteer recruitment for partners.** Where requested, the Food Bank could assist partners with administrative tasks that make retention difficult (for example, assistance with health permit applications or recruiting volunteers).

**Connect with elected representatives.** Elected officials and their offices would appreciate more opportunities to see hands-on what the Food Bank does and/or volunteer. Every legislative office staff needs a chance to see the Food Bank's work first-hand. The Food Bank could also consider providing monthly updates that includes what the need is and/or sending brochures to keep the offices updated on food Insecurity in their communities and what programs and resources are available.

## 4. OTHER COMMENTS

Participants also shared additional feedback and comments.

- There is an interest from community members and partners to continue being involved in meetings like the Stakeholder Engagement Initiative and sharing their input with the Food Bank. The Food Bank should continue to keep them updated and look for ways to have them support future processes.
- Provide more information to donors on how donations and contributions are spent and the rationale behind these approaches.
- Consider sharing updates with donors and finding additional ways that they can support the Food Bank, including volunteer opportunities with clear and well-defined tasks.
- Consider how the growth of the Food Bank impacts partners and their understanding of the organization.
- The pandemic has made it easier for collaboration with new and existing partners. So now is the time to grow collaboration efforts.

### BEYOND PART 3 – What happens next?

The [Stakeholder Engagement Initiative](#) has unfolded over the course of three parts, with information shared and feedback sought from a wide variety of voices representing each of our stakeholder groups every step of the way. The input received in Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3 of the SEI process will continue to strengthen the Food Bank's efforts to meet the needs of communities across southwestern Pennsylvania. Planning for the Food Bank's next three-year strategic plan, which is getting underway just as Part 3 of the SEI comes to a close, will use the feedback received during this process. An update on how feedback received during the Stakeholder Engagement Initiative was integrated into the new strategic plan, and what the next steps are, will be provided by the Food Bank to all SEI participants by the Fall of 2022.

This summary was written by Third Party Public (formerly Swerhun Inc.), an independent third-party facilitation organization. If you have questions about what's here, please don't hesitate to get in touch with the SEI Project Team through Erin Spangler, Engagement Initiative Project Manager, 412-460-3663 ext. 498 or [espangler@pittsburghfoodbank.org](mailto:espangler@pittsburghfoodbank.org).

## **Attachments**

- A. SEI Part 3 Integrated Summary of County-Specific Meetings with Local Partners and Community Leaders (attached separately)**
  
- B. SEI Part 3 Meeting Summaries (attached separately)**