

**FOOD BANK OF THE SOUTHERN TIER
ADVOCACY COMMITTEE MEETING
October 5, 2020
2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
AGENDA**

TOPIC	FACILITATOR	ACTION	TIME
1. Welcome and Check-ins	Erin Summerlee	Discussion	15
2. Approve July 15, 2020 Meeting Minutes	Erin Summerlee	Approve	5
3. FBST Advocacy Updates a. Sen. Gillibrand visit b. FEED Training Report Back	Lyndsey Lyman	Discussion	15
4. Advocacy Guiding Principles a. Review of advocacy assessment b. Breakout room reflections c. Next steps / Process with BOD	Lyndsey Lyman/ Jen B?	Discussion	60
5. Committee Member Updates	Erin Summerlee	Discussion	15
6. Action Items	Erin Summerlee	Discussion	5
7. Wrap up / Adjourn	Erin Summerlee	Discussion	5

Next Meeting

Monday, February 8, 2021

2:00-4:00 pm

RSVP to Lynn Dates Lynn.Dates@foodbankst.org

2021 Meeting Schedule

February 8

June 7

August 2

October 4

FOOD BANK OF THE SOUTHERN TIER
Advocacy Committee Meeting Minutes
July 15, 2020 2:00-4:00 pm

Committee Member	In Attendance	Unable to Attend
Erin Summerlee (Chair)	X	
Lorna Swaine-Abdallah	X	
Mark Bordeau		X
Catherine Rogers		X
Wendy Pursel	X	
Nancy Eckstrom		X
Steve Fowler	X	
Maggie Coffey	X	
Dave Radin	X	
Jessica Gosa	X	
Tess McKinley	X	
Joe Thomas	X	
Charles Thomas	X	
Kathy Greene	X	
Samantha Hillson	X	
Jackie Bogart	X	
Ex-Officio		
Natasha Thompson	X	
Staff		
Lyndsey Lyman	X	
Randi Quackenbush	X	
Lynn Dates	X	

1. **Welcome and Check-ins** – Jessica welcomed the group at 2:03 pm and the group went around the room and introduced themselves and checked in

2. **Approval of June 1, 2020 Meeting Minutes**
*Tess McKinley made a motion to approve the June minutes.
 Jessica Gosa seconded. All were in favor. None opposed.*

3. **FBST Advocacy Updates**
 Lyndsey Lyman provided information about the Nutrition Outreach Education Professional (NOEP) Advocacy Letter sent to state elected officials pointing out that this contract will be reinstated through 2022. She provided background about the Poor People’s Campaign explaining that we have connected leaders with the Speakers Bureau and shared the June 20 virtual march and people’s assembly video. Randi Quackenbush shared information about TEFAP, noting large receipts of food, and describing the self-attestation requirement to prove that you are poor enough to have access to TEFAP food, which will begin in earnest in June 2020. The group discussed the self-attestation process. Natasha noted her concern that people will decline or be nervous about giving this information adding that most food at CFDs is TEFAP. Natasha shared that Congressman Brindisi volunteered at SUNY Broome CFD with his wife and was very engaged.

4. **Advocacy Guiding Principles**
 Lyndsey provided an overview of the proposed process for Advocacy Guiding Principles, a document that would serve as the “guard rails” for the Food Bank’s public policies. She reviewed the timeline with the group, noting that multiple stakeholders would be involved in its creation. Joe Thomas pointed out that the BOD should be

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included in the process as soon as September. Lyndsey explained that this document will give fresh information with new opportunities to see hunger more holistically. Natasha added that this will bolster why we support these types of policies which provide “guard rails” and directly align with the FBST mission. The Committee broke into two groups for discussion.

5. August Recess Planning

Randi discussed the topic of Congressional recess and provided ideas for events with Federal officials when they are in NYS and asked the group for additional thoughts about this topic.

6. Committee Member Updates – advocacy & policy related

Samantha Hillson noted that Tompkins County received healthiest cities and counties grant in partnership with Cornell. Tess McKinley pointed out that Steuben County Cooperative Extension received hand sanitizer and masks that they are working to distribute and that they received funding from NYS Ag & Markets for container gardening in all counties. Dave Radin informed that since the last meeting he wrote a personal note to Tom Reed and received a boiler plate response. Jessica Gosa discussed that Foodnet MOW provided over 17k meals in June (avg month 13k), they are seeing that clients need larger volumes of food and they provided emergency meals with FBST as shelf stable meal kits. Jessica noted that they are watching the State budget closely. The group discussed additional funding lines. Erin Summerlee provided the Rural Health Network updates explaining that Tioga BOCES USDA Farm to School Grant will be implement in the fall, that the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation will make universal school meals available, and the regional Americorps and Americorps VISTA program has seen an increase in funding for national service programs.

7. Action Items

Lyndsey will share any August recess activities, the August 3, Committee meeting is canceled and the next meeting will be October 5, 2 – 4 pm.

8. Wrap up/Adjourn

Meeting was adjourned at 3:35 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by,
*Lynn Dates, Executive Assistant to
Natasha Thompson, President & CEO*

Food Bank of the Southern Tier Advocacy Priorities Summary

Decisions made by our elected officials have a huge impact on the supply of food available to the Food Bank and on the overall demand for charitable food assistance. In 2016, the Food Bank established an Advocacy Committee of the Board of Directors in order to ensure that our work encompasses **both the charitable work of distributing food and the advocacy work of ensuring a strong safety net.**

In 2020, the committee determined the **need for a participatory process for identifying the Food Bank's Advocacy Priorities.** The creation of these priorities is an opportunity to learn more together about the root causes of poverty and food insecurity and determine what is impacting clients the hardest.

To date, this process has included:

- **June 2020:** Survey of agency partners to determine interest in advocacy and initial priorities. 66 partner agencies responded
- **August 2020:** Virtual Focus Groups with clients to better understand factors impacting people who are accessing emergency food. 18 clients participated.
- **September 2020:** Community Voice Survey of clients to dive deeper into themes that emerged in the Focus Groups. 171 clients responded.

Initial Partner Agency Priorities

86% of respondents believe the **network should be engaged in advocacy.** When asked to choose from a list of priorities, **increasing access to Federal Child Nutrition Programs** and **access to fresh food from New York State and the USDA** ranked highest. Approximately half of respondents also indicated that increasing access to SNAP and affordable health care should be priorities.

Focus Group Themes

Focus group participants were asked about the situation in their home – economic or otherwise – and how it had changed in the last 12 months, one change they would like to see to improve their situation and what they would want their government representative to know about what they are going through and what is happening in their community. Six themes emerged:

1. People **don't have enough money** to make ends meet. Participants are seeing increased food costs at the grocery store and are needing more food and using more utilities because they and their children are home more due to the pandemic. Wages don't cover necessities and are too high for assistance – in some cases people don't apply for assistance because they feel other need it more. Credit cards and other types of debt are needed to get by.
2. **Health care** is costly and necessary procedures are not always approved.
3. People's **mental health** is suffering. This was the case before the pandemic and has since gotten worse.
4. **Pandemic EBT** and **unemployment benefits** would relieve stress and provide needed income, but obtaining them is a slow process and people are unsure if they will ultimately get them - even if they seem to be eligible.
5. **Lack of transportation** further exacerbates access to food and other resources. The issue of seniors who no longer drive was also mentioned and participants reported helping their neighbors who struggle with this – which can also add to their overall costs.
6. For families with children, **child care is an issue.** Some have closed during the pandemic and school-age children were home during the spring when schools closed. Cost of quality care has been an ongoing issue. Hybrid and remote learning models pose a continued childcare access/scheduling challenge into the new school year.

Community Voice Survey

Based on the themes from the Focus Groups, a survey link was texted to 1,600 households who had attended a Community Food Distribution. More than 10% completed the survey. This survey sought to better understand:

- Household Demographics

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation
- Advocacy Priorities
- Overall Financial Situation

Household Demographics

Survey respondents were **primarily women** (88%) and **nearly half** (45%) of households reported having **at least one child in the household**. A little more than **a quarter** (27%) of respondents live in households that included **at least one senior**.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

46% of respondents currently receive SNAP benefits – formerly Food Stamps. However, for the majority, having the benefit does not ensure that households have enough food for the month. Only 10% report that their SNAP benefits last the full month. Nearly **60%** report that they are **out of benefits in 2 weeks** or less.

Of the 54% who do not receive SNAP, 34% applied and did not qualify while 31% never applied because they don't believe they are eligible.

Advocacy Priorities

When asked to rank a list of 10 areas that government officials and community leaders should focus on over the next 12 months, the top 3 priorities were: **Food Access, Health Care and Housing**. Feeding America's Hunger in America studies have identified that needs don't exist in isolation and that both housing and health are interconnected with food security – along with income¹.

Coronavirus Stimulus Checks, Cost of Utilities and Transportation were the next 3 priorities, followed by Unemployment Benefits, Child Care, Raising the Minimum Wage and Debt Relief.

Overall Financial Situation

Respondents reported that their households would need an **additional \$500 per month** to cover all their expenses. This number emerged as both the median (middle) and mode (most often). 71% of respondents could not pay for a \$400 unanticipated cost and 45% report that they would need to go in debt to pay for such a cost.

When it comes to monthly expenses²,

- **More than three-quarters** of respondents struggle to pay for public transportation or rides, legal fees and student loans.
- **More than half** struggle at least sometimes to pay for food, credit cards/personal loans, keeping a vehicle on the road, mental health, dental care and child care.
- Other necessities like rent, mortgage, utilities, health insurance and prescription drugs are more likely to be paid in full each month, but **more than a quarter** report that they struggle with these as well.

Next Steps

1. Interviews with agency representatives
2. Draft advocacy priorities document for stakeholder review
3. Board of Directors approval of final document

¹ Housing as a pillar of stability in our communities: Understanding and integrating client housing needs and goals.

[https://feedingamerica.sharepoint.com/agencies_programs/endinghunger/citb/Documents/FA%20Housing%20101%20Working%20Paper%205.20%20\(1\).pdf](https://feedingamerica.sharepoint.com/agencies_programs/endinghunger/citb/Documents/FA%20Housing%20101%20Working%20Paper%205.20%20(1).pdf)

² Based on expenses that are applicable to responding households